

Tolerating (and Overcoming) the Physical Discomfort from Your Anxiety

It's common for people to experience physical discomfort when they are fearful and anxious. If you start thinking about a speech you have to deliver, or being in an enclosed place, or going to a crowded concert, your heart might start beating faster, your chest may tighten, you may sweat and even feel like you are going to faint.

These physical reactions can be very scary, and some people say they feel like they are having a heart attack or that they feel removed from reality. When this happens, people can become just as afraid of the physical reaction as they are to the actual situation that causes their anxiety. This is what some call "the fear of fear."

However, there is one proven way to break this cycle of anxiety and fear: to practice the physical sensations that make you nervous and panicky. If this doesn't sound like fun, you're right, it isn't. However, there are many studies that tell us that this is an important step to take in conquering your anxiety

There are three parts to this exercise. The first part is to determine the physical sensations that accompany your anxiety. You do this in the first column of the chart on the next page. Circle the physical symptoms you are most likely to have when you are feeling anxious and panicky.

The second part of this exercise is to actually create these uncomfortable feelings. The second column on the chart on the next page will give you some ideas how to do this. Note: You should initially practice these several times with a coach or friend in the room. The coach will encourage you to perform the exercises so that you mimic the physical sensations associated with your anxiety and will also protect you from any possible physical injury, like falling if you get dizzy.

The third and final part of this exercise is to record your practice re-creating the physical discomfort that you associate with your fear and anxiety. Although this isn't pleasant, the more you practice, the sooner you will be able to master your anxiety and lead a more energetic and fulfilling life.

How to Recreate Your Physical Discomfort

The more you practice the physical feelings that you associate with anxiety and panic the less likely you are to be influenced by these feelings. To prevent any possible injury, you should practice these physical exercises in the presence of a supportive person and in an appropriate place.

Uncomfortable Feelings	Creating Those Feelings
Lightheadedness, Feeling Faint	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hyperventilate for one minute. Breathe loudly and rapidly, similar to a panting dog), at a rate of approximately forty-five breaths per minute. • Place your head between your legs for one minute, then quickly sit up.
Feeling Weird and Unreal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think of how big the universe is and how small you are. • Think about the 200,000 years that humans have been on the earth all of your ancestors. • Sit in a completely dark and completely quiet room for five minutes /
Blurred Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stare at a lightbulb for one minute and then attempt to read.
Difficulty Breathing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold your nose and breathe through a thin straw for one minute.
Increased heart rate or tightness in your chest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drink an espresso or other caffeine-based drink. • Do five minutes of moderately intensive cardiovascular exercise like running up and down the stairs
Upset Stomach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do twenty jumping jacks after a meal.
Feeling Shaky	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tense all of your muscles and hold the tension for one minute.
Sweating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wear a jacket or wrap yourself in a blanket in a hot room.
Feeling Dizzy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spin around really fast for one minute.
Write other physical problems you have when you are anxious	How can you replicate these feeling?

