

MANIC PANIC

Yoga Can Be a Key in Alleviating Panic Attacks

by Jennifer Kaufman

Your heart races. Your chest tightens and you feel a shortness of breath. You feel dizzy and shaky. You feel anxious, as the world grows distant. You think you are having a heart attack. But maybe you are having a panic attack.

Just what is a panic attack? A panic attack is one feels rapid and overwhelming anxiety. The most common feelings of a panic attack are a shortness of breath and rapid heartbeat or heart palpitations. A suffering of a panic attack may also feel nauseous and dizzy while sweating heavily and trembling. They may even feel an odd sensation of being choked.

Panic attacks are not only physical. Sufferers complain of fearful thoughts like dying or having a mental breakdown. Often panic attacks are triggered by certain situations or by being with certain people. This can affect a sufferer's career and intimate relationships. Often a sufferer will lie in wait, waiting for yet another panic anxiety to occur.

There can be many causes of panic attacks, both physical and psychological. Sometimes problems in the nervous system are to blame. Certain situations or people can also trigger panic attacks. And in are highly stressful, post September 11th times, people experiencing panic attacks and anxiety is not surprising.

Fortunately, there is help for sufferers of panic attacks. Initial treatment usually includes medication and psychological therapy to get a grip on situations that could trigger an attack. However, a yoga practice can also alleviate panic attacks, especially its restorative elements of deep breathing and meditation.

When embarking on a yoga practice, a sufferer of panic attacks must ask him or herself four basic questions:

What exactly is a panic attack? What causes my panic attacks? What will my life be like if I never suffer another panic attack? How will I make this happen?

The first thing to do is to talk to the symptoms. This may sound silly. But silently talking to the symptoms, "Calm down. Yes, I'm having a panic attack. I will be okay" may help a sufferer focus instead of ignoring the panic attack. Yoga training is very beneficial,

because yoga does teach us how to interact with our nerves and concentrate on a moment.

Deep, relaxing breathing used in a yoga practice can also help alleviate panic attacks. Yoga teaches very good breathing skills. It is about deep and smooth breathing from the diaphragm during a practice. Ultimately, the goal is to breathe like this throughout the day. Two poses, the corpse pose (lying on one's back) and the crocodile pose (lying on the belly with the arms folded underneath the forehead) are two excellent poses to practice deep breathing.

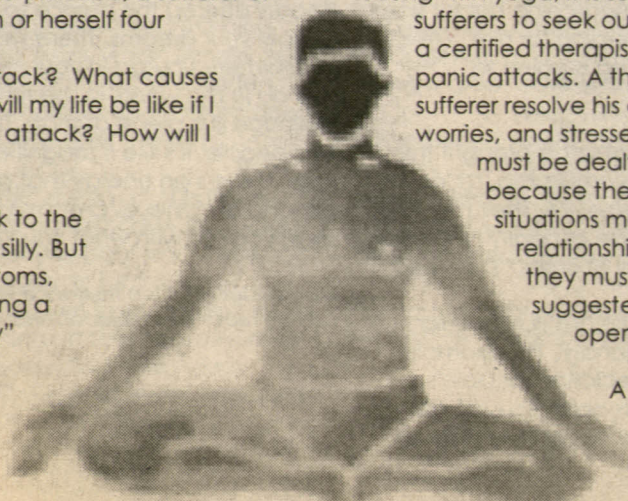
Ultimately, panic attack sufferers find that the deep, diaphragmatic breathing calms the effect of arousal during a panic attack and helps them focus on their breathing, not their panic attack. Soon these deep-breathing patterns will become routine.

Meditation is also key to the relief of panic attacks and can be incorporated into a yoga practice. Yoga is not just physical, it also deals with mental images, odd emotions and thoughts, and relationships. During the meditative aspects of yoga, one may "picture" a troubling image or come into a disturbing thought. This is the time, while the body is still, to have one's breath send steady, balancing "messages" to the emotions and nervous system. Furthermore, meditation has a steady pace. The mind can gather strength to deal with future images and thoughts that can come with a panic attack.

Both the breathing and meditation can be done when not practicing yoga. They can be done during high stress moments like a rush hour on the express way or a contentious meeting at work.

Along with yoga, it is suggested for panic attack sufferers to seek out psychological treatment with a certified therapist, especially one familiar with panic attacks. A therapist can help a panic attack sufferer resolve his or her fears. The situations, worries, and stresses that cause a panic attack must be dealt with. Often this can be difficult because these panic attack-inducing situations may have to do with a close relationship or a work problem. However, they must be addressed. It is highly suggested to find a therapist who is open-minded to a yoga practice.

A therapist may also suggest conflict resolution, including acknowledging and



accepting the conflicts, whether in the home or the office, are a part of life. Conflict resolution can be done in numerous ways: communicating with others without blaming or shaming, accepting honest feedback from others, trusting one's intuition, and seeking alternatives to stressful situations.

Finally, come up with a mantra. A mantra is a repeated phrase that feels protective. It can help one get through a panic attack and can be any phrase one finds comfort in. This can be repeated while practicing deep breathing and meditation.

Life will always be stressful and cause us a great deal of anxiety. Sometimes we may experience panic attacks. However, the trifecta of yoga—deep breathing, concentrated meditation, and a personal mantra can help us cope with life in the 21st century successfully. Don't panic. Do yoga.

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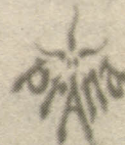
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