

Life... At the edge of a panic attack

Situation:

Wednesday morning we were out of milk. I told my wife that I would go to the store, and now I wasn't so sure I wanted to. I've suffered from panic attacks. Even though I'm on medication that takes care of the severe symptoms, I find that I still hesitate a lot about going away from the house.

Symptoms:

I knew I was having anticipatory anxiety. That was all explained to me before. When I thought about getting into the car, the picture of my worst panic attack came back into my mind. Instantly, like a flash, those old feelings were creeping in – the lightheadedness; I thought about how horrible it felt when my heart was racing out of control, and then I took my pulse to see if it was normal. The lightheadedness was getting worse, so I sat down. Then I got back up to see if my legs felt weak. That was another strong symptoms in the past. Then I sat down again because I was scared.

I started thinking about times in the past when I made a decision to do something and then backed out. Remembering those times didn't make me feel good about myself.

Solution:

I realized that I had the choice of two discomforts. I could go to the store and be uncomfortable. Or, I could stay at home and be uncomfortable because I was chickening out of something that I said I would do. I've spent hours beating myself up when I don't follow through.

With that stood up and walked around the house. I was testing to see if my muscles would in fact show my brain that there was no danger. I didn't feel 100% at first, but then it got better.

I changed my thoughts: Comfort is a want not a need. I can go shopping even if I feel discomfort. What I'm feeling is distressing, it's real. But it is not at all dangerous.

I was worried about the symptoms getting worse when I was away from home. I told myself that I didn't know if they'd be better or worse. Chances are they'd run their course if I didn't attached danger to them. No danger, no danger, no danger. I kept repeating it over and over.

It's hard for a man to admit that he's scared. But plenty of men have this illness. We sure didn't ask for it. I needed to face my fear – move my muscles and change my thoughts.



We need to do the things we fear and care not to do. It's the only way to get over the fear.

I realized too that I was spying on my body. That's a no-no. If I ever want to be strong enough to go to see my favorite cousin in Seattle, I've got to start with these small steps.

In the past:

Before if I was at home and started feeling bad, I'd stay home. No two ways about it. If I was out, I would instantly head for home. And I mean instantly. There have been many times we went out and we'd have to leave to come home. Once we drove to church and left before the service even started. We've left the movie theatre 20 minutes before the show ended because I couldn't take feeling the panicky feelings.

Now I'm taking charge of my life.

