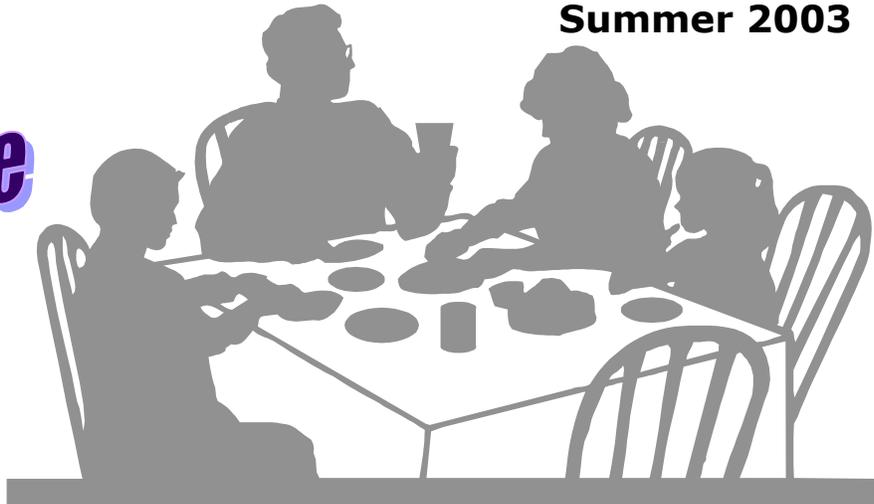


# THE NEW CALM COURIER

Summer 2003

## Family Time Anxiety

by Sandra J. Poole



On a recent news broadcast, the topic of family time anxiety came up and caught my attention. The feature focused on the quality and amount of time that parents and their children spend together. With all of the typical child's after-school and sports activities (e.g., soccer, football, gymnastics, dance), homework and social time with friends, it's a wonder that family members see each other at all.

Many parents have decided that the quality and amount of time spent as a family sharing meals each evening, church and group activities on Saturdays and Sundays, must take priority over children's sports and after-school activities. These parents may, however, experience some anxiety in having to decide what activities are allowed, the time commitments for them, and who gets to do what.

The family on the news broadcast has three children, and limits them to one extracurricular activity each. The children do not participate any more in extracurricular activities on the weekends so that church and family time can be enjoyed. It looked like these self-imposed restrictions were working well for them in the ten-second clip in which we viewed the family having dinner and talking amicably. Though it must have been a difficult transition for them to cut back on the children's activities, their family bonds were undoubtedly strengthened by it.

What I would like to do is invite our readers to share with us their way of dealing with anxiety over family time. How do you handle how many activities your children are involved in? How often do you share meals and conversations around the dinner table? With most sports competition game

times scheduled on the weekends, do you have time for synagogue or church? You can send your responses to us at: CDTA, 155 N Craig St, Suite 170, Pittsburgh PA 15213. Please address them to Attention: Calm Courier, or email them to [cdta@hotmail.com](mailto:cdta@hotmail.com). We look forward to hearing from you, and will publish a few of the responses in the next issue of the *New Calm Courier*.

Anxiety takes many forms and can affect us in so many ways. Learning to adjust to and handle anxious situations is one of the foci at Cognitive Dynamic Therapy, and we invite you check out our Anxiety Disorders Program at [www.cogdyn.com](http://www.cogdyn.com). You can access information about the services available, request brochures, and download publications on anxiety, family dinner, parenting issues, and many other topics.

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### Editor's Note

The Calm Courier is published four times a year. It is intended to inform and communicate with people who are interested in the anxiety disorders.

Subscriptions are \$10, and can be obtained from the Editor. The Mailing address is CDTA, Inc., 155 N. Craig Street, Pittsburgh, PA, 15213

Phone: 412-687-8700, or e-mail: [glanzlaw@yahoo.com](mailto:glanzlaw@yahoo.com) for information on subscriptions, or to discuss your questions about anxiety with the editor, Lawrence M. Glanz, Ph.D. The Calm Courier is a publication of CDTA, Inc.

# Are Panic Attacks Harmful?

by Lawrence M. Glanz, Ph.D.

When Franklin D. Roosevelt said, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself," he might have been speaking directly to people who have Panic Disorder. Of course he was addressing the American public, trying to calm them down, not patients who are very frightened of the sensations they are experiencing in their bodies.

Panic attacks can indeed be frightening. People describe them in a variety of ways, but most often they consist of sudden feelings of acute alarm, along with such sensations as shortness of breath, rapid heart rate, sweating, trembling, tingling or numbness, dizziness or lightheadedness, feelings of weakness, and a sense of imminent doom. Sometimes these sensations occur with little or no warning, and at any time of day or even at night. One person put it this way: "It is as though my whole body is going haywire, and I have absolutely no control over it." With such an experience is it any wonder that one might become very concerned about the consequences of having a panic attack.

When a person has had panic

attacks, they often do worry a great deal about them. Not only do they seem mysterious, but they leave many questions in a person's mind. Are they harmful? Do they lead to something worse? Does it mean I am coming unglued? Will I lose total control? Will I die from them? Will I make a laughing stock of myself? Often these questions are not answered adequately, and the person becomes quite frightened of having panic attacks.

**They are like a car alarm going off on a peaceful Sunday morning.**

Most psychologists have learned that in order to adequately treat people with panic disorder, it is essential for them to learn that panic attacks are really not harmful. Rather, they are a natural, if mistimed, response of the body. They are the body's normal response to threat, designed to protect, not to do any harm. It is a very primitive reaction, and if it were not so effective, our species



might not have survived.

One author put it this way: "Panic attacks are alarming, but not dangerous." They are like a car alarm going off on a peaceful Sunday morning. It is important to know that they are self-limiting. They really are not physically or mentally harmful. It is the fear of panic attacks that does the most damage, by leading to a decrease in confidence, an increase in hypervigilance, and often some degree of phobic avoidance of situations or activities associated with panic attacks.

Once people lose their fear of panic attacks, they no longer have the same hold on their lives. Much of the psychological treatment for Panic Disorder consists of eliminating this "fear of fear itself." When a person really understands that we are designed to have these reactions and equally that they are designed to be well tolerated, this fear of the fear response dissipates. In the words of one patient: "It feels as though I was released from jail." What a nice place to be!

## The Internet Guy: Pulling Out His Hair

I have just a brief recommendation for you this time. It has to do with hair pulling. I'm not referring to the kind of hair pulling you do because your kid just got busted at a party, which is something I have done myself. I mean the kind of hair pulling that goes along with anxiety. The correct term is Trichotillomania, but that's just a fancy doctor's word for habitual hair pulling. It is a problem that afflicts as many as 8 million people. It is related to obsessive compulsive disorder. It is a very bothersome and often embarrassing problem, and can lead to bare patches on the scalp and other places.

There are some good websites out there for those of you who have this problem, and I think you might want to check one of them out, especially if you are keeping this problem to yourself. You will find out just how common this problem is, and how other people like you deal with it. You can get the views of professionals who help people with Trichotillomania, and you can learn about medicines, and other ways to help yourself. Check out [www.StopPulling.com](http://www.StopPulling.com). It is one of many good websites on this topic, and I don't think you will be disappointed.



## Editorial: Advertising and Anxiety by Lawrence M. Glanz Ph.D.

It seems the advertisements are everywhere. The pharmaceutical industry has blanketed the media with them. "Ask your doctor if Blixifil is right for you." One can only imagine how much pressure doctors must feel to fill prescriptions for anxiety medication. It is not only doctors who feel the pressure, however, but patients as well.

People with anxiety often face this question: to take medication or not to take medication. On the one hand, they see the advertisements and they hear the testimonials. They wonder whether they too could feel the relief that might come from taking a pill. On the other hand, many of them are deeply suspicious and fearful of

medications. They worry about side effects, about long-term harm, about becoming addicted, and about being disappointed.

The advertisements make it all seem so simple, it is no wonder people feel uncertain. The old saying applies: if it seems too good to be true, it probably isn't true at all. As a result, many people who could benefit from taking medication do not, and some who should not take it do so. In addition, due to ignorance or fear, many people who are taking medication for anxiety fail to consult with their doctors in a timely way, and they sometimes change their own dosages or discontinue taking their medications without medical supervision. This is like serving as your own doctor, which is generally a foolish thing to do.

The truth about medications for anxiety is there is no one magic

pill. Some medications may be helpful for some people. Everyone is different, and each person must be treated as an individual. Medication may address the biological aspects of anxiety, but it cannot address personal or psychological aspects of anxiety. If you are suffering from anxiety it pays to find out all you can about your condition and its treatment. Keep an open mind on all the options. Anxiety is treatable, but it often requires some time and patience. If you take medications, it is generally still a wise thing to seek counseling or therapy, and it is always a good idea to stay in touch with your doctor regarding any and all questions you may have about your medication. As far as the advertisements are concerned: take them all with a very large grain of salt.

### Book Review: *Full Catastrophe Living* By Jon Cabot-Zinn Reviewed by Lawrence M. Glanz, Ph.D.



The title of this book refers to the complexity of life. As the author says, "Full catastrophe captures something positive about the human spirit's ability to come to grips with what is most difficult about life and to find within it room to grow in strength and wisdom." Just as Zorba the Greek would dance in the face of disaster, so we all must choose our response to the inevitable complexities of our lives.

Never has that complexity been more apparent than it is now. Who among us has not been touched by world events in recent times? I recently spoke

with one patient who summed it up by commenting, "I need another war like a hole in the head." On top of all our daily catastrophes, the uncertainties and controversies of war and its aftermath have added yet another layer of anxiety to all of our lives. The constant state of vigilance seems to have raised all of our individual inner stress thermostats to "code orange."

Cabot-Zinn describes his approach to such stress in his book. It is full of ancient wisdom, much of it drawn from the Eastern tradition of Buddhism, which seems so foreign to our Western minds. But his description makes much sense. In

discussing the program he developed for stress reduction at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center, he captures an important point: that we can choose our orientation to the world. We can face our problems, rather than trying to escape from them, and we can grow.

There is no big secret to achieving a more effective response to stress. It requires learning how to live fully in each moment, and to live mindfully in the present, rather than living on "automatic pilot."

(Continued on Page 4)

## Book Review: *Full Catastrophe Living*

(Continued from Page 3)

The theme of Cabot-Zinn's book is the importance of living a mindful life, in contrast to the way most of us usually live. Instead of living a life of "quiet desperation," we can shift our focus to the immediacy of life. With each breath we take, with each heartbeat, it is possible to nurture a state of acceptance, of wonderment. We can practice cultivating

a state of "being" rather than "doing." We can peacefully observe instead of automatically reacting to things. We can even observe our own negative thoughts, sensations, and personal pain, instead of fueling them with anxiety and anger.

The wisdom of Buddhism teaches the value of meditating in order to wake up to life. Most of us have little patience to just sit and pay at-

tention to our own breathing, but Cabot-Zinn's argument is most persuasive in teaching the importance of the awareness that such a practice can bring, and the changes that can take place in even the sickest of patients. His results have received a great deal of attention, and his book is well worth yours.

**Self-Help**

**Oakland Shadyside Friends Meeting House**  
4836 Ellsworth 2nd floor, Pittsburgh PA 15213  
412/578-2450

**Panic/Anxiety Support Group:**  
St. Rosalia Meeting Room, Greenfield Ave,  
Greenfield, PA Contact: Jim Madero 412/421-1874

**Upper St Clair, Our Redeemer Church**  
Rte 195 & Gateshead Dr, Washington PA  
15301 Contact: Kate 412/531-4748

**South Park Grace Lutheran Church**  
6810 Hilldale Dr , Pittsburgh PA 15236  
Contact: Bonnie 412/653-6132



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