

A PRESCRIPTION FOR PANIC

So you want to have a panic attack? ... Here are three simple steps to get you there:

- 1. Focus on that which you cannot control.** My simple definition of anxiety is trying to control that which you cannot control. Where we put our focus is incredibly important in determining our mental state. To build that anxiety into panic, maintain a constant focus on things you can't control like other people's reactions or trying to be perfect.

- 2.** Either a or b will be effective – as long as they are taken to the extreme.
 - a. Worry.** And then worry some more. Obsess about it constantly. Lose perspective and give that one thing (which you can't control but are trying to anyway) your tunnel vision focus. Worry that you'll go crazy (it might happen, right?). Make sure not to turn this off.
 - b. Suppress those feelings.** And then suppress some more. If a feeling comes to the surface, tell yourself it is unimportant or stupid and shove it back down. After all, what good does it do to feel an uncomfortable feeling, right? Tell yourself you'll be fine. Remember, the more you suppress, the more the pressure will build and lay the groundwork for a panic attack.

- 3. Ignore your body.** When something we're not dealing with is affecting us, our bodies will often betray us with aches and pains. From stomach upset to full on acid reflux and irritable bowel syndrome; from headaches to migraines – our body does wonders at acting out our stresses. Ignore this. Act as if it these are purely physical problems that have nothing to do with your psychological state. If you are able to achieve a full on panic attack, it may feel like a heart attack and land you at the emergency room – rest assured you'll be told your heart is fine and you can go back to ignoring your body. As a corollary to this step, engaging in exercise, deep breathing, or any meditative practice is contraindicated if you are trying to have a panic attack.

One of the great things about panic attacks: once you have one, you'll have persistent fear about having another one. This makes following the above steps even easier. Throughout, keep doing it your way, maintain that control, don't listen to friends or doctors trying to tell you there's something going on, you have to let it out, etc. Lock it down. Let the anxiety build to invite those panic attacks into your life.

Did you know? ... According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), over six million people in America will experience panic attacks each year. About one-third of them will develop agoraphobia – a fear of being in any place or situation where escape might be difficult (or embarrassing) or help unavailable in the event of a panic attack – which places severe restrictions on one's life.

Did you know? (cont.)... Panic attack is a very treatable condition. Treatments including education, therapy, relaxation exercises, and medication are very effective. In cognitive-behavioral therapy, you can learn the skills to keep a healthier perspective, focus on things that you can manage, and effectively cope with those anxiety provoking thoughts and feelings.

So, if you really don't want to have a panic attack, know that you're not alone and there is hope.