A **panic attack** is the sudden onset of intense fear and anxiety that can occur out of the blue or in response to encountering (or just thinking about) a phobic situation.

It includes:

a. *bodily* symptoms such as trembling, heart palpitations, tightening in the chest, shortness of breath, etc.

b. *emotional* reactions such as desire to run away, fears of going crazy, dying, being out of control, etc.

“The good news is that you CAN learn to **cope** with panic attacks so well that they will no longer have the power to frighten you. Over time, you can actually **diminish** the intensity and frequency of panic attacks if you are willing to make some **changes in your lifestyle**” (Bourne, 2005, p. 109)

### Top 5 Lifestyle Changes to Decrease Panic Attacks
1. Regular practice of deep relaxation
2. A regular program of exercise
3. Elimination of stimulants (especially caffeine, sugar, & nicotine)
4. Learning to acknowledge and express your feelings, especially anger and sadness
5. Adopting self-talk and “core beliefs” which promote a calmer and more accepting attitude toward life

### 3 Main Approaches to Deal with Oncoming Panic Symptoms:
1. **Retreat**- exit the situation until your anxiety subsides and return when feeling better (vs. escaping or not returning to the situation since that can lead to increased fear)
2. **Distraction**- ex. Talk to another person, move around or engage in a physical activity, stay in the present, do something that requires focused concentration, do something pleasurable, practice thought stopping
3. **Breathing** (or muscle relaxation) and **positive self-talk**, ex. “I can handle this,” “This too shall pass”

### Change your Thoughts about Panic Attacks
1. Read this in-depth section in *The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook* by Edmund J. Bourne, Ph.D.
   The key point is:
   “A panic attack can be a very frightening and uncomfortable experience, but it is absolutely **not** dangerous. Panic is an entirely **natural** bodily reaction that simply occurs out of context” (Bourne, 2005, p. 110).
2. Identify and then break the connection between body symptoms and catastrophic thoughts. (write down alternative explanations for body symptoms)
3. Face the symptoms by floating with the “wave” of a panic attack, observe your body, allow time to pass.
4. Explore the antecedents of your panic attacks in order to prevent them or plan how to cope with them
5. Tell a friend, family member, and/or employer/teacher about your panic attacks in order to minimize the likelihood of having a panic attack in a large number of situations.

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