

Panic Free: Eliminate Anxiety/Panic Attacks Without Drugs

Lynne Freeman

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More than 20 years ago, author and psychotherapist Lynne Freeman sat in a college classroom and suddenly was vaulted into an anxiety attack: her heart began pounding, her body shook, her vision became distorted and she felt an intense urge to bolt for the door. She thought someone had drugged her. Instead, she'd entered the debilitating world of panic and anxiety disorders, the nation's most prevalent mental health problem, which affect some 24 million Americans.

Panic Free is the result of Freeman's struggle against the freewheeling anxiety that eventually turned her into a shut-in agoraphobic. Traditional psychotherapy could do little to help, so Freeman began studying anxiety and applying new methods of treatment in her own practice, eventually opening an institute devoted to stemming attacks using unconventional techniques.

"I began to picture my anxiety as a huge monster that was bent on destroying my life," she writes. "I realized the monster grew bigger and more powerful every time I gave in to it. I had to show this monster that it no longer controlled me."

As Freeman challenged her fears, the anxiety attacks began to abate. Panic Free explains how to identify disorders and attacks, listing symptoms such as numbness, chills and fear of dying or going crazy, many of which can feel life threatening to sufferers. Panic disorders are perpetuated by fears that they'll recur as well as by a tendency to mistake similar physical conditions—low blood sugar, allergies or fatigue, for example—as the onset of an attack, Freeman explains.

The book discusses such biological prompts for attacks and, to control or quell symptoms, outlines drug-free steps that range from using anger to fight anxiety and breathing exercises to physically calm down to journal writing, massage and meditation. Psychotherapists often prescribe anti-depressants to fight anxiety and panic, but Freeman suggests that they're often ineffective or create undesirable side effects.

A number of case studies help illustrate treatment concepts, and Freeman generally avoids hard-to-understand medical terminology. The book helps those 24 million Americans realize that they're not alone, and they're not crazy. That in itself makes Panic Free a worthwhile addition to bookshelves.

LORI HALL STEELE (July / August 1998)

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