

How To Calm a Panic Attack

The following is excerpted from the article, "[The Anatomy of a Panic Attack](#)" by Daniel Liévano of The New York Times, November 10, 2022.

Panic attacks revolve around terror. Though people mainly associate them with the mind, they're actually constellations of symptoms, both physical and cognitive. Your brain is seized by fear; your body responds, and it can be hard to make sense of it all.

How do you soothe a panic attack in the moment?

It may be helpful to practice these coping strategies ahead of time, so that you can employ them the next time a panic attack hits:

Talk yourself through it.

Remind yourself that you have survived panic attacks in the past, and while scary, the panic itself is not dangerous.

Know who to call.

A trusted friend or family member can help talk you down when you feel a panic attack start. Just talking to someone about what you're experiencing, and naming the sensations across your body, can help stabilize you in the moment.

Count colors.

Some therapists recommend a simple grounding exercise: Count and name the colors around you. Say each one out loud, or just note them in your mind, as you register that the carpet is blue, or your shirt is red. Doing this can help distract you from the anxiety mounting in your mind.

Grab something cold.

Reach into your freezer and hold an ice cube, or place a damp, cool washcloth over your wrist. The shock of cold can help center you in the present; this also helps alleviate the uncomfortable warmth and sweating that some people feel during panic attacks.

Breathe like a baby.

Hyperventilating, a common feature of panic attacks, can make people feel dizzy, so taking slow breaths can be helpful. Often, adults breathe from our chests; instead, it might be helpful to breathe from our diaphragms like a baby might, focusing on expanding our bellies.

This can slow and deepen our breaths, flooding the brain with oxygen and triggering the parasympathetic nervous system, which helps signal that we don't need to fight, and reduces levels of distress.