



PATIENT EDUCATION — ANXIETY MANAGEMENT

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# Managing Panic Attacks *Without Medicines*

Evidence-based techniques to stop a panic attack in its tracks and prevent the next one

A panic attack feels like a heart attack — but it is **not dangerous and not life-threatening**. It is your nervous system misfiring a threat alarm when no real threat exists. **It will always peak within 10 minutes and it always passes.** The techniques in this guide are clinically proven to break the panic cycle. Practise them when calm so they are ready when you need them.

## What Happens in Your Body During a Panic Attack

Your fight-or-flight system activates, flooding your body with adrenaline. These sensations are **automatic, temporary physiological responses — not signs of danger or disease.**

Racing / pounding heart

Shortness of breath

Sweating or chills

Dizziness or faintness

Chest tightness or pain

Trembling or shaking

Feeling unreal or detached

Numbness or tingling

Fear of losing control or dying

Feeling of impending doom

## STEP-BY-STEP: WHAT TO DO RIGHT NOW DURING A PANIC ATTACK

1

### Recognise It and Name It Out Loud

Say aloud: **"This is a panic attack. I am not dying. My body is doing this automatically. It will pass in minutes. I have survived this before."** Naming the experience activates your rational prefrontal cortex, reducing the power of the emotional alarm system.

2

### Slow Your Breathing with Box Breathing (4-4-4-4)

Rapid shallow breathing (hyperventilation) dramatically intensifies panic symptoms. Slow, controlled belly breathing directly activates the parasympathetic (rest-and-digest) nervous system and counteracts the adrenaline response. See the breathing technique on Page 2.

3

### Ground Yourself with 5-4-3-2-1

Engage your five senses to anchor your mind to the present moment, pulling attention away from the panic spiral. Name: **5 things you can see · 4 you can touch · 3 you can hear · 2 you can smell · 1 you can taste.** Do this slowly and deliberately.

4

### Ride the Wave — Don't Fight It

Resistance and fleeing make panic worse by confirming danger. Instead, practise acceptance: **"Let the wave come. I don't need to escape it. It will peak and recede on its own."** Sit or stand still. Observe the sensations without judgment. They will diminish.

5

### Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Tense each muscle group tightly for 5 seconds, then release completely. Work from feet → calves → thighs → abdomen → hands → shoulders → face. The physical release of muscular tension signals safety to the brain and rapidly lowers overall arousal.

Page 1 of 2. For appointments with Dr. Pavan Sonar: [+91 8591840141](tel:+918591840141) | [drpavansonar.com](http://drpavansonar.com)

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PAGE 2 OF 2 — BREATHING, GROUNDING, LONG-TERM STRATEGIES & MYTH BUSTERS



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# Breathing, Grounding & Long-Term Recovery

Detailed techniques, lifestyle strategies, and myth-busting for panic disorder

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## BOX BREATHING — THE 4-4-4-4 TECHNIQUE

Repeat this full cycle 4-6 times. Breathe from your belly — your abdomen should rise, not your chest.

### INHALE

# 4

seconds — slow, steady, deep belly breath in through your nose

### HOLD

# 4

seconds — hold gently, without tension in your chest or shoulders

### EXHALE

# 4

seconds — slow, controlled exhale through your mouth or nose

### HOLD

# 4

seconds — rest before beginning the next inhale

## 5-4-3-2-1 GROUNDING TECHNIQUE — DO THIS SLOWLY AND DELIBERATELY

# 5

### SEE

Name 5 things you can see around you right now. Describe each one in detail.

# 4

### FEEL

Touch 4 objects — notice texture, temperature, weight, and hardness.

# 3

### HEAR

Listen for 3 distinct sounds in your environment — near and far.

# 2

### SMELL

Notice 2 scents — try lavender oil, coffee, or simply fresh air.

# 1

### TASTE

Notice 1 taste — sip water or chew something with a strong flavour.

## LONG-TERM STRATEGIES — REDUCE FREQUENCY & SEVERITY

### Daily Mindfulness (10 Minutes)

Apps like Insight Timer or Headspace. Mindfulness teaches the brain to observe physical sensations without reacting. Clinically proven to reduce panic attack frequency by up to 50% over 8 weeks of consistent practice.

### Regular Aerobic Exercise

30 minutes, at least 5 days per week. Exercise burns off circulating stress hormones, recalibrates the nervous system, and is as effective as medication for mild-to-moderate panic disorder in multiple clinical studies.

### Reduce Caffeine & Alcohol

Caffeine is a direct nervous system stimulant and a well-documented panic trigger. Alcohol causes rebound anxiety 4-6 hours after consumption. Gradually reducing both significantly lowers panic frequency within weeks.

### CBT with a Psychiatrist

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy with interoceptive exposure is the gold-standard treatment for panic disorder — an 80% long-term success rate. It teaches the brain that panic sensations are not dangerous. Short-term, highly structured course of 12-16 sessions.

## COMMON MYTHS — BUSTED BY CLINICAL EVIDENCE

MYTH

MYTH

**"I might actually die during a panic attack."**

Fact: Panic attacks are not medically dangerous. The heart, brain, and lungs are not harmed. No one has ever died from a panic attack itself. The danger is the fear of the fear.

**"I need medication to control panic attacks."**

Fact: Mild to moderate panic disorder responds very well to CBT and behavioural techniques alone. Medication is a valid option but not the only path. Many people recover completely without it.

**MYTH**

**"Breathing into a paper bag helps."**

Fact: This is outdated and potentially harmful — it reduces oxygen levels and worsens dizziness. Box breathing or slow diaphragmatic breathing as described above is far safer and more effective.

**MYTH**

**"Running away from the situation makes it stop."**

Fact: Avoidance and escape reinforces the fear and makes panic disorder progressively worse over time. Staying in the situation while using these tools permanently rewires the panic response.

**When to Seek Immediate Medical Help**

If you experience chest pain with sweating and jaw/arm pain, severe shortness of breath, loss of consciousness, or your first ever panic-like episode — please go to an emergency room to rule out cardiac causes. Once cleared medically, panic disorder is very treatable. Consult Dr. Pavan Sonar for a comprehensive psychiatric evaluation: **+91 8591840141**

**Disclaimer:** This guide is for educational purposes only. If panic attacks are frequent, disabling, or associated with chest pain, please consult a qualified physician immediately. For psychiatric appointments: **Dr. Pavan Sonar — +91 8591840141 | drpavansonar.com**

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