



# HOW YOUR THINKING AFFECTS PANIC ATTACKS



## Introduction

If you suffer from panic attacks, you may have noticed that that your thinking is different during a panic attack than at other times.

This is because, during times of high emotion, your brain functions quite differently, making it hard to think straight. (See 'Emotional Hijacking').

During a panic attack, you are more likely to think in 'all or nothing' terms. This is because your brain thinks you are in a survival situation, at which time you need to make quick and definite decisions: "Run away or attack!" There is no need for subtle, or 'greyscale' thinking.

Luckily, this gives us one way of tackling panic attacks. Calming yourself down (try using 7:11 breathing). And deliberately thinking in a more analytical way will engage another part of your brain and change your emotional state.

## Practise Being a Calm Thinker

It is important to practise thinking carefully and analytically when you are not having a panic attack. This will help you spot the difference more quickly and improve your emotional balance generally. Here's a few examples that might help.

Panic Thought	Alternative Thought
"Oh my God I can feel my heart speeding up, I'm going to have a panic attack!"	"It could just be because I walked up those stairs, or because I was thinking about work. If I just focus on what I'm doing, it'll probably go away."
"Janet just shot me a dirty look - she must hate me."	"That could have been a dirty look, or she might just be thinking about something that's bothering her."
"I failed my exam; I'm going to end up on the trash heap."	"I failed that exam, but I have passed others, and anyway, there's more to life than academic skills. I could give it another go, or focus on something else."
"I've got a pain in my stomach. It must be cancer."	"I've got a pain in my stomach, I wonder if it's indigestion, trapped wind or something more serious. I'll wait until tomorrow and if it's not got better, I'll go and see the doctor."
"I panic every time I meet her. I'm so pathetic."	"I seem to get a bit nervous when I meet her, I wonder why that is? I guess everyone feels more comfortable with some people than others."

You will notice that the statements in the left-hand column are much more likely to give rise to **emotional responses**. If you are going to get control of your emotional state, you must be aware of this and whenever you find yourself saying these sorts of things, deliberately change them into the type in the right-hand column.

You don't even have to believe the alternative statements; the important thing is that you force yourself to think them. **Remember:** For high emotion to exist, you must be thinking in an '*all or nothing*' way. Without that type of thinking, your emotional level will drop, whether you are angry, anxious or even excited!

### **Perseverance is Key**

I don't want to repeat myself, but so often people need convincing of the importance of this part of getting rid of panic attacks. It may seem like nothing, but it is probably the single most important long-term change if you are prone to thinking in all-or-nothing terms. And we are talking about permanent change here, not just until your panic attacks subside.

Gentle persistence is what is needed, so even if you think you are getting nowhere, you continue to practise this.

### **'De-conditioning' is Important Too**

You may find that in certain situations, your anxiety levels go up very quickly, seemingly without you having to think at all. This may well be because you have been conditioned to respond in this way, in the same way that you can salivate when you see a lemon.

In essence then, try to breath more calmly and move towards a more logical way of thinking.

If you have questions about panic attacks or are seeking solutions, please contact me via email: [steve@iotherapy.net](mailto:steve@iotherapy.net)