

Life... Feeling panicky driving on a specific stretch of road

Situation:

Last Thursday my Dad had outpatient eye surgery. My mother's not doing well so they asked if I could come over in that evening, spend the night and take them back to the eye doctor's office late Friday morning.

There's a stretch of road I have to travel to get to their house, about 4 miles, where I've had trouble before because there aren't any places to pull off if I start feeling really panicky. The roads out there don't have shoulders since it's pretty rural. In fact there are only a few houses.

Symptoms:

Even though I was a bit anxious about going, I did OK until I started into that 4 mile stretch of pavement. I started sweating, I had the thought, "I can't breathe." I got so tense and stiff all over that my jaws were hurting, my neck starting hurting from keeping it so rigid and I felt my heart racing.

Solution:

I started repeating, "These symptoms are distressing, not dangerous," over and over again. I knew there was more I could do so I commanded my eyes to blink once or twice and I forced my head to move back and forth slightly. I also knew that since the car was moving, that I would soon be through this scary piece of the trip – it wasn't going to last forever. Once I got passed it and felt more calm I kind of laughed when I remembered thinking, "I can't breathe." If I truly couldn't breathe, I'd be unconscious, and if I wasn't conscious I wouldn't be thinking! I'll remember that secure thought for the next time.

In the past:

Before I think I would have at least tried to get to my parents house. But I know that if I had felt that panicky before I hit "the spot" I would have turned around and went home. Period.