

Panic Loves it when you:

1. Have a chronic state of high stress.

(Chronically high cortisol and adrenalin {stress hormones} levels make it easy for a panic cycle to get started.)

2. Drink lots of caffeine.

(This keeps adrenalin levels high, causing chronic stress to the body.)

3. Don't sleep enough on a regular basis.

(7-9 hours at least 4 nights per week helps keep cortisol levels low. More than 9 hours per night doesn't increase the benefit.)

4. Pay attention to your body sensations of panic.

(Focusing on your pounding heart, anxious stomach or tight throat causes your body to release another round of adrenalin.)

5. Focus on negative and repetitive self-talk.

(This keeps the anxiety center of your brain activated, and doesn't allow your "thinking brain," or cortex, to become active with calm reasoning.)

6. Don't find the time to practice relaxation or to exercise.

(Your brain forgets how to relax if you don't do it regularly: it remains in chronic fight-or-flight mode.)

7. Don't have regular activities that engage your "thinking brain", or cortex.

(Research is currently underway to look at the effects of computer and gaming activities on the brain. It is known that regular participation in these activities decreases relays between parts of the cortex, as well as networking between "thinking" and "feeling" parts of the brain. It may be true that when these activities chronically replace talking, reading, problem-solving and artwork, our brain forgets how to calm itself.)

Remember that our bodies are designed to fight, hide, or flee from danger, so panic is actually a survival mechanism. It enables our bodies to be ready for danger by speeding up our heart, pumping blood to our muscles, and shutting down our thinking brain. This way, when there is a real threat, we are strong and can "act on instinct." However, our bodies are **not** designed to be in a constant state of panic (rapid heart beat, breathless). Unfortunately, if we live in anxiety and panic, our cortex is actually shut down more of the time, making us less able to process everyday life. Fortunately, our brains are constantly adding networks and changing, so **as soon as we start to lower our stress load and decrease the length and frequency of panic episodes, our brain forms healthier networks and begins to heal.**