

# Panic Attacks

## If You Are having A Panic attack NOW

- Remember that although your feelings and symptoms are very frightening they are not dangerous or harmful.
- Understand that what you are experiencing is just an exaggeration of your normal bodily reactions to stress.
- Do not fight the feelings or try to wish them away. The more you are willing to face them, the less intense they will become.
- Do not add to your panic by thinking about what "might" happen. If you find yourself asking "what if?" tell yourself "so what!"
- Stay in the present. Notice what is really happening to you as opposed to what you think might happen.
- Label your fear level from zero to ten and watch it go up and down. Notice that it does not stay at a very high level for more than a few seconds.
- When you find yourself thinking about the fear, change your "what if" thinking. Focus on and carry out a simple and manageable task such as counting backward from 100 by 3's or snapping a rubber band on your wrist.
- Notice that when you stop adding frightening thoughts to your fear, it begins to fade.
- When the fear comes, expect and accept it. Wait and give it time to pass without running away from it.
- Be proud of yourself for your progress thus far, and think about how good you will feel when you succeed this time.

## What to Do if a Family Member Has an Anxiety Disorder

- Don't make assumptions about what the affected person needs - ask them.
- Be predictable - don't surprise them.
- Let the person with the disorder set the pace for recovery.
- Find something positive in every experience. If the affected person is only able to go partway to a particular goal, such as a movie theater or party, consider that an achievement rather than a failure.
- Don't enable avoidance: negotiate with the person with panic disorder to take one step forward when he or she wants to avoid something.
- Don't sacrifice your own life and build resentments.
- Don't panic when the person with the disorder panics.
- Remember that it's all right to be anxious yourself - it's natural for you to be concerned and even worried about the person with the disorder.
- Be patient and accepting, but don't settle for the affected person being permanently disabled.
- Say: "You can do it no matter how you feel. I am proud of you. Tell me what you need now. Breathe slow and low. Stay in the present. It's not the place what's bothering you, it's the thought. I know that what you are feeling is painful, but it's not dangerous. You are courageous."

Don't say things such as: "Relax. Calm down. Don't be anxious. Let's see if you can do this (i.e., setting up a test for the affected person). You can fight this. What should we do next? Don't be ridiculous. You have to stay. Don't be a coward. Pull yourself together".