



Panic Attacks

by award-winning author / stress-relief expert **Susie Mantell**

Q: Dear Susie, I'm a 15 year-old boy. I'm an A student, but I have been experiencing anxiety attacks and a lot of stress. My palms get very sweaty and I feel like I'm going to faint, and I get these thoughts like something terrible is going to happen.

A: The first thing I want to say to you is: "Relax..."

As you read on here, take a couple of long, slow, gentle breaths. That's a good start, because breathing can help ground us a lot when we feel afraid. And everyone feels frightened sometimes. You might be surprised to know that many, many people have at some time in their lives experienced a period of anxiety or "panic" attacks, when they have felt sweaty palms, shortness of breath, light-headed and a sense of dread or a fear they sometimes cannot exactly pinpoint. It is very unpleasant. The ironic part is that once we feel afraid, then we can make ourselves feel afraid that we will feel afraid again. So for now, breathe slowly and read on.

I am not a physician and even a great doctor or therapist couldn't say for sure without meeting with you, just what the cause is or just what to do. But there is a lot more known these days about panic and anxiety than there used to be. Additionally, people are more frank about discussing it, which makes anxiety much easier to treat.

There can actually be some simple medical causes for the symptoms you describe, so your medical doctor is the right place to start. I always think it's a good idea to first determine whether there's anything that should be addressed medically. Find a trusted adult with whom you can discuss this. Perhaps your parent or an adult relative can help, maybe a teacher or school psychologist a guidance counselor, your friend's parent, or perhaps a clergy member. Find someone who has good judgment and is a good listener, with whom to discuss your feelings. Do just what you did by taking the initiative in writing to me, to get the local help you so deserve. If the first adult doesn't help, talk with another until someone listens and helps you find professionals that can help you to relax and go back to enjoying school and friends and fun activities in your life.

I know that it's easier for adults to get the help they need than it can be for kids. Adults can make appointments, decisions, they can drive and research professionals more easily perhaps, but you do not have to do this alone. There is help available in every community. Many hospitals even have Panic Disorder Clinics or something with a similar focus. Anxiety is a common problem and there are experts in what you describe in every city.

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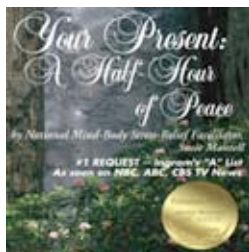
Panic Attacks: "I'm a 15 Year-Old Boy..."
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One Little Tip that Helps Sometimes

1. Get a small paper bag like a paper lunch bag. (Never plastic!) Keep it with you.
2. If you feel the panic-y feelings, cover your nose and mouth with the opening of the small paper bag and just slowly, gently, evenly breathe in and out of the bag, breathing in the same air you breathe out.
3. Sometimes this soothes and things simmer right down. I have done it myself, years ago. When we are afraid, we tend to breathe more shallowly, and that shallow, quick breathing is called "hyper-ventilating." Breathing the same air, in/out of the bag, sometimes relaxes us and "resets the system."
4. Keep track of when and where the episodes occur. This could be a clue. It is worth a try.

You sound like a bright young man, and you are very self-aware, which is a terrific start. The outstanding and admirable high academic achievement to which you refer can sometimes generate some anxiety too, if we're the kind of people who tend toward perfectionism. Your problem is not uncommon. In fact, I will post this reply on my website, because I know others struggle with the same things. There is a lot of really good help available, to facilitate you in discovering the cause of your anxiety, and how best to relieve it and get back to the fun aspects of life! On my website you will find some tips on breathing and worry, at www.relaxintuit.com.tips.asp

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