

Finding Balance

Panic disorders are defined by modern medicine as episodes of intense stress, sudden anxiousness and helplessness. Panic disorders, abbreviated as PD, have been described as a mental illness associated with strong sense of anxiety. However, since officially recognized and labeled by an International Classification of Diseases World Health Organization (ICD-10, WHO) in 1992, the recent perspective looks to treat Panic disorders as less of a mental illness or disease and more of a brain dysfunction.

The primary example of a panic disorder is a “panic attack.” The severity of the condition is compounded by a fear or anxiety of a recurring attack, or “anticipatory attack.” Prolonged episodes can give rise to agoraphobia, or the fear of going into public places. Treatment must often come with the assistance of friends or family since seeking help means traveling alone, another possible anxiety trigger.

Stress is activated and registered in the brainstem and cerebral cortex of the brain. However, this activity can be suppressed by acupuncture stimulation. Indeed, acupuncture stimulation can cause the increased release of serotonin, a natural chemical produced by the body that delivers relaxing effects. Feelings of peacefulness and calm are associated with higher levels of serotonin while depression and anxiety are associated lower levels.

PD can also stem from an imbalance between the body and mind, or our physical and mental health. Negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, and sadness should be dealt with by taking a relaxed but upright posture. However, our common reaction to these emotions include a shrugged neck, rigid back, curled chest and stiff posture; the body is literally physically defending itself from an attack. The stiffness of the muscles can run deep leading to chronic pain, compounding on the negative effects of PD.

Stiff surface muscles can lead to stiff support muscles, leading to a shortness of breath. This is the start of real panic, as the body refuses to move and you simply cannot breathe. This presents a severe problem because relaxation can only begin with deep, full breaths.

Panic disorder may start as a brain dysfunction, but it becomes a whole body dysfunction. Relaxation must begin with body, and work back to the brain. The shrugged neck, the stiff body

must relax and breathing must return to normal. Focusing on the back, pressure can be applied to the nerve trunk at the base of the neck and along the spine, affecting not only the stiffness but heart and gastrointestinal function as well.

Misaligned physical and neurological systems can surface as anxiety, sleeplessness, dizziness, and chronic fatigue. Psychiatry can provide an important role in the healing process, but psychiatry is only limited to mental health and the medications prescribed only treat the symptoms of the problem. Medications can alter and control the brains function, but this is only temporary relief from the whole issue. The principles of acupuncture and Traditional Chinese medicine link our physical and mental health as a single unit and must be treated as such for a comfortable existence.