Specific Purpose: To inform my audience about the nature, extent, and symptoms of panic attacks.

Central Idea: Panic attacks are serious medical conditions whose fearful symptoms affect millions of people.

Introduction

I. I can’t breathe, my arms are tingling, I’m really dizzy, and it feels as if my heart is about to fly out of my chest.
II. When this happened to me three years ago at an outdoor concert, I was really frightened.
   A. At the time, I had no idea what was going on.
   B. My doctor told me later that I had experienced a panic attack.
III. I have learned a lot about my condition during the past three years, and I did additional research for this speech.
IV. Today I would like to inform you about the nature of panic attacks, the people affected most often by them, and the options for treatment.

(Transition: Let’s start with the nature of panic attacks.)

Body

I. Panic attacks are a severe medical condition with a number of physical and mental symptoms.
   A. As defined by the National Institute of Mental Health, panic attacks involve “unexpected and repeated episodes of intense fear accompanied by physical symptoms.”
      1. The attacks usually come out of nowhere and strike when least expected.
      2. Their length can vary from a few minutes to several hours.
   B. There are a number of symptoms common to most panic attacks.
      1. Physical symptoms include a pounding heart, shortness of breath, lightheadedness, and numbness or tingling sensations in the arms and legs.
      2. Mental symptoms include acute fear, a sense of disaster or helplessness, and a feeling of being detached from one’s own body.

(Transition: Now that you know something about the nature of panic attacks, let’s look at how widespread they are.)

II. Panic attacks affect millions of people.
   A. According to the American Psychiatric Association, six million Americans suffer from panic attacks.
B. Some groups have a higher incidence of panic attacks than do other groups.
1. The National Institute of Mental Health reports that panic attacks strike women twice as often as men.
2. Half the people who suffer from panic attacks develop symptoms before the age of 24.

(Transition: Given the severity of panic attacks, I’m sure you are wondering how they can be treated.)

III. There are two major options for treating panic attacks.
A. One option is medication.
1. Antidepressants are the most frequently prescribed medication for panic attacks.
2. They rearrange the brain’s chemical levels so as to get rid of unwanted fear responses.
B. Another option is cognitive-behavioral therapy.
1. This therapy involves techniques that help people with panic attacks gain control of their symptoms and feelings.
   a. Some techniques involve breathing exercises.
   b. Other techniques target thought patterns that can trigger panic attacks.
2. According to David Barlow, author of the Clinical Handbook of Psychological Disorders, cognitive-behavioral therapy can be highly effective.

Conclusion

I. As we have seen, panic attacks affect millions of people.
II. Fortunately, there are treatment options to help prevent panic attacks and to help deal with them when they occur.
III. In my case, the combination of medication and cognitive-behavioral therapy has been extremely helpful.
IV. I don’t know if I will ever be completely free of panic attacks, but at least I understand now what they are and what I can do about them.
Bibliography


