



PanicFreeTV

FOUNDATION SERIES

Episode #2 of 4

PANIC EXPLAINED

The Term Panic “Attack” is Inaccurate, Misleading, & Unhelpful

- Your brain’s number one priority in life is to keep you SAFE. When it perceives imminent danger, it sounds an alarm to tell your body to protect you.
- While it can feel as if panic is “attacking” us, a panic “attack” is NOT an attack — it’s just an overprotective false alarm.
- Like any false alarm, there is no danger, and there is definitely no “attack”.
- Since the intent behind panic is try to protect us and increase our safety, the term “panic attack” is inaccurate, misleading, and unhelpful.
- Since research shows that words really matter (a topic for another time), I prefer to use the term “panic false alarm” instead of the scientifically inaccurate “panic attack”. (However, because the term “panic attack” is so commonly used, I do use it from time to time, just to make sure people can connect with what I’m saying.)

Panic Symptoms* Are Just Harmless By-Products Of A False Alarm

- All the strange and scary symptoms* panic creates are just harmless by-products of a false alarm.
- Fortunately, thanks to much research, we know how a false alarm ALONE can create all the symptoms* of panic.
- We know that these symptoms* can’t kill you, or make you truly go crazy.
- And reassuringly we know that, from research, as you learn about this, it can help you feel more safe and secure.

* SYMPTOMS: Remember, as we covered in Episode 1, panic attacks are not an illness or a disease. I only use the word ‘symptoms’ here in a colloquial sense.

IMPORTANT: As I mentioned in Episode 1, it’s always good to get one good medical check-up from a good doctor, just to make sure that you don’t have a medical issue that can mimic panic. A lot of people get worried when they hear this, but it’s just sensible advice. We’re recommended checking with a doctor before starting a new exercise program, and it’s just as good an idea if you’ve self-diagnosed your issue as being panic.

The Fight-Flight Response

- There are three main ways our body can respond to an alarm to protect us: fight, flight & freeze. (The freeze is less common in panic, so we'll just focus on fight-flight here).
- If you or I come across a mugger in a dark alley, for example, our brain automatically prepares our bodies to either (1) FIGHT against that mugger, or (2) to take FLIGHT and flee to try to escape from the danger.

A Panic False Alarm Is A *Mistaken* Triggering of The Fight-Flight Response

A Panic False Alarm is a mistaken triggering of the fight-flight response. It's the triggering of the fight-flight response, even though there is no danger.

This explains:

- Why it's so natural to try to FIGHT against panicky feelings or anxious thoughts...
- Why it's so natural to want to escape — to flee or “take FLIGHT” — from whatever situation we are in, when we have a Panic False Alarm...
- Why we can feel our body shift so dramatically when panic is triggered (the fight-flight response has to act very quickly to mobilise our body to protect us, and this happens with a Panic False Alarm too, even though there is no danger)...
- And why we feel so OUT of control (because everything that happens, happens involuntarily, and it happens so fast).
- The fact that the Fight-Flight response is a non-conscious response also explains why as many as 58% of people with panic have experienced Nocturnal Panic False Alarms (panic “attacks” that are triggered while they're SLEEPING and not consciously thinking anything!)

Anxiety Can Create A Huge Array Of Harmless Body Sensations

- The fight-flight response requires energy and oxygen, and this explains why panic can create such a wide range of symptoms*.
- For example, the fight-flight response increases everyone's breathing rate, so that we're able to get more oxygen to key muscles if we need to fight back or escape.
- Because of this, a main way that anxiety can create such a wide-range of strange body sensations and experiences is because of hyperventilation (over-breathing; breathing in excess of our body's needs).
- To learn how anxiety can create all the symptoms of panic alone, please keep reading.

“Ringing Bells” (EXTRA)

- Ever heard of the Russian physiologist, Ivan Pavlov, and his dogs?
- Pavlov found that anything he associated with food triggered the dogs to salivate as if food was around. Contrary to popular opinion he probably didn't use bells, but used many other sounds. He was able to associate whistles, tuning forks, or metronomes with feeding the dogs, so that those things automatically made dogs salivate — even if no food was present.
- This is the power of conditioning, and conditioning is just as powerful for us humans as it is for dogs:
- It's why the smell of a lover's perfume can automatically trigger certain feelings inside us...
- It's why an old song can bring back long-lost memories...
- And it's why harmless body sensations can innocently, and mistakenly, become associated with panic, and therefore trigger the vicious cycle.
- This is the foundation of The Panic Mistake & The Panic Pattern.

The Panic Pattern

The Panic Pattern is the core, hidden pattern behind every panic “false alarm”.

The recipe for panic doesn't require ANY real danger. It just requires our brain to make a mistake: mistaking harmless body sensations for danger.

- 1) A panic "false alarm" happens when anxiety creates body sensations...
- 2) And, because our brain has mistakenly learnt to fear those body sensations, it creates even more anxiety...
- 3) This increased anxiety then creates even MORE body sensations, and around the cycle we go, in a HARMLESS vicious cycle, that can escalate into a full fight-or-flight response.

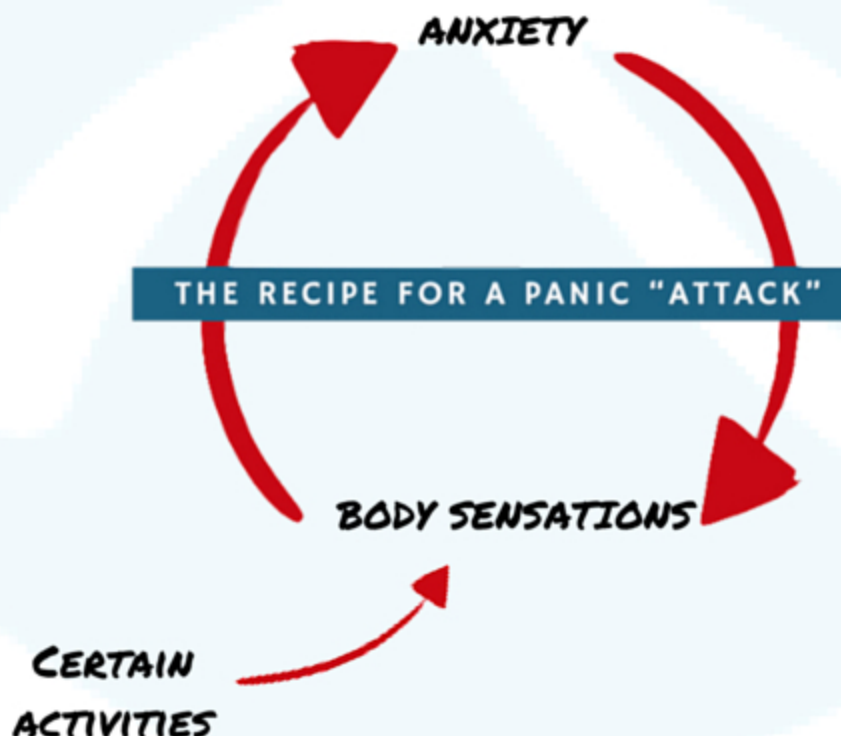


NOTE: The big key that makes panic possible is that the body sensations that can trigger a panic attack are also *EFFECTS of anxiety* (i.e. they can all be produced by harmless anxiety alone).

IMPORTANT: I explain later how anxious THOUGHTS can also play a role in The Panic Pattern. While anxious thoughts are secondary to body sensations, they can fuel The Panic Pattern by increasing our anxiety, and therefore, as a consequence, increase the body sensations that anxiety produces.

Certain Activities Can Trigger The Panic Pattern In Some People

- Activities that directly create certain body sensations can also trigger panic for people too.
- For example, a lot of people with panic avoid intense exercise. Exercise makes everyone's hearts beat faster and harder, and, if it's intense enough, it can make us breathless. Therefore, people who get triggered by those things often stop exercising.
- Hot baths and saunas can make anyone feel dizzy, and so for people who fear dizziness, they can be scary.
- Even things like sex can trigger some people, because unfortunately for them, it just happens to share some of the same sensations that their brains have mistakenly learnt to fear (e.g. rapid heartbeat, sweat, etc.).
- Again, the recipe for panic doesn't require ANY real danger. But what it does require is that our brain mistakenly fears one or more body sensations... that anxiety itself can create — even when there is no danger.



The SOLUTION For Panic Is To End The Panic Pattern

- Understanding The Panic Pattern also gives us the path back to freedom.
- If our brain isn't triggered by the harmless effects of anxiety, if it doesn't mistake anxiety-related body sensations as being dangerous... then there can't be a vicious cycle, and you can't have a panic attack.



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ANXIETY

BODY SENSATIONS

The Only Way To A Normal, Panic Free Life

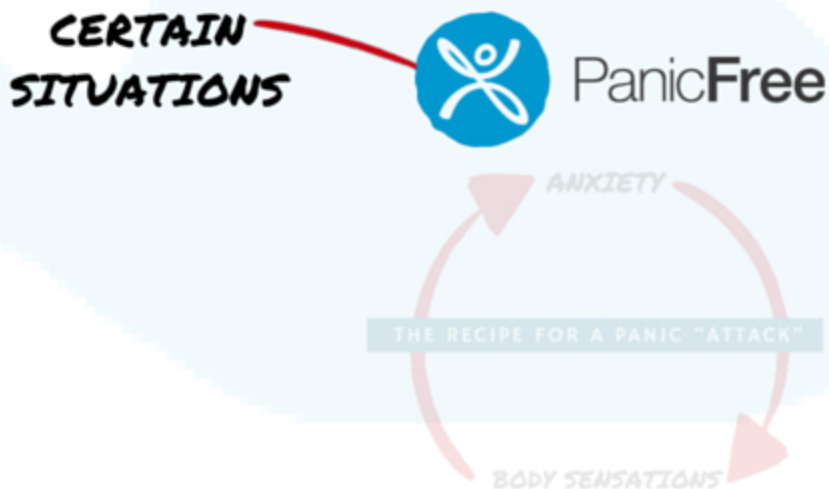
- Ending The Panic Pattern is the ONLY way to a truly panic-free life.
- Panic Free doesn't mean you cope better with panic attacks, because needing to cope means you still have them.
- Panic Free means no more panic attacks ever again. It means that you're naturally and effortlessly as Panic Free, carefree and "normal" as anyone else you know... without you even having to think about it.
- The only way to truly be Panic Free is by transforming the automatic triggers that create The Panic Pattern. Again: If our brain isn't triggered by the harmless effects of anxiety... if it doesn't mistake anxiety-related body sensations as being dangerous... then there can't be a vicious cycle... and you can't have a panic attack.

Situational Panic False Alarms

- Why do many people have panic that's triggered by external situations — like driving, or flying, shopping, leaving the house, or other things? That's because SITUATIONS can become associated with anxiety, just like Pavlov's "bells" became associated with food for dogs. This feeds right into The Panic Pattern.
- This can especially occur if we've had a panic false alarm before in a particular situation. It can also happen if a situation shares something unique in common with a situation in which we've had panic before. (e.g. the fear of being "trapped").
- Anything that triggers enough anxiety to create a feared body sensation can trigger the whole vicious cycle, and therefore a panic attack.



- The **SOLUTION** for Situational Panic False Alarms is to break the association between the situation and anxiety so that you're not triggered anymore. I have a number of powerful ways I use to help clients quickly do this (so they can swiftly regain their full freedom to go anywhere and do anything they want). These are, however, beyond the scope of this particular episode.



Anxious Thoughts & The Panic Pattern

- We will talk more about this in Episode 3, but anxious thoughts can play a HUGE role in The Panic Pattern too.
- While anxious thoughts are secondary to body sensations*, they can fuel The Panic Pattern by increasing our anxiety, and as a consequence increase the body sensations that anxiety produces.
- The anxious thoughts that play a role in panic typically relate to any danger we believe could, would or might happen as a result of the False Alarm (from any catastrophe we fear might arise: whether that be dying, going crazy, humiliating ourselves, being trapped etc.).



NOTE: Again, the big key that makes panic possible is that anxious thoughts, like panic-related body sensations, can both make us anxious AND are also *EFFECTS* of anxiety (i.e. they can all be produced by harmless anxiety alone).

* There is debate in the scientific community about various sub-types of Panic False Alarms. One proposal is for a "Cognitive" Subtype. To sum up in one sentence: this is a Panic False Alarm where body sensations play less of a role, and fearful thoughts are the PRIMARY DRIVER. The main fears here may primarily be of losing control, going crazy, and feelings of unreality... rather than of intense body sensations. The good news is that the solution is EXACTLY the same: end The Panic Pattern.



panic symptoms **EXPLAINED**

the effects of the fight-flight response



BREATHING: Your muscles need extra oxygen to fight or run away from danger. That's why the fight-flight response makes us breathe faster & more deeply.



HEART: Your body needs nutrient- and oxygen-rich blood to fuel the fight-flight response. That's why anxiety makes the heart beat faster & pump harder.



MUSCLES: The fight-flight response directs our muscles to tense up in order to protect us. This can lead to strange muscle pains, shaking, and even spasms & cramps.



GASTROINTESTINAL TRACT: Digestion isn't essential when facing imminent danger. That's why the fight-flight response directs blood away from your stomach & decreases salivation. This can lead to a dry mouth, and to "butterflies", nausea, stomach cramps, diarrhoea, & other strange sensations in our stomachs.



SKIN: The fight-flight response directs blood away from your skin and extremities, which are vulnerable during an attack, to reduce potential blood loss if you're attacked. That's why fear can make skin pale & cold. We also sweat to prevent us from overheating during fight or flight. Sweat also has the added advantage of making it harder for an attacker to hold onto us.



EYES: The fight-flight response dilates our pupils to let in more light so that we can see better. In panic, this can also lead to a hypersensitivity to bright lights, blurred vision, or spots in our field of vision. The fight response also can give us tunnel vision, causing us to focus only on any perceived danger.

OTHER GENERAL EFFECTS: The rush of adrenaline from the fight-flight response can lead to the sensation of heat all over your body. And since the fight-flight response uses a lot of energy, it can also leave us feeling drained, tired and exhausted afterwards.



hyperventilation **EXPLAINED**

- Hyperventilation (HV) is another word for over-breathing (breathing in excess of your body's needs).
- HV often occurs as a result of a panic "false alarm", and is responsible for creating many of the strangest symptoms.
- In the face of imminent danger, our muscles need a lot of oxygen so that we can run away or fight back. So, one thing the fight-flight response does is it increases our breathing rate so that we breathe faster.
- If there's a mugger about to attack you, you want a faster breathing rate — it's really important. It will help you have enough oxygen to fight back or run away.
- But what happens with a Panic False Alarm? Since there's no mugger to run away from or to fight against—even though a Panic False Alarm mistakenly triggers the Fight-Flight response—we end up breathing much MORE than our body needs. This is why panic often lead to HV.
- When we breathe fast we get a lot more oxygen, which is fine. But we also breathe out much more of a waste product called carbon dioxide. And even though carbon dioxide is a waste product, our body uses some of it to balance the pH of our blood.
- You don't need to know ANY of the biochemistry. Just know that when we HV, because we're over-breathing, we breathe out so much carbon dioxide that it can result in a TEMPORARY shift in the biochemistry of our blood.
- Reassuringly, it's all completely HARMLESS. But because our blood goes to every organ in our body, HV is a major way that panic can create such a wide range of strange symptoms.



panic symptoms EXPLAINED

the effects of hyperventilation

Hyperventilation (HV) is another word for over-breathing (breathing in excess of your body's needs). HV often occurs as a result of a panic "false alarm", and is responsible for creating many of the strangest symptoms.



BREATHING: HV can temporarily weaken the diaphragmatic muscles. This can make it seem like it's harder to breathe, that you're not getting enough air, and create feelings of "shortness of breath". In particular, HV can make it feel more difficult to inhale (to take in a breath). The good news is that you'll always have enough air; the bad news is that the illusion panic can create of not having enough air can be strong.



HEART: HV can lead to palpitations, skipped heartbeats, and a racing heart. HV can also create vague shifting pains all over your body, especially around the chest.



MUSCLES: HV can effect muscles by making them more excitable. This can make muscles twitchy, spasm, cramp, and it can also make them fatigue quicker and temporarily become weaker. This can lead to tense and painful muscles. Because HV typically involves a lot of chest breathing, it can especially effect the intercostal muscles (creating pain around the ribcage and chest area).



PAIN: HV can create vague shifting pains all over the body, especially around the chest.



NERVOUS SYSTEM: HV can trigger a hypersensitivity to lights and sounds. It can also lead to tingling or numbness in the arms and feet, dizziness, and light-headedness.



MIND: HV can lead to time-distortion, difficulty in concentrating, feeling as if you're watching yourself or have left your body, feeling as if the world is "unreal" or that you're not real, feeling as you're in a dream, etc.



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WHY I HAVE NEVER RECOMMENDED DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING EXERCISES TO COPE WITH PANIC FALSE ALARMS

Breathing techniques are the main, and often only tool many therapists have in their toolkit for panic or anxiety. It seems everyone recommends a breathing exercise of some sort to try and calm Panic False Alarms—but let me share a few of the reasons why I don't.

USING BREATHING TECHNIQUES TO CALM PANIC OR ANXIETY IS, AT BEST, A POOR-QUALITY BAND-AID.

- While breathing techniques can temporarily reduce the intensity of a Panic False Alarm, there two reasons why they are never more than just BAND-AIDS.
- First, they DON'T correct "The Panic Mistake".
- And second, breathing techniques are an attempt to COPE with Panic False Alarms AFTER they arise. They're a short-term "attempted solution" (see Episode 3)—because if you need to "cope" with panic attacks, that means you still have them.
- My goals are entirely different: I want you to be naturally and effortlessly 100% Panic Free — without you having to think about it.

MY DEFINITION OF "PANIC FREE"

- Panic Free ISN'T about coping better with panic attacks, because, again, that means you still have them.
- Panic Free doesn't even mean that you're able to immediately stop a panic attack as soon as it begins — because, at best, that's just a good start.
- What "Panic Free" really means is that panic has truly become a total non-issue for you.
- Panic Free means no more panic attacks ever again, because panic is truly a thing of the past.
- In other words — Panic Free means that you're naturally, effortlessly, and AUTOMATICALLY as panic free, care free and "normal" as anyone else you know, without you even having to think about it.
- If you've had problems with frequent panic attacks, you've probably tried various breathing exercises and techniques. They may have made you feel a little better at times, but they haven't helped you become Panic Free. That's because...

HABITUALLY USING BREATHING TECHNIQUES TO TRY TO COPE WITH PANIC FALSE ALARMS CAN REINFORCE PROBLEMS IN THE LONG TERM

- Until recently the general research picture showed that diaphragmatic breathing exercises were harmless, but ineffective (long-term).
- Recently though, there has been mounting evidence that diaphragmatic breathing exercises can slow or even stop recovery. There is also evidence that they can reinforce and WORSEN problems with panic in the LONG TERM.
- To give you just one example, research published in 2013 in the journal Behaviour Research and Therapy showed that adding diaphragmatic breathing to Cognitive Behavioural Therapy led to worse results (slower recovery, greater long-term fear about panic related body sensations, etc).

DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING TECHNIQUES ARISE OUT OF AN OUTDATED MINDSET

- Many therapists instruct clients to use breathing exercises throughout the day in an attempt to try and reduce anxiety, and hopefully, reduce the likelihood of Panic False Alarm.
- This, again, is yet another Band-Aid approach. It's living with "The Panic Pattern" intact, but trying to not trigger it.
- Again, my goals are totally different: I want you to be panic free, and the only way for that to happen is to end "The Panic Pattern".
- Life is stressful at times for everyone — and that's not always a bad thing! We grow most as people outside our comfort zones. On top of this, no one reaches their full potential or happiness by constantly trying to avoid stress or anxiety. If you have to always avoid anxiety and stress in order to avoid a Panic False Alarm, that's a recipe for a boring, and paradoxically, anxiety-filled life. (See Episode 3).
- I want to help you become truly RESILIENT so that no matter what life throws at you, you stay completely panic free, without even having to think about it.
- My approach is not about you having to constantly try and stay calm or avoid anxiety — it's about permanently correcting "The Panic Mistake", so even if life throws huge challenges your way (as it will, because that's the nature of living)... you'll never need to worry about Panic False Alarms again.

BREATHING TECHNIQUES DON'T NECESSARILY CORRECT HYPERVENTILATION

Most therapists prescribe deep breathing exercises thinking that they always correct hyperventilation (over-breathing).

Unfortunately, there are two ways to hyperventilate: one is to breathe too fast, the other is to breathe too deeply (without dramatically slowing your breathing rate).

Paradoxically, research shows that when people are told to slow their breathing to correct hyperventilation, they often breathe much deeper—and thus maintain or worsen hyperventilation.

The only foolproof way to learn to reliably correct hyperventilation is to get physiological feedback from a capnometer (a device used to measure hyperventilation). Obviously, you probably don't have a capnometer lying around — which gives us yet another reason to forget diagrammatic breathing techniques.

SUMMARY

- To sum up: trying to use diaphragmatic breathing techniques to cope with Panic False Alarms is at best ineffective, and at worst harmful. While breathing techniques can act like a temporary Band-Aid, they don't help correct "The Panic Mistake" — and there is growing research showing that they can make problems with Panic False Alarms worse in the long term.

Coming next...

EPISODE 3: "THE PANIC PARADOX"

By the end of episode #3, you'll have discovered:

- Why your past efforts to end panic have failed...
- What common-sense strategies EVERYONE with frequent Panic False Alarms uses that you need to AVOID — because they're actively keeping panic in your life.

(Some of these strategies are frequently recommended by doctors and therapists. Some of them just intuitively seem like the right thing to do. But what they ALL have in common is that they've been shown, by careful scientific research, to make panic worse, and to keep it in people's lives. The good news is that as soon as you stop doing these things, everything, automatically changes for the better).

A SCIENTIFICALLY-VALIDATED TECHNIQUE THAT HELPS END PANIC

- In Episode 3, I'm also going to give you a simple, scientifically validated technique — that's totally counter-intuitive — but that is backed up by multiple scientific trials showing that it really works to help end panic.
- This technique is something that I've used with dramatic success with my own clients, and I'm extremely excited to share it with you in the next episode.