



Anxiety and panic attacks

There is much written about anxiety and panic attacks. Why? - Because they are an essential part of being human. Panic attacks and anxiety are abilities that have kept us safe for millions of years, allowed us to survive, evolve and succeed as a species. When the world was a dangerous place, without anxiety and panic attacks we would not have scanned the environment for danger and so may have died out as a species. And this is why.

What Panic Attacks are for...

Many thousands of years ago, a woman was walking through a gorge with rock walls that stretched up towards the sun, shrouding the gorge floor in shade. She was making her way to a spring near where she and her tribe lived. As she rounded a corner, she found herself face to face with a huge bear.

The animal, surprised by her attacked, swinging a massive paw. It knocked her off her feet, cutting her badly with its sharp claws and breaking three of her ribs. Despite her injuries she sprang to her feet feeling no pain and ran back the way she had come.

Over the following months, her body healed and she was able to contribute once again as a member of her tribe. She started on light work and was gathering twigs one day when she came to a stone cliff that stretched up above her, shading her from the sun. She suddenly began to feel very uneasy and looked around. There was nothing to be seen but still the feeling increased. She dropped her bundle, turned and ran back to the safety of her tribe.

'Man the hunted'

We have long referred to man as 'man the hunter'. In evolutionary terms, and with regard to anxiety and panic attacks, this is highly misleading. We did not survive in hostile environments by being over-confident, brash, loud animals. We survived by learning how to be quiet, timid and very, very careful.

In a world where most large animals were stronger, faster, more vicious and armed with teeth or claws, the best way for humans to survive was avoidance.

Panic attacks are good for you !

The highest level of anxiety, often called a panic attack, or the 'fight or flight' response, is a fantastic emergency mechanism which puts your body in the perfect state for tackling your aggressor or getting out of there fast.

All the adrenaline, the alterations in blood flow, the changes in the digestive system and so on, are designed to give you the best chance to stay alive.

Safety in the modern world

If you're thinking, 'Well what does this have to do with my life today?' then you're right. This heritage has left us with the ability to be scared, to scan our environment for danger and to panic. The important thing to realise is that this ability can be used habitually and inappropriately.