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Sudden Panic Attacks

Let's begin with an important question that one of my subscribers (see below for more information on how to become a subscriber) asked:

“Why should a rational thinking person suddenly out of the blue get a panic attack. How can it take over your whole being?”

I would first start out by thanking the visitor who submitted this question. I'd also like to acknowledge that I've been there. Prior to my first panic attack, I'd never had such circular and continually anxious thoughts. I felt it my gut that things were not right and I also had an eerie feeling that what I was experiencing was not going to go away as easy as a cold or the flu, for example.

The truth is there are many different reasons why you or I came down with anxiety and panic attacks. While it can be intellectually satisfying to rationally explain our anxiety and what brought it on, this is not going to make us better.

What I really came to learn however is that the more I continued to try and figure things out the more I started thinking “what if” thoughts. For example, I might think something like maybe it was the coffee I drank that caused my heart to race and then I became more and more anxious and this just fed my symptoms. Okay so that's what brought this on. Then I'd think something like: Well then what if it was something else? What if I still have attacks after giving up coffee. What if I don't get better?

The point I'm trying to make is the more I analyzed the situation, the more I became trapped by it.

One simple saying explains it all “analysis equals paralysis.” When we analyze our anxiety and panic attacks we worsen our symptoms. We become paralyzed by our own circular thoughts.

You might be asking: Okay we're not supposed to analyze everything, but what can we do to get better?

Heard of Cognitive Therapy?

Cognitive Therapy was certainly effective for me with my recovery from anxiety, panic attacks, and agoraphobia. Research has demonstrated it can be extremely effective for others, sometimes more effective than medications used for anxiety and panic disorder.

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The idea behind cognitive therapy is that our thoughts cause our emotions and if we can look at our own thoughts, identify the cognitive distortions present, and substitute healthier thoughts, we can feel better. This process is called cognitive restructuring.

The great thing about this approach is that it's a rational systematic approach and one that still allows your analytical mind to go to use, but instead of becoming more anxious, you create new thoughts that lead to healthier beliefs about reality in a way that allows you to feel less anxious, not more.

One reason that it's helpful to work with others is because they can draw us out of ourselves, our own circular thoughts, our own analysis. Did you ever notice your thoughts really can go to the dark side when you're alone? Well by interacting with others it allows you to have your attention not completely focused on yourself and your thoughts.

You still, however, wouldn't do cognitive therapy to analyze all of the reasons why you became anxious or prone to panic attacks, but rather you'd work to isolate your negative thoughts, identify the distortions, and then replace healthier thoughts/beliefs.

That's why in my newsletter (see below to subscribe for free) I look at particular thoughts you might be experiencing, possibly at the root of your anxiety.

My newsletter is not intended to be a substitute for therapy from a professional, but I am hoping it can serve as a catalyst for you to challenge your own thoughts.

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