

13 PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS YOU MIGHT EXPERIENCE WHEN SUFFERING FROM ANXIETY AND PANIC ATTACKS

1. Palpitations or sensations of pounding heart

When we find ourselves in a situation that we perceive as a threat, our brains activate our autonomic nervous system (ANS), better known as the fight or flight response, readying our bodies for action; to fight or to flee, or we can also freeze.

Our heart automatically pumps faster to cope with the increased demands that will be made on it when we start running away or fighting.

2. Breathing rapidly

As adults, we normally take between 12 and 20 breaths per minute. Again, if we are feeling like we are in danger, our ANS (autonomic nervous system) kicks in and we start to breathe more rapidly in order to take in more oxygen to increase our energy levels. This oxygen fuels the muscles we need to use to get us moving and shift us out of danger.

3. Feeling that you can't breathe

Despite the increased breaths, we can sometimes feel like we can't get enough air. To explain this feeling, it is necessary to understand just how oxygen works in the body.

Oxygen is a very sticky molecule and, without the aid of a gas called carbon dioxide, it sticks too closely to the red blood cells that

carry it around to the various tissues in our bodies. This means it can't be readily released to be absorbed by the cells that need it. Normally, we breath in the right amount of oxygen and, with the aid of carbon dioxide, this gets transferred to the body tissues, and then the carbon dioxide is breathed out. But when the oxygen is breathed out almost straight away, as a result of sustained shallow breathing but no action (hyperventilation), it takes precious carbon dioxide with it that hasn't done it's job yet, causing the levels of available carbon dioxide in our blood to fall. Without the carbon dioxide to help, the remaining oxygen sticks to the red blood cells and we feel we are oxygen starved, even though we are actually taking in plenty.

Most people start gasping or panting when this happens, to attempt to take in more air to breathe, but unfortunately this has the opposite effect, because then even more carbon dioxide gets breathed out and even less oxygen is distributed to the body cells. However, it should be noted that although you feel as if you are oxygen starved, the brain won't let this oxygen deficiency become critical!

4. Sharp chest pains

A very real experience that can be caused when you hyperventilate, as there is excess strain on your chest muscles.

5. Trembling or shaking

The more you hyperventilate the more uncontrollable the trembling and shaking will be as the body tries to compensate for the lack of oxygen.

6. Dizziness or feeling faint

Again, this is all down to the hyperventilation. The body is feeling weak and this causes us to feel faint.

7. Sweating

We are expecting to take some serious aerobic exercise to either run or fight so our ANS (autonomic nervous system) releases sweat through ducts in our skin. As it moistens the surface of our body it then evaporates and cools us down and helps prevent us from over heating.

8. Tingling sensations or numbness

Blame the hyperventilation!

9. The body feeling weak

Once again the hyperventilation is to blame as the body is feeling exhausted.

10. Difficulty speaking

Lack of oxygen causes us to feel sluggish and unable to get our brains to function in the way it normally would.

11. Thinking you are dying

With the body's alarm on full alert and all these escalating physical symptoms you're experiencing, is it any wonder you think you're dying when you don't understand what's happening.

12. A feeling of being unreal

You might be thinking that this isn't real, almost dream like. You might feel detached, like you're having an out of body experience. Looking down on yourself, watching as you go through this awful experience, can make you feel as if you are going crazy. But feeling detached in this way is just the body's natural defence, it's attempting to calm you down.

13. Fear of losing control

The fight or flight response has now been turned to full and is ready to respond to the danger that you perceive. Many or all of the above physical symptoms are happening and you are ready to run or to fight. However, if you are at home sitting on the sofa and the threat is in your mind, all this energy has nowhere to go. Your body is shouting at you to fight or run but the battle in this case is in your mind. So you feel as if you are losing control, but this is a feeling, not a reality.

How long does a panic attack last?

Generally a panic attack will burn itself out within a few minutes if left to follow a natural course; the fight or flight symptoms will naturally peak in about 10 minutes. If you're finding the symptoms are lasting for much longer than this then you are not having a panic attack. The only reason symptoms don't peak quickly when we are having a panic attack is because our terrifying thoughts and powerful imagination is leading us to hyperventilate and thus increase and perpetuate the symptoms.

7/11 Breathing Exercise

The 7/11 Breathing exercise resource is a useful and effective tool to help cut through the hyperventilation, by regulating your oxygen and carbon dioxide levels, and sending a message to the whole body system to calm down and relax. [Download it here.](#)

Ideally you would do this as a general preventative, in the morning when you wake and just before sleep, so that it promotes an overall calming affect, making you less likely to suffer from attacks of anxiety, but it can also be done when you need it too!

Note: If you are hyperventilating, or feeling very anxious, use the technique shown for this. For this you initially take very sharp intakes of breath followed by a slower out breath until the breathing has calmed and returned to normal.