

# **“Panic Disorder” – An In Utero Problem (Resolved in Eight Sessions)**

**By David Leistikow, MD**

## **Case Report**

Helen A., age 27, came to be me because she could not go to work, she had been given a month off and after one week she could not stand being alone at home. When asked, “What is your problem”, she stated: “A panicky feeling. I can’t breathe right, my heart goes real fast, I get hot on the inside, have nausea, my ears ring, a feeling like I’m going to pass out, and feel I have to get out of there.”

She stated that her problem began three weeks before she came to me when she had the flu with vomiting and diarrhea. She was alone at home and became more and more scared. She called her physician, but wasn’t able to reach her immediately. She became increasingly frightened, and when her husband came home, she started to cry and felt better.

Additional history revealed that her parents moved in with her three months before. Her mother “overworries” and has lots of anxiety. Helen asked me whether she may have been picking this up, since she had feelings of anxiety off and on two months before in public places. These feelings would pass and she didn’t think anything of them. Mom used to be sick like this a lot. Her mother was in Germany during the World War II bombings and escaped by crossing the frontier in a covered wagon, without her husband, while she was pregnant with an older sibling.

Helen reported the duration of the illness to be three years. When asked what had happened three years ago, she said that her father-on-law had died and she got upset and sick then.

When I asked her are there any conditions making her better or worse, she said: “I’m fine if I have no pressure to go anywhere, or to do something I don’t want to do.”

The problem stops her from “being able to handle things; from going on with my life, being myself, and going back to work.”

At the age of six she was pushed into a swimming pool, went under, and swallowed a lot of water. She remembers “a panic feeling” to this day and does not swim. She had to be pulled out by someone.

She was born two months prematurely. There were many complications. Her mother was sick and was in labor for three days. Helen was born weighing 3 lbs. (1958) and was blue at birth. She questions the fact whether she got enough when bottle fed. Hospitalization was required for one month and subsequently, her mother was too sick to take care of her. She was cared for by her sister and grandmother. As a child she had hay fever and allergies and developed asthma at 16 years of age. The asthma disappeared at age 19, when she married and moved out of the house. Amphetamines and LSD were used for one year in high school, at age 17-18. She had a strict Catholic upbringing. She had an

abortion at age 21 and feels guilty about the experience. Although it was her idea to have the abortion, she regrets having had it. She was married at that time, but was not ready (financially) to have a child. She became pregnant again one year later. She felt guilty and had excessive vomiting for three months. She had not confessed her abortion to the church. She does not like sex much, especially if her husband pressures her or if he drinks. She states that her husband claims that she never wants to have sex, and that one time per week is not enough for him. She climaxes 20% of the time, if she's in the mood.

Negative childhood experiences included 1) Her grandmother, with whom she had lived with all her life, died when Helen was 15; 2) her mother "overworried" and said, "Don't do this, don't do that, or you will get hurt."

She said that after she had her first baby she began to worry more, like her mom. "Mom was my role model; she was around to help, but I felt I needed her there." She listed her father-in-law's death as the most traumatic incident in her life. "I was closest to him. He had a stroke. I was depressed and moved in with my mother-in-law. That was hard; she was depressed lots."

Sexual history includes her fear of bleeding to death at puberty, until mother assured her it was OK. Her first sexual incident occurred at 16 years of age, with her brother-in-law, in whose house she lived at the time. She remembers waking up and being touched many times, saying "no" and being thrown out of the house.

A word association test was done in hypnosis. Her significant responses were as follows"

Problem	Me
Fear	hurt
First happy when	I grew up
I was near death when	age 5, almost drowned
First afraid when	had first baby. Didn't know how to handle things.
Greatest fear	is of the unknown
Thing that stops me is	fear of the unknown, fear of anything
Hypnosis	scared of the unknown
First unknown was	first baby I had
Why	do I have these feelings
When	I became a mom I started feeling the same as mom
My punishment	I'm not well
If I ever really let go	I want to be a person that's not scared.

A **dream suggestion** was given after the word association and she brought in a dream at her next session a week later. "I am on a boat. A tall blond haired man is there. There is a storm. It gets dark. I get sick. The storm gets worse. The boat gets stuck and I wake up and I can't breathe." Her interpretation was, "The tall man is my brother-in-law, makes me angry, makes me mad, makes me feel stuck. I have to put up with him because he is married to my sister." I asked her to hold onto that feeling and tell me how else she was stuck. She said, "Plus all the family problems are on me (from parents),

plus stuck with my job. My parents moved in and my job has worsened, and my boss is frustrating. I feel stuck. I'm getting more uptight, can't handle, can't leave, body gets upset, stomach nausea, dizzy, heart fast, faint, then I get scared and tense." I asked if she felt the adrenalin and she said "Yes, now." I pointed out that the "adrenalin response" she just had was to help her survive and it was a normal body response to a life-threatening situation, like a bear chasing you. Her only problem was that she was triggering the response prematurely and unnecessarily. Since she turned it on, she could turn it off, and would begin to practice this between now and her next session. Whenever she felt the first flush in her face or ears she would look around, and, if no threat was imminent, she would tell her adrenalin glands that there was no threat and she could shut off the adrenalin.

At her next visit (5<sup>th</sup> session) she was age regressed to her first recollected "panic attack". She went to her father-in-law's death in 1983. He had a brain hemorrhage. She was upset, had nausea and vomited. She said "This isn't fair, he can't die." I asked her to see him in the casket, to tell him whatever she wanted to say and didn't get to say, and then when she'd said everything, to say goodbye, see him lowered into the ground and covered up. Realizing that his spirit lives on I told her she could go back there whenever she wanted to and talk to him just like when she prays. I then asked her to go with that feeling of panic back in time to the next preceding incident. She went to the birth of her first child. "I feel stuck. Why me" I'm not going to get stuck again. No more kids. The baby is upset lots and cries lots. I'm stuck taking care of her." Next, she went back to age 5, in a swimming pool, under water. "Can't breathe." I told her to feel it, and she did, gasping, stating, "I am swallowing water, fighting, can't get out, someone there, choking, water coming out, can't breathe." I asked her to visualize things OK at the end of the drowning episode, to feel herself calm and breathing all right and obviously being a survivor. I gave her suggestions that the past was past and ended the session.

At her next (6<sup>th</sup>) session she was asked to go back to the age 5 drowning episode and feel it. Again she said, "I can't breathe. Someone brings me out. I needed someone and have all my life. I have spent my whole life trying to please others."

I added to that, "Yes, to survive," and she said "Yes." I then asked her to go all the way back to her first awareness inside her mother's womb and to recall the feeling there. She said, "Mom's scared and nervous. She's 38 already, I was an accident. I feel same as her." I told her to go a couple of months ahead and she said, "Mom's more nervous, afraid of future, when I'll be born. She worries about her health, adrenalin all over." I move her into her 8<sup>th</sup> month, and she said, "I was born early, dry, water broke two days before. I want out but I can't get out, I'm very weak. I may die. I can't breathe, **pressure – PANIC!**" I asked her to see herself move through the birth canal and coming out and she said, "I see the light and I am out, scared, small, weak. They are trying to make me breathe. They slapped me, I breathe, **PAIN EQUALS LIFE**". I said, "You don't need pain anymore."

She said, "I'm put into an incubator, **ALONE**, mom is not there. I'm unacceptable, afraid, mother is sick. I feel guilt when I don't do things for others." "Yes," I said, "because you feel you need them to survive?" "Yes," she replied. "No," I answered, "not anymore. You are grown now, not a helpless newborn."

Next we move on to one month of age. Her home is an incubator. She said "Mother and Dad are not there much (at hospital). They don't want me. I try to be good. Mother gets mad and yells."

I explained that this was the situation and not her fault. Mother and Dad were short of money, times were hard, too many mouths to feed and that they probably wanted her but there were just too many frustrations. They also were older parents. I then brought up the fact that her sister and grandmother loved her a lot and she agreed. "Yes, they did," she said. I asked her to hold on to that feeling of love she felt. It was hers inside and I told her she would keep that feeling. We ended the sessions by age progressing her up to her present age and being her own best friend and being self-sufficient. Helen told me she had gone back to work because she was bored being home, and that work was fine now.

At her next session, she was asked to go to any other negative feelings she had experienced. She went to her abortion in 1979. "It was a sin," she said. She was told to ask for and accept forgiveness from God, and after she had done that, she stated that she felt better. Next, I took her back to her asthma at ages 16-19 and the following came out: "Responsibilities are scary. It is cold, walking to school, had to run, fear of not being able to, panic, adrenalin." I asked her to see herself breathing normally now. She admitted that the drugs she was taking at that time had been an escape. She left home at the age of 19 to get away from her mother and all the stress.

Next, she was age regressed back to age five. "I'll die if someone doesn't help me," she said. I asked her to see the five year old grow rapidly and walk out of the pool. She imagined herself standing up and the water only coming up to her waist. She calmly went out.

We went again to her in utero experience. She felt again the worry, the anxiety, and being sick, all transmitted from her mother. We then progressed to her birth. "Can't breathe." She said. I said "OK, now you can see the process completed. You see light and you are out." She became calm then. I gave her the suggestion that she was free from her mother, and that she could see the umbilical cord cut and see that she was no longer connected to those feelings of fear and worry. I finished the session by giving her positive suggestions, focusing on being able to express her feelings spontaneously and freely.

Two weeks later, age regression directed to her own pregnancy took place. Her labor lasted 24 hours. She felt "trapped, hot, increased heart rate, like I can't handle things. I thought I'd have a nervous breakdown if I had another kid. Now, I know I could have another kid and enjoy it." Again she was asked to review, relive and release emotions about the abortion, about the near drowning at age five and about her own birth. She had the feeling of "giving up" in the birth process. I asked her to see herself push out and being free and she said it felt good to be in control. I asked her to see herself as an adult and in control from now on. The Walking Zombie Syndrome was discussed and positive suggestions of being alive and being well were given. She continued to practice shutting off her own adrenalin at the first flush, and felt she could do that almost instantly now.

She was seen one month later and all her positive control and ability to shut off adrenalin response was reinforced, after another age regression and rebirth. At present, ten months since her last session, she tells me in a brief visit that she is fine.