

## TRUE HEALTH DRAMA

# 'Panic attacks left me housebound'

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I was walking my dog, Bruno, when an awful feeling came over me. My stomach felt tight, my throat tightened and my heart was pounding so hard, it hurt. Dizzy and sweating, I couldn't seem to catch my breath.

*I'm going to die.* I panicked. I felt the need to run, fast, so I did, the whole mile back to my house.

When the front door slammed behind me, I felt safe again.

There had been no one else around when the feeling hit. Nothing had triggered it.

*What was happening to me? Was I going mad?*

It was the summer of 2003, and I'd been having funny turns for a few months.

I'd been sitting at my desk at the solicitor's where I worked as a legal secretary, when I'd first started feeling jittery.

I'd developed a dislike for the office lights, too. They'd never bothered me before, but now, I felt dizzy whenever they were on.

Even worse, I felt detached from everything, like I was constantly dreaming.

'Are you under stress at the moment?' my GP had asked.

I'd nodded. Work was hectic and I was in a bit of debt. To top things off, my marriage was in trouble as well.



**I just did what Charles said: This won't kill me. Bring it on! See if I care!**

suggested I carry round a brown paper bag to breathe into if I had an anxiety attack.

'So you don't hyperventilate,' he'd said to me.

I'd started keeping one in my bag. But now, after my first full-blown panic attack, I knew a paper bag wasn't enough to protect me.

I was terrified by what had happened.

*What if I hadn't made it home?*

Soon, the very idea of leaving the house scared me.

I was signed off sick from work and began to stay indoors 24 hours a day.

My husband had to take our son, Jack, to and from school, and it put even more pressure on us.

All I thought about was my condition. *Why was I like this? Would I be this way forever?*

Over the next few months, I felt constantly on edge and had two more major panic attacks.

Then, one day at the start of 2004, I looked up my symptoms on the internet and came across something called The Linden Method, which had been invented by a man named Charles Linden.

He wasn't a trained psychologist, but he'd suffered from anxiety and depression himself, until he'd found a way to take control.

The website explained that when you had an anxiety disorder, it was like the bit of your brain which was responsible for fear wouldn't switch off, even when there was nothing to be afraid of, leaving you anxious for no reason.

As I read, my jaw dropped. It was like he was writing about me.

Linden claimed you could retrain your brain not to feel that way.

So I decided to send off for one of the packs, which contained a manual plus some helpful CDs and DVDs.

*I've nothing to lose,* I thought. They arrived a few days later.

The manual suggested distracting your brain, so you didn't keep going over what was wrong with you.

I thought about it. I'd ridden horses as a kid and loved it.

Plucking up my courage, I went to the local shop and put a card in the window saying I wanted to start riding again and was interested in buying a horse.

Within days, I'd got a call about a horse for sale, Muffin.

I forced myself to go and see her, and was so glad I did.

I bought her and arranged for her to stay at a local stables.

Having to muck her out, groom and exercise her gave me a reason to leave the house. And thinking about her *did* help me feel calmer.

I was still worried about having another attack, but one of the CDs said that when you felt one coming on, you had to tell yourself: *This won't kill me. Bring it on! See if I care!*

A few weeks later, I was at the stables when the worst happened. I had an attack.

*This won't kill me,* I kept telling myself...

And you know what? The feeling of anxiety passed.

That was four years ago, and I haven't had another panic attack since. I was even back at work a month after that last episode.

Here's to me being anxiety free. Cheers!



## Fact file Anxiety

### WHAT IS IT?

Anxiety is normal — it's the body's way of warning you about danger. But in some people, anxious feelings become a real problem. Anxiety disorders can be triggered by a frightening experience, or an ongoing stressful situation. Sufferers can also get anxious simply about feeling anxious.

### SYMPTOMS

of an anxiety disorder may include impatience and difficulty concentrating, pessimism, insomnia, depression, obsessive thoughts, excessive thirst, stomach upsets and wind, frequent urinating, failure to respond to sexual stimulation, periods of feeling winded and having a pounding heart, muscle aches, headaches, dizziness, pins and needles, tremors and painful or no periods.

### RELAXATION

techniques and exercising can help to reduce the physical symptoms and experts also recommend cutting out caffeine.



Getting involved with horses again has helped me take my mind off things



**BRITAIN'S FUNNIEST DOG**

**RUNNER-UP: Max** See p18