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How to stop a panic attack, from women who have overcome them



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Experiencing a panic attack for the first time can be completely terrifying.

A sudden rush of adrenaline, coupled with debilitating symptoms, can leave the sufferer feeling scared, disorientated and subsequently exhausted. In the words of Nadia Hussain, who has spoken openly about her own "crippling" anxiety, "it feels like you're going to die. Your airways close up. Your head spins. You collapse. It's so scary".

The NHS cites panic as the most severe form of anxiety, and can "create a cycle of living [...] in fear of fear". If you're prone to panic attacks, you're not alone. 13.2% of people will experience a panic attack in their lifetime according to the [Mental Health Foundation](#).



Nadia Hussain has been open about her mental health struggles

As a society, we're talking about mental health more than ever before, with celebrities championing conversation around panic disorder. Nadia Hussain's recent documentary, *Nadia: Anxiety and Me*, documents the TV chef's quest to find treatment, while journalist Bella Mackie's bestselling memoir, *Jog On*, highlights how exercise can be a lifeline for those suffering with anxiety and panic attacks, which were, for Bella, "physically brutal".

When the moment strikes, it's easy to think, in the words of Bella Mackie, "I can't possibly get through this". So how do you?

WSH spoke to three women who have learned to manage their attacks about how to cope when they feel the panic rising.

How to stop a panic attack: three women share their strategies

While experiencing a panic attack can be an unsettling experience, there are coping mechanisms that can help prevent the attack from escalating.

Jane Sorrell, life and wellness coach at [janebliss.co.uk](#), first started experiencing panic attacks 15 years ago



Jane believes it's important to address the root of the issue

"I remember during the first attack there an extreme awareness of my heart. All of a sudden, I couldn't breathe and I was convinced I was having a heart attack. I felt overwhelmed and couldn't stabilise. It was horrific.

"I only really learned how to stop panic attacks when I delved into why my anxiety was there in the first place. If you want to deal with the root of a panic attack, accept that it's often down to something else going on in your life; grief, or stress, perhaps. Reach out to someone – whether that's a loved one, close friend, your GP or a professional – as it's so important to talk.

"An attack can bring back uncomfortable and familiar memories of previous panic attacks. When you feel the memory creeping back up, let it wash you until you feel safe, repeating 'I am safe, I am fine'. Overcoming a panic attack involves a lot of positive self-talk; a strong mental attitude is key.

"At this moment, breathing is so important. Many people get it wrong when it comes to breathing to calm the system down. The exhale needs to be longer than the inhale by one count to engage the relaxation response. An easy technique to remember is 3-4-5; breathe in for 3, hold for 4, then breathe out for 5.

"Another technique that will work quickly is a technique called EFT, which involves tapping on meridian points in order to relax the body. EFT points include the collar bone, under the nose, under the eye, the side of the eye and the chin."