

Understanding and managing the psychological impact of blood clots



Contributors: Rachael Hunter and Paul Bennett
University of Swansea

Chair: Simon Noble
University of Cardiff



Swansea University
Prifysgol Abertawe

It can be difficult...

	One month	Six months
	%	%
Anxiety	36	40
Depression	20	20
PTSD		
Clinically relevant	23	21
Clinical diagnosis	16	16
Health anxiety	44	50

Breaking this down...

- *Post-thrombotic panic syndrome*: short-term episode of v. high intensity anxiety
 - hyperventilation
 - Feelings of panic
 - General physiological arousal: fight or flight
- *Post-thrombotic neurosis*: longer term nagging and repeated 'worry', 'unease'
 - Feelings of unease or anxiety
 - Intrusive unwanted worries that interfere with daily life
- *PTSD: specific diagnosis*
 - Chronically high arousal/hypervigilant
 - intentional memories
 - flashbacks



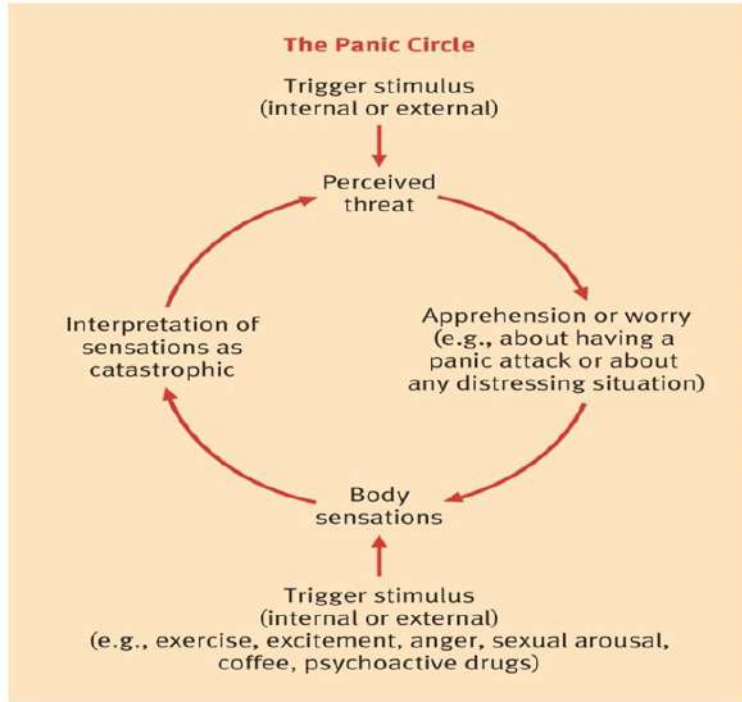
Post-thrombotic panic syndrome

- Triggered by:
 - Reminders and memories of the VTE
 - Most likely when original VTE was highly anxiety provoking – but could be later information: “You are lucky.. You could have died!!”
 - Sensations that match original ‘symptoms’ – am I having another VTE?
 - Walking too fast, talking on phone while walking etc.



What can you do?

The panic process



- Be aware of risky situations where likely to experience ‘ambivalent’ sensations. Try to relax and reassure self at this point. Don’t wait until problems arise.
- Be careful to not label any sensations as necessarily signs of ongoing problems.
- Start using deep breathing (count the square) and deep relaxation (brown paper bag if things get really bad!)
- Focus on feelings of relaxation and breathing rather than other sensations
- Reassure self that feelings are not impending doom, but are the body in overdrive – you have experienced them before
- If all else fails, then know you can call for medical help

Longer term worries: post-thrombotic neurosis



- Active distraction: managing the habit
- Emotional writing
- Mindfulness

Mindful exercises

Mindful Breathing

- Start by breathing in and out slowly. One breath cycle should last for approximately 6 seconds.
- Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth, letting your breath flow effortlessly in and out of your body.
- Let go of your thoughts. Let go of things you have to do later today or pending projects that need your attention. Simply let thoughts rise and fall of their own accord and be at one with your breath.
- Purposefully watch your breath, focusing your sense of awareness on its pathway as it enters your body and fills you with life.
- Then watch with your awareness as it works work its way up and out of your mouth and its energy dissipates into the world.



What works best for whom?

- Can divide by *problem*
- Panic – relaxation, self-reassurance
- Long-term intrusive worries – mindfulness
- PTSD – emotional writing
- Can divide by person
- Relaxation can work if cannot image/meditate
- Emotional writing may work for intrusive worries... in fact, probably does!
- Suck it and see....

The good stuff..... !



- <https://thrombosisuk.org/psychological-impact-vte.php>
 - Coping with worries: active distraction
 - Coping with worries: meditation and mindfulness
 - Post-thrombotic panic syndrome
 - General relaxation
 - Getting to sleep at night

Build resilience

Building blocks:

hydration,
food,
Sleep...

Anxiety management

