Practising panic sensations

Bringing on the feelings on purpose, to learn that they are safe.

If you fear the sensations of panic, the most direct treatment is to produce them deliberately, in a planned way, and find out that nothing bad follows. The exercises below create sensations similar to panic. They are safe for healthy people.

Before you start

Check with your GP first if you are pregnant or have a heart condition, asthma or another lung condition, epilepsy, low blood pressure, a history of fainting, or neck, back or balance problems. We will choose exercises that suit you.

Exercise	For how long	Sensations it tends to produce
Breathe fast and deep through your mouth	1 minute	Dizziness, tingling, unreality
Breathe through a narrow straw, nose pinched	1 minute	Breathlessness, air hunger
Hold your breath	30 seconds	Breathlessness, chest tightness
Run on the spot, or up and down stairs	1 minute	Pounding heart, breathlessness, heat
Spin in an office chair	1 minute	Dizziness, nausea
Shake your head from side to side	30 seconds	Dizziness, blurred vision
Head between your knees, then sit up quickly	30 seconds	Light-headedness, head rush
Tense every muscle in your body	1 minute	Trembling, tension, heaviness
Stare at a spot on the wall, or at your own reflection	2 minutes	Unreality, feeling detached

How to practise

1. Try each one and rate how similar it is to your panic, and how anxious it makes you.
2. Pick the ones that come closest. Start with a moderate one.
3. Do the exercise fully. Do not stop early, hold on, or distract yourself.
4. Stay with the sensations afterwards until they fade. Notice what happens, and what does not.
5. Repeat three or four times in a row, every day, until the fear drops.

The aim

To stop being afraid of the sensations. They do not have to go away.

Notes

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This handout supports your therapy. It does not replace professional advice.