

Supplemental Writing Practice

Panic Disorder

I. Introduction

- A. Definition
 - 1. type of anxiety disorder
 - 2. frequent, unexpected episodes of intense fear & anxiety (called panic attacks)
- B. Background information
 - 1. serious condition (affects ability to function at work & home)
 - 2. many—abuse alcohol / drugs: relieve anxiety
 - 3. 1 in 5 attempts suicide—can't cope w/ panic attacks
- C. Statistics
 - 1. 2–3 times more common—women
 - 2. attacks start in 20s (usually)
 - 3. attacks diminish in number & severity—as grows older
 - 4. sometimes in children—not diagnosed until older (often)
- D. Thesis statement

II. Possible causes, e.g.,

- A. Low levels of serotonin
 - 1. serotonin = brain chemical (helps control anxiety & mood)
 - 2. when levels low—may overreact to perceived threat (can → panic attack)
- B. Imbalance in exchange of carbon dioxide & oxygen
 - 1. due to improper breathing when stressed
 - 2. → excess carbon dioxide accumulates in blood
 - 3. excess carbon dioxide → feelings of suffocation (can trigger panic attack)
- C. Researchers believe
 - 1. stress can play role in development
 - 2. unhealthy thinking styles (overemphasize danger of certain events) can play role in development

III. Symptoms

- A. Main = frequent occurrence of panic attacks
 - 1. can strike at any time (even asleep)
 - 2. during attack (lasts 10–30 mins)
 - a. feelings of terror
 - b. believes
 - i. going insane /
 - ii. having heart attack /
 - iii. about to die
 - c. physical symptoms, e.g.,
 - i. pounding heart
 - ii. shortness of breath
 - iii. others (possible), e.g.,

- aa. chest pain
- bb. numbness / tingling in hands & feet
- cc. sweating → cold, clammy skin
- dd. facial paralysis
- ee. feels cannot breathe / is choking
- ff. starts to tremble
- gg. becomes dizzy & nauseous
- d. sometimes
 - i. believes attack is dream /
 - ii. believes someone else experiencing attack (= mental state called depersonalization)
- B. Main = constant fear of more panic attacks
 - 1. can → change lifestyle: avoid settings where can't escape easily / find medical help (called avoidance behavior)
 - 2. frequently → agoraphobia (= profound fear of public places—especially if crowded)
 - a. never leaves house (some cases), can prevent person from
 - i. holding job
 - ii. participating in healthy social life
 - iii. maintaining friendships
 - b. can → serious depression
- C. Diminish w/ proper treatment (fortunately)

IV. Treatment—combination of medications & psychotherapy

- A. Medications—2 types most helpful
 - 1. antidepressants
 - a. alter level of serotonin in brain
 - b. e.g., selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors
 - 2. anti-anxiety drugs, e.g., benzodiazepines
- B. Cognitive behavioral therapy (typically)—12 weeks, while taking medication
 - 1. change thinking patterns (trigger fears)
 - 2. replace distorted thoughts w/ new thoughts (more realistic)
 - 3. sometimes—re-create physical symptoms of panic attacks
 - a. in safe environment, e.g., therapist's office
 - b. example—may be asked to hold breath
 - i. helps become less afraid of feelings of suffocation
 - ii. helps gain control over feelings of suffocation
- C. If agoraphobia—desensitization therapy recommended
 - 1. 1st—learn relaxation techniques, e.g.,
 - a. slow breathing
 - b. meditation
 - 2. therapist shows pictures of situation (triggers panic), e.g., crowded mall
 - 3. discuss frightening situation in detail
 - a. help patient realize mall not dangerous in reality
 - b. use relaxation techniques if anxiety too intense
 - 4. next step = gradually approach mall

- a. 1st drive by
 - b. following week—stand at entrance & observe
 - c. w/in 1 month
 - i. should be able to enter mall
 - ii. use relaxation techniques whenever necessary: relieve anxiety
5. w/ repeated exposure—should begin to feel sense of control over frightening situation

V. Conclusion

- A. Restatement of thesis
 1. general class = anxiety disorder
 2. main characteristic = bouts of intense fear
 3. 3 aspects
- B. Main ideas
 1. causes (possible), e.g.,
 - a. chemical abnormality in brain
 - b. metabolic imbalance
 2. main symptoms
 - a. panic attacks
 - i. feels terrified
 - ii. breathing problems
 - b. constant fear of another attack
 3. treatment
 - a. medication
 - b. psychotherapy