



DON'T PANIC

The Protocol.

Seven protocols for the day it gets loud.

JOINDONTPANIC.COM

HOW TO USE THIS

Read it once. Then save it.

This is not a book. It is a toolkit for the moments that don't wait: panic, craving, the 2 a.m. spiral, anger, numbness, sleepless nights, the edge of relapse.

Read it once now, while it's quiet. Your body remembers more than you think it does.

Then keep it on your phone. When the moment comes, find the page that matches it and do step one. Not all the steps. Step one. The rest will be there when you need it.

None of this is a performance. It's physiology. Every step works whether you believe in it or not.



01 · PANIC ATTACK

I'm Having a Panic Attack

3–5 MIN

1

Stop moving. Stop talking.

Sit down or lean against something solid. Both feet flat on the ground. You are safe. Your body doesn't know that yet · but you do.

2

Ground · 5-4-3-2-1

Name out loud: 5 things you can SEE · 4 you can TOUCH · 3 you can HEAR · 2 you can SMELL · 1 you can TASTE. Naming forces your thinking brain back online.

3

Breathe · extended exhale

Inhale through the nose 4s. Exhale through the mouth 8s. Twice as long out as in. Do 8–10 rounds. Your body physically cannot stay in panic while doing this.

4

Hands on chest

Feel your heartbeat. Don't slow it · just feel it. It's doing its job, responding to a false alarm. There's nothing wrong with your heart.

5

Cold water

Cold water on the face triggers the dive reflex · heart rate drops, vagus nerve fires. A physiological override.



02 · CRAVING

I'm Craving Right Now

3–5 MIN

1

The 90-second rule

Every craving builds, peaks at ~90 seconds, then fades. You don't have to beat it. You have to survive 90 seconds. Start counting.

2

Physical interrupt

Cold water on the face. OR grip something solid and squeeze 30s, then release. OR walk outside right now · new environment, new neurochemistry.

3

The HALT check

Most cravings are a mislabeled need. Am I Hungry? Angry? Lonely? Tired? Address the real deficit and the craving often dissolves.

4

Redirect the energy

A craving is energy. 20 hard pushups. Flood the system with a different intensity. The muscular fatigue competes with the craving signal.



03 · CAN'T SLEEP

I Can't Sleep

10–15 MIN

1 Get out of bed

If you've been lying there 20+ minutes, get up. Don't let your brain link the bed with stress. The bed is for sleep.

2 What NOT to do

Don't check the time. Don't pick up your phone. Don't turn on bright lights. Each one is a cortisol or melatonin sabotage.

3 Breathe · extended exhale

Inhale 4s, exhale 8s. 8–10 rounds. Shifts your nervous system from wired to ready-for-rest.

4 Legs up the wall

Lie on your back, legs straight up a wall, palms up. 5–10 minutes. Your nervous system reads this as safety and downshifts.



04 · SPIRALING

I'm Spiraling / Anxious

5–7 MIN

1 Recognize the spiral

Say it: "I am spiraling. These are thoughts, not reality. I am the awareness watching the thoughts · not the thoughts themselves." That separation is everything.

2 Box breathing 4-4-4-4

Inhale 4 · hold 4 · exhale 4 · hold 4. 5–8 rounds. The holds interrupt the rapid breathing that feeds anxiety.

3 ETD Express · name it

One word for what you feel. Then locate it in your body. "I feel anxiety. It's in my chest." Affect labeling can drop amygdala activation by up to 50%.



05 · RELAPSE

I'm About to Relapse

5-10 MIN

1

STOP

Stop what you're doing. Take 3 breaths. Observe what triggered this · there's always something underneath. Proceed with intention. You caught the autopilot.

2

Call someone. Right now.

The phone call IS the intervention. "I'm struggling right now and I need to talk." Relapse happens in isolation · break it.

3

Change your environment

Leave the room. Leave the house. Go outside. Not optional. Cravings are context-dependent · remove the cues.

4

90-second protocol

Cold water on the face. Grip and release. Extended exhale 4-in / 8-out. Survive the 90-second peak.



06 · ANGER

I'm Angry and About to React

3–5 MIN

1

The 6-second rule

For ~6 seconds the surge hijacks your prefrontal cortex. Count to 6 before you speak or act. That's the difference between the thing you can't take back and saying nothing.

2

Exhale the charge

3 sharp exhales through the mouth · blow out a candle across the room. Then shift to 4-in / 8-out for 6 rounds. Vent the charge so it doesn't come out as words or fists.

3

Clench and release

Make fists as tight as you can. Hold 10s. Release completely. The release after maximal contraction IS the regulation.



07 · NUMBNESS

I Feel Nothing / I'm Numb

5–10 MIN

1

Understand what this is

Numbness is dorsal vagal shutdown · your nervous system's deepest protection, not weakness. The goal isn't to force feeling. Body first. Always body first.

2

Wake the body up

Cold water on hands and face. Stamp your feet · 10 per foot. Squeeze ice. Any sensation is a bridge back.

3

Bilateral movement

Walk · left foot, right foot. Or rock side to side. Or tap your knees left-right-left-right for 30–60s. Same principle as EMDR. The freeze begins to thaw.

SCREENSHOT THIS PAGE

The first move.

When you can't think, you don't need the whole page. You need the first move.

PANIC ATTACK

Stop moving. Stop talking.

CRAVING

The 90-second rule

CAN'T SLEEP

Get out of bed

SPIRALING

Recognize the spiral

RELAPSE

STOP

ANGER

The 6-second rule

NUMBNESS

Understand what this is



The button is always in your pocket.

These seven protocols live inside the Don't Panic app as a panic button: one tap, step by step, timed and guided, the moment it gets loud. The free tier exists so cost is never the reason a man stays dysregulated.

joindontpanic.com

If the moment is bigger than a protocol: call or text 988 (US & Canada), any hour.

Reaching out is the strong move.

DON'T PANIC.