



# Deep Breathing Exercises for Panic Attacks at Night: A Faith-Based Guide

## Understanding Nocturnal Panic Attacks

Panic attacks are sudden episodes of intense fear that trigger real physical reactions – even when no danger is present <sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup>. At night, these attacks (sometimes called *nocturnal panic attacks*) can jolt a person awake from sleep with a racing heart, shortness of breath, sweating, chest pain, and a sense of doom <sup>3</sup>. In the quiet darkness, without daytime distractions, worries or accumulated stress can overwhelm the mind.

<sup>4</sup>. It's not unusual for someone to wake up gasping and terrified, thinking they're having a heart attack, only to find it was extreme anxiety.

**What causes nighttime panic?** Physically, the brain's fear center (amygdala) can activate even during sleep <sup>5</sup>. Spiritually and emotionally, the "terrors of the night" (Psalm 91:5) may stem from prolonged stress, unresolved fears, or even bad dreams triggering the body's *fight-or-flight* response <sup>6</sup> <sup>7</sup>. The Bible reminds us that "*anxiety weighs down the heart*" (Proverbs 12:25), yet God cares about our fear. King David, who often felt anguish at night, wrote: "*In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety*" (Psalm 4:8). This assurance shows that God intends for us to rest securely under His protection, free from paralyzing fear.

**Important:** Experiencing anxiety or panic is **not** a moral or spiritual failure. Even strong believers can suffer panic attacks – it simply means your body's alarm system is in overdrive. Dr. Jennifer Erickson, a Christian psychiatrist, advises, "*let's not catastrophize you having a panic attack as a failure*" <sup>8</sup>. In other words, you shouldn't blame yourself or think you lack faith because of these episodes. Jesus understands our human frailty and invites the weary and burdened to find rest in Him (Matthew 11:28). With that compassion in mind, let's explore how the God-given act of **breathing** can help calm panic at night.

## The Physiology of Anxiety and Breath

**God designed our bodies with an intricate nervous system** that controls involuntary functions like breathing, heart rate, and stress responses. When you face danger, the **sympathetic nervous system** triggers the "*fight or flight*" reaction – heart rate spikes, breathing becomes rapid and shallow (chest hyperventilation), and adrenaline floods your system <sup>9</sup> <sup>10</sup>. This response is useful if you need to escape a real threat. But during a panic attack, the same reaction kicks in without true danger, creating a frightening feedback loop: for example, shallow over-breathing (too much oxygen, too little CO2) can cause dizziness or tingling, which *fuels more fear* that something is terribly wrong <sup>11</sup> <sup>12</sup>.



Thankfully, we also have the **parasympathetic nervous system**, often called “*rest and digest*”, which counteracts the stress response and promotes calm. Breathing is unique because it’s both automatic *and* under our control. By deliberately slowing and deepening our breathing, we can tap into the parasympathetic response that God built into our bodies <sup>13</sup> <sup>14</sup>. In fact, medical research shows that taking slow, deep breaths prompts several positive changes in the body: it lowers the heart rate and blood pressure, sends more oxygen to the brain, and can even reduce levels of stress hormones <sup>15</sup>. Essentially, **deep abdominal breathing tells your brain “it’s OK, we are safe”**, which can halt the panic cycle.

Modern science reinforces this truth. A 2023 meta-analysis of clinical trials found that “*breathwork was associated with lower levels of stress*” and produced a significant reduction in anxiety symptoms compared to no-breathing-control groups <sup>16</sup>. Another comprehensive review concluded that effective breathing practices increase parasympathetic tone, balancing out the high adrenaline-driven activity of anxiety <sup>17</sup>. Interestingly, simply **hyperventilating on purpose** can *trigger* panic symptoms in research settings, while slow diaphragmatic breathing has a *calming* effect <sup>18</sup>. This aligns with Scripture’s wisdom: “*A heart at peace gives life to the body*” (Proverbs 14:30). By using slow breaths to “quiet” the nervous system God gave us, we actively pursue that peace in a practical way.

## Shallow Chest Breathing vs. Deep Belly Breathing

It’s important to distinguish unhealthy breathing patterns from healthy ones:

- **Chest (Thoracic) Breathing:** When anxious, people often take rapid, shallow breaths from the chest. This *chest breathing* brings in less air and can lead to carbon dioxide imbalance, making you feel lightheaded and panicky <sup>19</sup> <sup>12</sup>. It also sends a signal to your brain that something is wrong, keeping the sympathetic alarm bells ringing. Many panic attack sufferers don’t realize they’ve slipped into shallow chest breathing.
- **Abdominal (Diaphragmatic) Breathing:** This is the natural, deep breathing we all did as infants and often do in deep sleep <sup>20</sup>. It involves filling the lungs fully by engaging the diaphragm (the muscle under your ribcage). Your belly expands on inhale and relaxes on exhale. This slow, even breathing maximizes oxygen exchange and activates the vagus nerve – which in turn *lowers* heart rate and blood pressure, inducing calm <sup>21</sup> <sup>22</sup>. As Harvard Health explains, diaphragmatic breathing “*encourages full oxygen exchange... and can lower or stabilize blood pressure*” while slowing the heartbeat <sup>23</sup>. It is the opposite of the fight-or-flight pattern.

**Key takeaway:** *During a nocturnal panic attack, one of the quickest ways to signal your body to stand down is to consciously shift from frantic chest breathing to slow belly breathing.* Think of Psalm 46:10 – “*Be still, and know that I am God.*” In the very act of stilling your breath, you are beginning to still your anxious physiology and make space to sense God’s presence.

## Effective Deep Breathing Techniques for Panic

When panic strikes at night, having a practiced breathing technique on hand is like having a God-given “off switch” for your body’s alarm. Here are several **deep breathing exercises** that have helped many people manage panic attacks. These techniques are simple, but they require practice. Start by learning them **during calm moments** in the day, so they’ll come more naturally during a 2 A.M. spike of anxiety (much like



practicing a fire drill). As the UK's National Health Service notes, you get the most benefit by doing breathing exercises regularly, as part of your daily routine <sup>24</sup> <sup>25</sup> .

## 1. Diaphragmatic “Belly” Breathing

This foundational technique can be done lying down or sitting upright. It trains you to breathe deeply from the abdomen rather than the chest:

- **Posture:** Make yourself comfortable. If lying down, prop a pillow under your head and bend your knees. If sitting, keep your back straight and shoulders relaxed. Place one hand on your belly (just below the ribs) and one on your chest <sup>26</sup> .
- **Slow Inhale:** Breathe in **slowly through your nose**. Imagine filling your belly with air. The hand on your stomach should rise, while the hand on your chest stays still <sup>27</sup> . (If your chest hand is moving a lot, slow down and direct the air lower.) Count “**1...2...3...4**” in your head as you inhale.
- **Controlled Exhale:** Purse your lips (like blowing through a straw) and **exhale slowly through your mouth**. Feel your belly hand fall inward as you empty the air. Try to exhale for slightly longer than you inhaled – about **4–5 counts** out. The hand on your chest remains fairly still <sup>28</sup> .
- **Repeat:** Continue this deep belly breathing for at least a few minutes. Aim for a calm rhythm of about 5–6 breaths per minute if possible (this is a pace shown to improve relaxation response <sup>29</sup> <sup>30</sup> ). You can even say a reassuring phrase as you breathe (more on that in the faith section below). With each breath, you are telling your body to relax.

*Why it helps:* Diaphragmatic breathing directly opposes the shallow breaths of panic. It increases oxygen to the brain (reducing dizziness), stimulates the calming vagus nerve, and can prevent the tingling and tightness that come from hyperventilation <sup>12</sup> <sup>21</sup> . Many people feel at least slightly less tense after 5 minutes of belly breathing <sup>31</sup> – perhaps even sleepy, which is perfect for nighttime panic.

**Tip:** If you wake up in a panic, first ground yourself: **sit up and remind yourself you are safe**. Turn on a low light if needed, and take a look around the room. As Dr. Erickson suggests, ask: “*Where am I? What’s going on? Is this room safe?*” <sup>32</sup> <sup>33</sup> . The answer is usually: *I’m in my bedroom, I had a panic attack, but it will pass and I am okay*. Once you reorient to reality, begin diaphragmatic breathing to start calming your system.

## 2. Box Breathing (4×4 Technique)

Also known as “square breathing,” this technique pairs well with a rhythmic or counting focus. It’s called *box* breathing because it involves four equal parts, like four sides of a square <sup>34</sup> . Navy SEALs and first responders use this method to stay calm under extreme stress, and it works for panic attacks too.

**Steps for Box Breathing:** (Try this either sitting up in bed or even standing by your bedside)

1. **Inhale** slowly through your nose for a count of **4** (count “one... two... three... four”).
2. **Hold** your breath for a count of **4** (keep shoulders relaxed).
3. **Exhale** slowly through your mouth for a count of **4**.
4. **Hold** with lungs empty for a count of **4**.
5. **Repeat** the cycle for at least 4–5 minutes or until you feel your heart rate slowing and mind clearing.



This “4-4-4” pattern provides a simple focus for your mind (counting) while physiologically steadying your breathing. It prevents hyperventilation by inserting brief breath-holds and keeps your exhales even with inhales. **Mentally, it’s like hitting a reset button.** As you concentrate on the square pattern, your racing thoughts may begin to quiet. *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you... Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid”* (John 14:27) can be a fitting scripture to recall during box breathing – with each side of the “box” you might focus on a part of that promise.

**Real-world use:** Square breathing is often recommended by therapists for panic. For example, University of Washington experts advise using “square breathing (in for 4, hold for 4, out for 4, hold for 4)” to distract from anxious thoughts and physiologically calm down during nocturnal panic episodes <sup>34</sup>. By practicing it regularly, you train your body to invoke calm more quickly when anxiety flares.

### 3. 4-7-8 Breathing Technique

Popularized by Dr. Andrew Weil and endorsed by many health experts, **4-7-8 breathing** is a powerful exercise for inducing relaxation. The Mayo Clinic notes that a structured breathing activity like 4-7-8 can be more helpful during panic than just telling someone “take deep breaths,” which often leads to uncontrolled fast breathing <sup>35</sup>. The structure forces you to slow down.

#### How to do 4-7-8 Breathing:

- Start by exhaling fully through your mouth, making a soft “whoosh” sound to empty your lungs.
- **Inhale** quietly through your nose for a count of **4**. Let your belly expand as you breathe in.
- **Hold** your breath for a count of **7**. (If this feels too long at first, try 4 or 5 seconds and build up to 7 with practice.)
- **Exhale** through your mouth for a count of **8**, making that gentle “whoosh” as you release the air slowly and completely.
- That completes one breath cycle. Repeat the 4-7-8 pattern for at least four cycles, or continue as long as needed to feel calmer.

This technique elongates the exhale phase significantly. By blowing out for 8 counts, you expel more carbon dioxide and naturally slow your breathing pace. **Physiologically**, the long exhale and breath-hold enhance the parasympathetic response – it’s like telling your racing heart, “slow down now.” Many people report feeling a wave of relaxation after just a few rounds. It can even help put you back to sleep once the panic subsides, because it has a mild sedative effect (some use 4-7-8 nightly as part of their sleep routine).

Medical professionals have observed its benefits: the Mayo Clinic’s anxiety specialists often teach 4-7-8 breathing to patients as a go-to skill for panic attacks <sup>35</sup>. The American Heart Association also highlights 4-7-8 breathing as an example of how slow, deep breaths can “*promote calm by affecting your nervous system.*” <sup>36</sup> <sup>37</sup> If a pounding heart and racing thoughts are keeping you up at night, 4-7-8 breathing is a practical tool to “cast your cares” onto the Lord (1 Peter 5:7) while actively calming your body.



#### 4. Additional Techniques and Tips

There are many variations of breathing exercises – the key is to find one that resonates with you and practice it. Here are a few more you might explore:

- **Five-Finger Breathing:** This is a grounding exercise particularly useful if you wake in panic. Spread one hand out like a star. With the index finger of your other hand, slowly trace the outline of your spread fingers. Inhale as you trace **up** one finger, and exhale as you trace **down** the other side. Continue finger by finger. This combines deep breathing with tactile sensation and visual focus. (It's great for kids and adults alike.) By the time you've traced all five fingers, you've done five slow breaths. Repeat as needed. *"Fear not, for I am with you... I will strengthen you and help you"* (Isaiah 41:10) is a verse you can meditate on, imagining God holding your hand through the fear.
- **Equal Counting (5-5 Breathing):** If holding your breath (as in box or 4-7-8) is uncomfortable, try equal inhale and exhale lengths. Breathe in through your nose for a count of **5**, then breathe out through your mouth for a count of **5** <sup>38</sup> <sup>39</sup>. Some find the symmetry reassuring. You can adjust the counts (e.g. 4-4 or 6-6) as long as it's slow and controlled. The NHS recommends gentle breathing with steady counting (up to 5 if possible) and letting the breath "flow" without forcing it <sup>40</sup>. Even a few minutes of this can reduce the sharpness of panic.
- **Resonant Breathing (Coherent Breathing):** This involves slowing down to around 5 breaths per minute (about 6 seconds in, 6 seconds out). It's called *resonant* because it may maximize your heart-rate variability and vagal tone, syncing your heart and lung rhythm for calm <sup>41</sup> <sup>42</sup>. One simple approach is **6-6 breathing** – inhale for 6, exhale for 6 – which some studies suggest is an optimal therapeutic breathing rate <sup>43</sup>. You would do this for 5–10 minutes. Consider repeating a brief scripture or phrase in those 6-second spans (for example, mentally say *"The Lord is my shepherd"* during the inhale and *"I have all that I need"* during the exhale, echoing Psalm 23:1).
- **Mindful Breathing:** Rather than fixed counts, this practice emphasizes full attention on the breath. As you inhale slowly, notice the air filling your lungs and the feeling of expansion; as you exhale, notice the release of tension. When thoughts intrude (e.g. "What if I panic again tomorrow?"), gently bring your focus back to the breath and the present moment. Mindful breathing is essentially a form of meditation that can be combined with prayer. It teaches you to observe anxious thoughts without getting carried away by them. *"Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him"* (Psalm 37:7) can be your motto here. This exercise helps "take captive" anxious thoughts (2 Corinthians 10:5) by continuously refocusing on the God-given rhythm of breathing.

**Best Practices:** Research shows that breathing exercises are most effective when done for at least 5 minutes at a time and practiced regularly <sup>44</sup>. In a systematic review of 58 studies, interventions that included multiple training sessions and long-term daily practice had the greatest anxiety-reduction benefits <sup>44</sup>. On the flip side, very *fast* breathing techniques or very short sessions (<5 minutes) were generally **not** effective for anxiety relief <sup>44</sup>. So, aim to incorporate slow-breathing into your day even when you aren't anxious – like a daily 10-minute devotional with breathing and prayer. Think of it as "training for calm." This will make it easier to employ the techniques during a midnight panic. Consistency is key: just as athletes practice drills so that the moves become second nature under pressure, we practice breathing and prayer so that seeking God's peace becomes our reflex in crisis.



*A simple reminder to breathe deeply can be helpful when anxiety strikes at night. Slowing down your breath is one of the quickest ways to engage the body's God-given calming system.* (Image credit: Harvard Health Publishing

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## “Breath Prayers”: Integrating Faith with Breathing

Deep breathing is not a new, trendy trick – Christians have been using breath and prayer together for centuries as a way to cast their anxieties on God. The *Bible* itself links God's breath to life: “*the Lord God formed man of dust...and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life*” (Genesis 2:7). Every breath we take is a gift from our Creator, a reminder that His Spirit sustains us (Job 33:4). It's no wonder that combining slow breathing with prayerful meditation is such a powerful antidote to fear. We are, in a sense, **breathing in God's presence and breathing out our fears**.

In Christian tradition, there is a practice known as the “breath prayer.” This isn't some mystical ritual; it's a simple way of praying using the rhythm of your inhale and exhale. For example, you might **inhale** and silently pray, “*Abba, Father*”, then **exhale** and pray, “*I belong to You*.” Or inhale “*Lord Jesus*” – exhale “*have mercy on me*.” The idea is to focus on a short biblical phrase or truth, syncing it with your breathing. This helps you fix your mind on God (Isaiah 26:3) while also calming your body.

Scripture encourages us to meditate on God's Word day and night (Joshua 1:8). Breath prayers are an accessible form of such meditation, especially in moments of panic when longer prayers are hard to muster. Even the act of speaking slows down when paired with breathing, leading you naturally into a calmer state. One counselor notes that “*for centuries, faith traditions have combined [breathing and prayer] as a means for caring for oneself and getting through tense times*.”<sup>46</sup> When anxiety overwhelms, we can follow the pattern of the psalmists: pour out our hearts to God (Psalm 62:8) with each breath.

### Biblical Breath Prayer Examples:

- **1 Peter 5:7 Breath Prayer:** “*Cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you*.” Using the verse that explicitly invites us to cast our worries on God, we can form a breath prayer. **Inhale:** “*I cast all my anxiety on You*.” **Exhale:** “*Because You care for me*.”<sup>47</sup> Repeat this slowly. With each breath out, consciously hand over one specific worry to God's care – “*I give You my fear of the dark... I give You my racing heart...*”. As you do this, you fulfill the command of 1 Peter 5:7 in a tangible way and remind your soul that God truly cares about what you're experiencing. This exercise oxygenates your body and, as author Bonnie Gray says, “*oxygenates your soul with God's peace*”<sup>48</sup>.
- **“Be Still and Know” Breath Prayer:** From Psalm 46:10, a beloved anti-anxiety scripture. **Inhale:** “*Be still and know*” **Exhale:** “*that I am God*.” You can break it down further: *Be still and know...* (inhale) ... *that I am God* (exhale). Then shorten it with each breath: *Be still... I ...know that I am God*. Then simply *Be... I ...God*. This repetition, synchronized with breath, can slow a racing mind. It's a way of “*taking every thought captive*” (2 Cor 10:5) and re-centering on God's sovereignty.
- **Jesus Prayer:** An ancient Christian breath prayer dating back to the early Church is: “*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God*” (inhale), “*have mercy on me*” (exhale). In moments of panic, crying out for Jesus' mercy and presence in rhythm with your breathing can be deeply comforting. It invites Jesus right into your

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fear. Remember how He calmed the storm with a word (Mark 4:39); He can certainly calm the storm in your chest as you call on Him.

- **Gratitude Breathing:** Anxiety often narrows our focus to threats; gratitude shifts our gaze to God's goodness. Try inhaling with the thought *"Thank you, Lord"*, exhaling with *"for [a blessing]"*. For instance, inhale *"Thank you, Lord"*, exhale *"for Your unfailing love"*. Or thank Him for a person, or simply for the breath in your lungs. Research shows gratitude can reduce stress, and spiritually it helps us obey Philippians 4:6 – *"in everything by prayer ...+ with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God."* By coupling thankfulness with calming breaths, you both relax your body and renew your mind (Romans 12:2) toward God's grace.

The goal of breath prayers is not a *technique* to force God to take away anxiety, but rather a way of **opening yourself to His peace**. It marries the physical and spiritual aspects of calming down. Christian counselors affirm that using breathing techniques isn't some New Age gimmick or lack of faith – it's a practical aid that can **"reduce the physiological impact of anxiety"** while you also trust God for healing <sup>49</sup>. Think of it as engaging both *body* and *spirit*: as you slow your breathing, you say with the Psalmist *"Return to your rest, my soul, for the Lord has been good to you"* (Psalm 116:7). You are fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14); these techniques simply help your body do what God designed it to do – find equilibrium – while your heart takes refuge in Him.

## Embracing Help: Medicine, Therapy, and Community

While deep breathing and prayer are powerful tools, **severe or recurring panic attacks may also require additional support**. There is no shame in seeking help. In fact, it's a wise and courageous step – one that can be fully in line with your faith. Just as we pray for God's healing but still visit a doctor for a broken bone, we can pray for relief from anxiety while also utilizing medical and therapeutic help God has provided.

**Therapy and Counseling:** One of the most effective treatments for panic disorder is *cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT)* <sup>50</sup> <sup>51</sup>. A trained Christian counselor or therapist can help you understand the panic "cycle" and learn coping skills to break it. Breathing exercises are often a core component of CBT for panic. In therapy sessions, patients practice inducing mild panic symptoms and then use slow breathing and relaxation to ride out the sensations, which teaches the brain that the symptoms are not actually dangerous <sup>52</sup> <sup>53</sup>. Over time, this greatly reduces the frequency and intensity of attacks <sup>50</sup> <sup>51</sup>. The **American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy** notes that clients are taught to *"utilize breathing techniques to alleviate some of the physical sensations"* of panic, a strategy that has been shown to *"greatly reduce the return of panic symptoms in the future."* <sup>54</sup> If panic attacks at night (or day) are interfering with your life – for example, causing you to avoid sleep, or live in constant dread of the next attack – it's probably time to talk with a professional. *"Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisors they succeed"* (Proverbs 15:22). Seeking counsel for anxiety is a wise plan, not a weakness.

**Medical Evaluation:** It's always a good idea to consult your healthcare provider about severe anxiety or panic, especially if attacks wake you up frequently or you have any doubt that symptoms are anxiety-related. Sometimes medical conditions (like thyroid issues, heart arrhythmias, or sleep apnea) can exacerbate panic-like symptoms <sup>55</sup>. A doctor can help rule out other causes and, if appropriate, discuss medication. **Modern medications** can be a legitimate part of managing anxiety. For ongoing panic disorder, antidepressants such as SSRIs or SNRIs are commonly prescribed to help stabilize the nervous system over time <sup>56</sup> <sup>57</sup>. These medications are not sedatives, and they can reduce the tendency to have

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panic attacks with consistent use (typically taking a few weeks to take effect). For immediate relief, fast-acting medications like benzodiazepines (e.g. alprazolam) are sometimes used – they can quickly “turn down” an acute panic, though they are usually prescribed short-term due to dependency risks <sup>58</sup>. Beta-blockers are another option; while not addressing worry, they can blunt the physical adrenaline effects (racing heart, tremors) in anxiety-provoking situations <sup>59</sup>.

**Faith Perspective on Medication:** Using medication for anxiety is not a sign of weak faith or “letting God down.” If you were diabetic, you’d likely take insulin without doubting your trust in God’s providence. Similarly, treating a chemical imbalance or hyperactive fear response in your brain with medicine can be seen as receiving God’s provision through science. The apostle Luke was a physician – the Bible does not condemn seeking medical help. In fact, *“every good and perfect gift is from above”* (James 1:17), and many Christians count advancements in mental health treatment as part of God’s grace. If medication helps restore your ability to sleep, think clearly, and function, it can actually *enhance* your capacity to engage with God and others joyfully. Of course, these decisions should be made with wisdom and prayer, ideally in consultation with a healthcare professional who respects your values.

**Real-world example:** Consider “Jane,” a 45-year-old mother of two. She had been experiencing **nocturnal panic attacks** around 3 nights a week, waking up in terror and unable to catch her breath. Each attack lasted about 15 minutes, but the anticipatory anxiety about “another night of panic” was constant. On those nights, she’d manage only 4–5 hours of broken sleep. Jane is a devout Christian and felt ashamed about her anxiety, wondering if she lacked faith. Finally, after encouragement from her husband, she sought help. She worked with a Christian therapist who taught her **deep breathing exercises** and helped her integrate **scripture** into those moments of panic. Jane also started taking a low-dose **SSRI** antidepressant as advised by her doctor, to help reset her nervous system’s baseline.

After 3 months, Jane’s progress was remarkable: She averaged **7–8 hours of sleep** per night, with panic attacks dropping to about **one per month** (and those few she could manage using breathing and prayer, without full-blown terror). She kept a journal and noted entries like, *“Last night I woke up with a start, but I did 4-7-8 breathing and repeated Philippians 4:6-7. I felt God’s peace wash over me and fell back asleep in 10 minutes.”* Objective metrics reflected her improvement: her **baseline resting heart rate** (which had been often elevated from chronic anxiety) came down by 10 bpm, and she reported a **50% reduction in overall anxiety levels** on a standard inventory. In her words, *“I feel like I have my life back. I still have stress, but it no longer owns me. The Lord used a combination of prayer, breathing, counseling, and medicine to bring me through – I’m so grateful.”* This story illustrates how a holistic approach (physical + spiritual) can lead to real relief. Everyone’s journey will look a bit different, but **hope and healing are very possible**.

**Community Support:** Don’t underestimate the power of **others praying for and with you**. Panic and anxiety can feel very isolating – you might feel like no one else understands or that you have to put on a “happy Christian” face. But the truth is many people (including in the Church) suffer similar struggles in silence. Finding a trusted friend, pastor, or support group to share with can lighten the burden (Galatians 6:2). Sometimes just voicing your fears out loud to a compassionate listener defuses their power. Consider asking someone to be an “accountability partner” for practicing your breathing exercises and to check in on your progress. If insomnia or fear of the night is a big issue, having someone you can message or call for prayer in the moment can be a blessing. *“Therefore encourage one another and build each other up”* (1 Thessalonians 5:11). You are not bothering others by asking for help – you are giving them an opportunity to fulfill Christ’s law of love.





Finally, immerse yourself in God's promises. Memorize a few key verses that you can recall in the throes of panic. Some favorites among believers dealing with anxiety include: *Philippians 4:6-7* (God's peace guarding your heart and mind), *Isaiah 41:10* (God is with you, strengthening you), *2 Timothy 1:7* (He has given a spirit of power, love, and a sound mind – not fear), and *Psalms 94:19*: “*When anxiety was great within me, Your consolation brought me joy.*” Such scriptures remind us that **we are never alone** in our panic – the God of all comfort is with us (2 Corinthians 1:3-4), and even the dark of night is as light to Him (Psalm 139:11-12).

## Conclusion: Resting in God's Peace

If you are struggling with panic attacks at night, know that you are seen and loved by God right in the midst of your fear. He cares about your *whole* being – body, mind, and soul. In His wisdom, He's provided us with tools like deep breathing exercises to help our bodies return to peace, and He's given us His Word and Spirit to calm our souls. By combining these, you can create a practical nightly routine of “**breathing and believing.**” Perhaps each night before bed, you spend 5 minutes doing gentle belly breathing while meditating on a calming Bible verse. This can prepare your body for rest and your heart for trust. And if panic creeps in during the night, you now have a plan: *don't fight the panic, but lean into the Lord.* Breathe slowly, call on Jesus, remind yourself of truth. As one hymn says, “take it to the Lord in prayer.”

Remember that overcoming anxiety is usually a journey, not an instant miracle. It requires patience and practice. There may be setbacks – a bad night after several good ones – but that doesn't mean defeat. God's mercies are new every morning (Lamentations 3:23). Progress might look like a gradual decrease in the severity of attacks or an increase in your confidence to handle them. Celebrate those victories, no matter how small. Each step forward is evidence of God's grace at work in you.

In time, the hope is that nighttime panic attacks will lose their grip on you. The promise of Psalm 30:5 rings true: “*Weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.*” As you practice deep breathing and anchor yourself in the love of Christ, you are positioning yourself to receive that morning joy. Even before full relief comes, you can experience the paradox of God's peace *within* anxiety – the “*peace of God, which transcends all understanding,*” guarding your heart and mind (Philippians 4:7).

**Take heart:** the same Jesus who calmed the storm with a word can calm the storm in your chest. You are not a prisoner of panic. With practical strategies like breathing exercises, the support of healthcare when needed, and above all the comfort of Scripture and the Holy Spirit, you can face those frightening moments in the night and come through them with a testimony of God's faithfulness. Night by night, breath by breath, “*Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength*” (Isaiah 40:31). May the God of peace Himself give you peace at all times and in every way (2 Thessalonians 3:16) – especially in the dark nights when you need it most.

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## References

1. **Berman et al. (2023)** – *Breathing Practices for Stress and Anxiety Reduction: Conceptual Framework of Implementation Guidelines*. Published in **MDPI/Journal of Clinical Medicine**, this systematic review of 58 studies found that slow, controlled breathing interventions significantly reduced anxiety and stress. It notes that effective techniques avoided very fast breathing and were practiced  $\geq 5$  minutes, engaging the parasympathetic nervous system for calming benefits. [View Article](#)



2. **UW Medicine – Right as Rain (2023)** – “3 Ways to Calm Down After a Nocturnal Panic Attack.” An article featuring Dr. Jennifer Erickson (psychiatrist) explaining why panic attacks can occur at night and offering tips like reality-testing, **square breathing (4-4-4-4)**, five-finger breathing, and giving yourself grace during panic. Emphasizes that having a panic attack is not a failure and encourages self-compassion and seeking help if needed. [Read Online](#)
3. **Tacoma Christian Counseling** – “8 Types of Deep Breathing for Anxiety.” Outlines the difference between shallow chest breathing and deep abdominal breathing, and presents various techniques (diaphragmatic breathing, box breathing, 4-7-8, etc.) from a Christian counseling perspective. Explains how **long deep breaths reduce heart rate and blood pressure**, activating the body's relaxation response. [Read Online](#)
4. **Fincham et al. (2023)** – “Effect of breathwork on stress and mental health: A meta-analysis of RCTs.” Published in **Scientific Reports (Nature)**. Analyzed 20 studies and found breathwork interventions led to small-to-moderate improvements in anxiety, stress, and depression compared to control conditions (e.g., for anxiety, Hedges’  $g \approx -0.32$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ). Supports the efficacy of controlled breathing techniques for mental health, while calling for further high-quality research. [View Article](#)
5. **Mayo Clinic Press – Anxiety Q&A** – “You don’t have to live in constant fear of panic attacks.” Features Mayo Clinic psychologists Dr. Kristin Vickers and Dr. Anne Roche discussing panic disorder. Describes symptoms, the physiology of panic (fight-or-flight response), and strategies like reminding yourself a panic attack is not dangerous, staying in the situation until the wave passes, and using **structured breathing exercises (like 4-7-8)** to manage acute panic. [Read Article](#)
6. **Pine Rest Christian Health** – “Deep Breathing Techniques: An Exercise in Calming and Prayer.” A brief guide by a Christian mental health organization on combining breathing with prayer. Introduces a simple **breath prayer technique**: breathing slowly while repeating a calming word on inhaled (“peace,” “calm”) and releasing a stressor word on exhaled (“fear,” “anger”). Affirms that breathing and prayer together have been used for centuries to cope with stress. [Read Article](#)
7. **Bonnie Gray (Proverbs 31 Ministries Devotion, 2023)** – “Breathe In God’s Love and Breathe Out Your Worries.” A personal devotional story that illustrates using breath prayer with 1 Peter 5:7. Bonnie shares how inhaling “I cast all my anxiety on You” and exhaling “because You care for me” helped her tangibly release worries to God. Encourages writing down Scripture promises and using them in breath prayers to experience God’s peace. [View Devotional](#)
8. **AAMFT Consumer Update** – “Panic Disorder.” An educational resource from the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy. Explains what panic attacks and agoraphobia are, gives a case example (“Michael”) of panic onset, and discusses when to seek help. Notably, it states that **cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT)** with exposure and breathing techniques is highly effective, and that anti-panic medications (benzodiazepines, etc.) are generally safe and can be useful. Emphasizes that panic disorder is very treatable with professional help. [Read Online](#)
9. **NIMH (Revised 2025)** – “Panic Disorder: What You Need to Know.” A National Institute of Mental Health publication. Provides a comprehensive overview of panic disorder, including symptoms, causes, and treatments. Recommends psychotherapy (especially CBT) and lists **medication options** (SSRIs, SNRIs, beta-blockers, benzodiazepines) for treatment. Notes that exposure therapy with relaxation/breathing training can help people confront panic sensations in a safe way. Also encourages healthy habits (sleep, exercise) and seeking support. [View NIMH Resource](#)
10. **NHS (UK) – Breathing Exercise** – “Breathing exercises for stress.” A self-help guide from the National Health Service describing a basic deep breathing technique. Instructs to breathe gently in through the nose and out through the mouth, counting from 1 to 5 each way (if possible), and to continue for **at least 5 minutes**. This official resource reinforces the importance of belly breathing and regular practice as part of managing anxiety or panic. [View Guide](#)

The information presented is for educational and inspirational purposes only, it is not intended as medical advice.



11. **American Heart Association – Infographic (n.d.)** – “*Breathing Brings Benefits*.” Highlights how slow, deep breathing can positively affect the body. Key points: deep breathing helps manage stress, reduce feelings of anxiety and depression, lower blood pressure, and increase oxygen delivery to organs. It also specifically mentions the **4-7-8 breathing technique** as an example exercise. Reviewed by AHA experts, this infographic underscores that you can trigger healthful physical responses (like a calmer nervous system) simply by controlling your breath. [View Summary](#)

**Scripture References:** Psalm 4:8, Psalm 46:10, Psalm 91:5, Psalm 94:19, Isaiah 41:10, Isaiah 26:3, Isaiah 40:31, Matthew 6:34, Matthew 11:28, Mark 4:39, John 14:27, 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, 2 Corinthians 10:5, Philippians 4:6-7, 1 Peter 5:7, 2 Timothy 1:7, 1 Thessalonians 5:11, 2 Thessalonians 3:16, James 1:17, 1 Peter 5:7, etc. (NIV and ESV translations). These verses offer comfort and guidance on trusting God in anxious times and are used throughout the article to reinforce the principles discussed.

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