

Life... Deep breathing doesn't stop my panics

Situation:

I've read a lot about deep breathing to alleviate panicky feelings, but it doesn't seem to work for me. What am I doing wrong?

Answer:

You're not alone - deep breathing didn't calm me down either when I was really panicky. A lot of people who try it don't get any relief, in part, because they can't fully concentrate on their breathing. The danger thoughts get in the way. When you feel panicky, your thoughts are spinning. Every one of them is screaming "Fear!"

Let's go through a little scenario. You start to feel panicky. You think, "Oh no, here it comes again." You scan your body for any and all unpleasant sensations. The more you find, the more afraid you get. Your sensations get stronger. You think, "I'll try that deep breathing I read about." You take a deep in-breath, hold it and exhale. No change. So you try it again. Breathe in, breathe out. Still no noticeable change. Then you add more insecure thoughts, "This isn't working! Now what?"

When you're anxious, tense or panicky, it's very difficult to put your total concentration on anything other than the fear you're feeling. That's why I recommend that if you want use the body or behavioral approach (deep breathing) combine it with an effective mind or cognitive technique.

Use your verbal tranquilizers to calm your mind as your conscious breathing helps calm your body. If your secure thought is "I am safe," as you breathe in, think the words, "I am." As you breathe out, think the word "safe." I am safe! Or use the word "no" on the intake and "danger" with the out breath. "No danger."

Using phrases like "I feel fine" or "I feel well" don't work because you don't feel the least bit "fine" or "well." Secure thoughts have to target your sense of insecurity, not just your feelings. You have to tell yourself "safe" in order to feel safe. Your body chemistry will respond to your thoughts and calm down on its own. The intense physical symptoms will wind down.

Your body relaxes when you feed it secure thoughts. Repeat those verbal tranquilizers until it does. They do work!