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Panic Attack & Anxiety Imagery

Welcome to this Healthy Living To Go podcast from Kaiser Permanente, designed to fit the way you live and the way you learn. Listen, live well, and thrive.

I'm Belleruth Naparstek, and these are some guided exercises designed to help reduce or eliminate panic attacks. The first 3 exercises build up your relaxation and self-regulation skills. The 4th is a powerful guided imagery exercise, designed to help you face and embrace these episodes if and when they occur. This has the paradoxical effect of reducing their frequency and intensity, and for many, eventually eliminating them altogether. And the 5th is a series of affirmations, which some people find easier to use than guided imagery.

Please keep in mind that panic attacks are very common, and that thousands of emotionally healthy people have them. They're simply your body's well-meaning but misdirected attempt to keep you safe – with a full-blown survival response, that's somehow gone into a self-perpetuating loop. The selfregulationregulation skills on this program interrupt the loop and tame the response, putting mastery and control back into your own hands. skills on this program interrupt the loop and tame the response, putting mastery and control back into your own hands.

You can listen to the entire program each time or you can pick out the segments that work best for you. The important thing is to listen regularly at first, once or twice a day, for several weeks, so that you're conditioning yourself to to relax at will, very quickly and automatically.

The goal is to have the skill of self-regulation at your fingertips....or, more accurately, you want to have this ability installed on the inside of you... so much so, that when you start to feel the first hints of an attack, you'll be able to respond automatically. That's why you want to practice ahead of time, when you're feeling OK – to condition yourself – like an athlete - to react quickly and skillfully, without having to think about it, at the earliest signs of trouble.

You're likely to find that as you use these exercises over time, they'll have a stronger and stronger effect. Should you notice that your mind wandering, you can gently guide it back. And because the imagery encourages a dreamy kind of awareness, please don't play this while driving.

Every now and then, these exercises may bring forth unexpected emotion. If this is the case with you, see if you can allow the feelings to just come up and move through you, seeing it as a necessary kind of rinsing that's taking place. It won't hurt you to do this, and it may in fact be very good for you.

If you position your hands the same way each time you listen, this will become a kind of instant conditioning cue. Later, you'll be able to use this positioning to move very quickly into a place of deep relaxation and balance.

So just give these exercises a try, and then listen repeatedly to those you like best, preferably at the same time and in the same place each day, but really, any time you can do this is a good time. After a

few weeks of steady practice, you'll start to feel more and more like they're a part of you. This becomes your own internal, spring loaded, automatic tool kit, ready to go to work for you whenever you need it.

So for now, see if you can take this next while, to commit yourself to this process of engaging the power of your mind to help you heal... by gently immersing yourself in this safe and easy process... all you have to do is settle in and let yourself listen...

Counting the Breath

To begin with, see if you can position yourself as comfortably as you can, shifting your weight so that you're allowing your body to be well supported.... And you might want to take a moment to feel the support beneath you, and just let your body settle in....

And as you breathe, in and out, slowly and comfortably... you can allow yourself to feel more and more settled and comfortable.... inhaling as fully as you can, gently and easily... and breathing out, fully and comfortably....

And knowing, that when you place your hands over your abdomen or your chest... in the same way each time you listen... that you're creating a built-in cue for later on... that will diffuse any tension or discomfort... and remind your body to relax, quickly and easily.... just by placing your hands in this same way... any time, day or night...

Continuing to inhale as fully as you comfortably can... and breathing out, fully and easily...

And with the next breath in... counting: one, two, three...

And counting out... one, two, three....

Just this simple 1,2,3... as more and more, your belly rises, easily and naturally, as you breathe in... one, two, three.... And subsides, easily and naturally, as you breathe out... one, two, three.... Like the breath of a sleeping baby... up and down.... one, two, three... and one, two, three...

Aware that your hands, resting on your body, are gently lifted by the fullness of the inbreath... and lowered with the outbreath...

One... two...three...

And

One... two... three...

One.. two... three...

And

One.. two.. three...

Feeling your hands rise gently and easily with each breath in... and subside, gently and easily with each breath out...

One.. two... three... in

And

One.. two.. three... out

And now just counting on your own, in your own mind... with each breath, in and out...

Letting the rhythm of your breathing guide the counting...

And the rhythm of your counting guide the breathing...

And so...

Knowing that you can create a soothing rhythm with your own steady, relaxed breathing... that this is always available to you... just by placing your hands over your body... and counting in... and counting out...

You can... very gently and with soft eyes... bring your attention back to your surroundings... knowing in a deep place that you are better for this... stronger and steadier and calmer... And so you are...

Mantra Repetition & Conscious Breathing

And once again, positioning yourself as comfortably as you can, shifting your weight so that you're allowing your body to be well supported.... Taking a moment to feel the support beneath you....

And as you breathe, in and out, slowly and comfortably... you can allow yourself to feel more and more settled and supported.... inhaling as fully as you comfortably can... and breathing out, fully and easily....

And knowing, that when you place your hands comfortably... over your abdomen ... in the same easy, relaxed way each time you do this... that you're creating a built-in cue that will carry you to a sense of comfort and safety... reminding your body that it knows how to relax, quickly and easily.... just by placing your hands in this same way... any time, day or night...

Continuing to inhale as fully as you comfortably can... and breathing out, fully and easily...

Counting one, two, three with the in-breath....

And out... one, two, three.... With the out-breath....

Noticing how your hands gently lift with the fullness of each inbreath... and how they subside with the outbreath...

And with the next breath in... softly saying the word "peace" to yourself... and with the outbreath, saying the word "calm"...

And again... breathing in the word "peace" And breathing out the word "calm"

Inhaling "Peace"...

Exhaling "Calm"....

Breathing in... fully and deeply... all the way down into the belly... and saying to yourself, "I am peace" and with the outbreath, saying to yourself the phrase, "I am calm"

Taking the next breath in... "I am peace"...

And breathing out... "I am calm"...

Soft and easy, rich and full.... as you carry words of comfort and safety all the way in to your center... I am peace....

And breathing out, into your surroundings, words of comfort and safety... I am calm....

..... pause...

I am peace...

I am calm...

Allowing these simple words, carried into your center on the in-breath, to soothe and settle you...

I am calm...

I am peace...

And perhaps you'll want to choose different words... your own words...

The way some like to say:

I am strong....

I am well....

I am strong....

I am well....

Or the way some prefer: "May the world be at peace".... with the in-breath.... And "May the world be at ease".... With the out-breath...

May the world be at peace...

May the world be at ease....

And so... Knowing that this is always available to you... just by placing your hands over your belly...

You can... very gently and with soft eyes... bring your attention back to your surroundings...

knowing in a deep place that you are stronger... calmer... and more peaceful ... that you are better for this... And so you are...

Body Scan

See if you can position yourself as comfortably as you can... shifting your weight so that you're allowing your body to be fully supported... your head, neck and spine aligned...

And taking a deep, full, cleansing breath... exhaling as fully as you comfortably can.. and another... deep into the belly... and again, breathing out as completely as you can...

And gently allowing yourself to turn your attention inward... focusing inside for just this next while... to see how your body feels... feeling where your body might be tight or tense or sore... and where it feels loose and open... so you're just letting your awareness move around inside your body... with friendly but detached interest...

Starting perhaps with your head... noticing how it feels inside your head... whether it feels tight or congested or uncomfortable... or loose and open and easy... breathing in to your head... and breathing out... knowing that you're not trying to shift or change anything... but just noticing what is so... no praise, no blame.. as you breathe...

And moving your awareness into your neck and shoulders... curious about any tightness or heaviness there... any sensation at all... and breathing in to your neck and shoulders... and breathing out...

And down into your arms... and hands... aware of how it feels inside the muscle of your arms... in the joints... all the way down to the tips of your fingers... breathing in to your arms and hands... and breathing out...

And noticing how it feels in your chest... sensing how it feels around your heart... aware of any sensations there... heavy or tight... or spacious and open... and without trying to change anything... but just recognizing what is there... you can breathe the warm energy of the breath there... in and out...

Moving your awareness down the length of your back.. noticing how your back feels, all along the spine... all the way down to your tailbone... noticing any sensation there... with detached but curious interest... and breathing into it...

And coming back around... to notice how it feels inside your belly... noticing the sensations in your abdomen... and breathing the warmth of the breath into your belly... and breathing out...

Continuing to move your awareness down into your bottom... sensing how it feels all along your whole pelvic floor... and breathing down into it... and breathing out...

Sending your awareness into your hips and legs... noticing any sensation in the muscle of the legs... and the joints... all the way down to the feet... all the way to the tips of your toes... and breathing the breath into your legs... and breathing out...

So you're just doing this gentle, curious inventory of this body of yours... noting where there might be discomfort... where it might feel dense or tight or heavy or sore... and where it might feel loose and light and easy...

And acknowledging this body of yours... perhaps allowing yourself to feel gratitude for its constant service to you... in spite of its alleged imperfections... as you take another, deep, full breath... all the way down into any uncomfortable places... breathing the warm, healing energy of the breath anywhere it's needed... and releasing discomfort with the outbreath...

And again... sending the breath into any tightness... letting it warm and loosen and soften all around and through it... and then breathing it out, fully and easily...

And again... breathing the warmth of the breath down into any discomfort... and breathing it out...

As you take this time to reacquaint yourself with this body of yours... listening to it... acknowledging it... and letting your awareness sink down into it... breathing fully and easily into every part of you... softly acknowledging the sore, weary places... and the strong, solid places... no praise, no blame... just noting what is so... and remembering the power of just connecting back into your body...

And so, whenever you are ready... taking another full, deep breath... and gently, with soft eyes, coming back into your surroundings... knowing in a deep place that you are better for this... And so you are...

Warrior of the Heart Imagery

To begin with, see if you can position yourself as comfortably as you can, shifting your weight so that you're allowing your body to be well supported.... taking a moment to sense the support beneath you... and just letting your body settle in.... inhaling as fully as you comfortably can... and breathing out.... completely and easily...

Knowing, that if you place your hands comfortably... over your abdomen... that this will become your built-in cue... to remind your body that it knows how to relax, quickly and easily.... any time, any place... whenever you arrange your hands in this way.... And with the next breath in... counting one, two, three...

And counting out... one, two, three....

Just a simple counting:

One, two, three... with the inbreath...

And one, two, three with the outbreath...

As more and more, your belly rises, easily and naturally, of its own accord... one, two, three.... And subsides, easily and naturally... one, two, three.... Like the breathing of a sleeping baby... up and down.... up and down...

Aware that your hands are gently being lifted with the fullness of the inbreath... and lowered with the release of the outbreath...

And with the next breath in... softly saying to yourself the word "peace" ... and with the outbreath, the word "calm"...

And again... breathing in "peace".... And breathing out "calm"....

I am peace...

I am calm...

I am well...

I am strong...

Or any other words of your own choosing that carry safety and calm to you...

Breathing in and out... fully and deeply...

As you allow a place to come to mind... where you feel safe and peaceful and easy... a place that's either real or imaginary... it doesn't matter... just so it's a place that feels good and safe and peaceful to you... and if many places come to mind.. you can allow yourself to choose just one of them for now ...because any one of them will work well for this...

And allowing the place to become real to you... looking around you... taking everything in with your eyes... enjoying the colors.. the scenery... looking over to your right... and over to your left...

And listening to sounds of the place .so you're just allowing your ears to become attuned to all the sounds of this place... that is so safe and peaceful to you...

And smelling its rich fragrance... perhaps even tasting it on your tongue... and feeling the air on your face and neck... as your skin enjoys the presence of this place... that is so safe and peaceful to you...

And letting its healing energy soak into your skin... infusing muscle and tissue and bone... all the way down into each and every cell...

So with every in-breath, you're inhaling the peacefulness of this place... as you stand, strong and steady, straight and tall... surrounded by its generous energy ... so safe and peaceful to you... your head high, and your shoulders wide... your arms loose and strong at your side... feet apart, firmly planted on the ground... knees slightly bent and ready... your breath moving in and out of your belly, strong and steady... feeling energized and alert, flexible and strong... like a warrior of the heart, ready to welcome any encounter...

And sensing, too, the protective presence of those who stand with you... on either side of you ... and around you guarding your back... come to reinforce your strength and resolve... and some might be familiar... or some not... it doesn't matter... because you know... that these are your allies, protectors and guides ... committed to your well-being and safety.... And you may find beloved friends or family... teachers and helpers... perhaps a powerful ancestor... or a special animal... or divine helpers.... mythic beings... surrounding you with their strength and wisdom and blessing....

And you know, that more and more... you can face down any fear or threat... no matter how intense or sudden... with the heart and presence of a warrior... fully present... breathing deeply... understanding that when you can open to this experience... and embrace it... and breathe it in... slowly and steadily and fully... that you can breathe out mastery and calm... breath by breath.... one, two, three... one, two three...

Taking fear in with the breath... one, two, three.... and breathing out calm... one, two, three... and so transforming it, breath by breath.... in the powerful seat of your own warrior heart... breath by breath... you watch yourself temper fear... more and more, changing it into an energized kind of calm... using the powerful alchemy of the breath... one, two, three... one, two, three....

And you can watch, surprised but not surprised, as more and more, with each calming, soothing breath, your racing heart slows... and any sweating or trembling subsides... light-headedness disappears as your head clears and steadies... and you might notice that your throat and chest are feeling more and more

spacious and open and comfortable... as you take in just the right amount of air.... filling your lungs softly and fully with nourishing air... as your companions smile and nod...

Feeling tight muscle relaxing... as strength fills your legs... and you might notice that you can feel your feet planted firmly on the ground... drawing strength from the earth, up through your feet.... and you know that you can move if you choose to do so... but for now, you prefer to stand here... strong and steady... flexible and ready... able to outlast whatever comes... and you can feel how your stomach is becoming more and more settled and calm... your body temperature more and more balanced and comfortable...

As any racing thoughts settle and grow quiet... as your sense of your deepest self, solid and steady, fills you... along with a sense of confidence and clarity...

And you can witness this shift with detached curiosity.... because a part of you has always known... that you have within you the ability to ride any wave of experience... like a skillful surfer... knowing that it will always, always crest and subside... and you will glide to shore... stronger and more masterful each time... and perhaps even finding, as your mastery grows, that what once was fear is feeling more and more like the xxx energy of exhilaration...

Understanding that these brief episodes always pass... that you will outlast them, every time, until they are no more... just an illusion of threat... strangely convincing at the time... because they are created by your own powerful internal chemistry... in a well-meaning but misguided attempt to look out for you... an outdated survival response that's forgotten how to retreat on its own and instead finds itself looping and repeating... in a confused attempt to complete its mission... a mission that's no longer needed...

So now you use the energy of the breath... aligned with your own powerful will, and the detached clarity of your mind... and the circle of protection around you... to interrupt the cycle and return to the peaceful place at your center... and you can watch from this place of safety and calm, sitting in the powerful seat of the heart... as it all subsides... more and more quickly and easily, each time...

And you might even choose to thank your highly attuned response system... for its efforts to protect you... gently explaining to it, that all is well... telling it: xxx I am safe; all is well; you can go now.... And you know that it will go.... more and more quickly and easily... until one day when you may notice with mild interest... that it's been gone altogether... for quite some time...

Your companions smile and nod... understanding that you've seen this... that you are mastering fear more and more skillfully... and you might even feel a warm hand on your shoulder... or hear some words of encouragement in your ear... or just feel the sense of support around you...

As you continue to breathe your breath, in and out, slowly and steadily... one, two, three... and one, two, three... a warrior of the heart...

And so... knowing you can call forth this place and these visitors and the power of your own breath, whenever you wish... you can once again feel your hands and your feet.... your breath in your belly... and knowing you are better for this...

And so you are.

Affirmations

Affirmations are positive statements designed for repeated listening, a sort of reprogramming of your unconscious mind to combat negative thinking. Over time, they can have a profound, cumulative effect. Some people find them easier to work with than guided imagery.

See if you can listen to each statement in a state of open, relaxed attention, breathing in deeply as you hear each one, and breathing out as you repeat it to yourself.

I know there are times I become anxious and panicked, and I accept what I feel as my inner truth of the moment.

More and more, I can allow myself to let go of worrying about things I cannot control, and focus on my own inner peacefulness.

I salute my own courage, strength, endurance and fortitude.

I salute the healing action of my own breath.

When I remember to feel my breath moving in and out of my body, slow and steady, I know I can return to my own inner peace and calm.

More and more, I can feel settled and calm, peaceful and quiet, as I breathe in and breathe out, comfortably and easily...

I know that when I let my belly rise and fall, easily and naturally with my own breathing, I feel settled and calm, peaceful and quiet...

I enjoy the feel of my hands on my belly as I breathe steadily and comfortably, in and out.

I enjoy the feel of my hands, resting on my body, as they're gently lifted by the fullness of my inbreath... and lowered by the steady release of the outbreath...

More and more, I know that I am in charge of my own, relaxed breathing...

I am learning to say calming words and phrases to myself, as I breathe in and out...

More and more I can allow simple words, carried in to me on my own breath, to soothe and settle me and bring me back to myself...

I can hear myself say the words "I am peace" to myself on the inbreath, and "I am calm" to myself on the outbreath.

I feel myself becoming more and more able to settle myself at will.

I welcome the return of my strength, vitality and sense of self.

My growing mastery over these episodes is a source of hope, relief and quiet pride.

More and more, I can turn my attention inward and focus on the peaceful stillness at my center...

I welcome my new awareness of the peaceful power in my heart, the seat of my strength, and the home of my spirit.

More and more, I can feel energized and alert, flexible and ready for any encounter...

I sense the protective presence of guardians and allies on either side of me and all around me....

I welcome all assistance, seen and unseen, here to reinforce my courage and resolve...

I can see and feel a peaceful, balanced calm move all through my body.

I can see and feel radiant sunlight, entering and warming my body, sending peaceful joy and sweet healing deep inside.

I can see and feel a powerful blue-green wave of healing, washing through me from head to toe, clearing away any unwanted debris and taking it out with the tide.

I can see and feel a soft, warm, pulsing blanket of comfort surrounding me, [enveloping me with healing and softly soaking its energy into me.

More and more, I know I can face any fear or threat... with the courage of my own open heart...

I know that when I can stand at open attention, fully present, and breathing into my fear, it softens and fades...

More and more, I understand that I can open to fear, embrace it and breathe into it...

I know that when I can face and embrace these experiences, they soften and fade...

I feel myself transforming fear, breath by breath, in the fierce cauldron of my own open heart...

More and more, I'm able to transform any experience with the powerful alchemy of my own breath...

More and more I can slow my racing heart with my own calm, relaxed, measured breathing...

I can feel my symptoms subside and fade with my own calm, relaxed, measured breathing...

I watch sweating and trembling subside with my own calm, relaxed, measured breathing...

I sense any lightheadedness disappearing, my head clearing and steadying with my own calm, relaxed, measured breathing...

I feel my chest becoming more and more open and spacious and comfortable with each calm, relaxed, measured breath...

I feel my stomach settling down with each calm, relaxed, measured breath...

I watch my body temperature becoming more even and comfortable with each calm, relaxed, measured breath...

More and more, any racing thoughts settle down and grow quiet with my own calm, relaxed, measured breathing...

More and more, I can witness this shift from fear to calm with detached curiosity....

I welcome my ability to cushion myself from jarring sensations, modulating my responses from this new seat of settled, balanced calm.

I know I can ride any wave of intense emotion like a skillful surfer, knowing that it will always crest and subside...

I know I can ride any wave on intense emotion, and I will glide to shore, stronger and more masterful each time...

I understand as I gain more and more mastery that these brief episodes always pass....

More and more, I know that what feels so much like danger and doom, is only an illusion, created by my own well-meaning but misguided survival chemistry...

I understand I can interrupt the cycle and return to the peaceful place at my center...

I can watch my symptoms subside from a place of safety and calm, sitting in the powerful seat of the heart...

More and more, I can trust the energy of my breath, my own powerful will, and the detached clarity of my mind to return me to a place of peace and calm...I thank my highly attuned reactivity for trying to protect me...

I tell it, I am safe; all is well; you can go now....

I know that a time is coming when these episodes will lessen and fade, coming further and further apart, until they are gone altogether....

I know that I'm nourished and sustained by all the love and beauty that has ever come into my life.

More and more, I can feel my mind getting clearer, my body stronger, my heart fuller, my energy freer.

I know that I have things to do, purposes to accomplish, gifts to give and I require a strong body and a clear mind for this.

More and more, I know that I am perfectly, utterly safe.

And so you are.