

The first time I ever had an anxiety attack, I thought I was going to die. It felt like I couldn't breathe. Over and over I tried to calm down and tried to suppress my thoughts but they just kept going. I sat in the corner of my room at 6 years old, and sobbed while feeling as if I were suffocating. And that feeling never went away from there. For years I felt this constant feeling of lack of air and never understood why. Anxiety disorders. They're a real kick in the crotch sometimes, especially since most of the time they're so well hidden. So well disguised. But when that little beast comes out of hiding it's horrifying. While others think of their grades or what they're up to for the rest of the day, I'm focusing on breathing. Breathing is often on my mind. Anxiety is often on my mind. The fact that people don't have to think whether or not they're inhaling one minute or hyperventilating the next, is on my mind. You may not know what it feels like. You may not understand why it's such a big deal, why it hurts so much.

Allow me to show you.



¹ Sharma, Lucas. "Symbolizing Mental Illness: The Imagery of Raw Emotion." *Conversations*. *Conversations*, September 11, 2018. <http://www.conversationsmagazine.org/web-features/2018/9/10/wzsa3i79220v5m2xc00bl8mxmq4zob>.

You wake up in the middle of the night in an attempt to come back to reality after nightmares crept into your brain. Over and over again you dreamt of the ones held close to your heart. Your parents, past or present significant others, close friends. And over and over again you watch them die. It repeats every night. And every night, you try to save them. You will never succeed. But this night is different. You wake up and your throat is tight. You wake up, and the restless panic and anxiety follows you out of the dream. A weight in your chest begins to take hold of your body and whatever air was able to pass through your throat is no longer there. The more you try to breathe the more you lack air. The faster you inhale the quicker the air you exhale. The sound of your lungs wheezing in unison with the pain in your chest does nothing but speed up your already hyperventilating lungs. The heartbeat pounding in your chest feels like it may stop completely at any moment. Your brain feels on fire. Your lips turning blue, the environment around you that was so clear seems to blur in front of your eyes. *You're dying. Try to breathe harder or you're gonna die. If you don't get control you're going to die. Why would you do that to your mom? Why do you want to leave her daughterless. It's your fault you can't control yourself. Stop. Stop it. Why can't you just breathe? Stop crying. Breathe faster it'll help. Just breathe like a goddamn normal person.*

And everything eventually goes dark.

Now what some people may not take into consideration is at this point your body is lacking a good amount of oxygen. Hyperventilating makes it so that your blood levels will be altered due to the levels of gas your body is both inhaling and exhaling. While your hyperventilating carbon dioxide levels go up,

oxygen goes down, and blood levels drop. And when blood levels drop, the body begins to have issues functioning the way it should.² Headache from lack of oxygen, skin turning shades of pink to blue to purple. Dizziness and confusion due to the brain's lack of an oxygen source. This will go on from anywhere to a few minutes, to off and on for an hour. Until the body can no longer take the strain, and then black out.³

It's a simple car ride today. Nothing out of your normal schedule. Get in the car, seatbelt on, pull out of the parking lot and reverse. It's a simple procedure. One you have done a hundred times before.

You're going to hit someone today.

What?

² Sharma, Lucas. "Symbolizing Mental Illness: The Imagery of Raw Emotion." *Conversations*. *Conversations*, September 11, 2018. <http://www.conversationsmagazine.org/web-features/2018/9/10/wzsa3i79220v5m2xc00bl8mxmq4zob>.

³Fields, Lisa. "Hyperventilation: Symptoms, Causes, Treatment, Emergencies." *WebMD*. *WebMD*, October 29, 2021. <https://www.webmd.com/lung/lung-hyperventilation-what-to-do>.

Anxiety can often trigger paranoia issues. Often one may become accustomed to paranoid thoughts in the midst of an anxiety episode. "They all hate you", "if you don't get an A your parents won't love you anymore", "if this isn't perfect something bad will happen to you or your family". The anxiety itself can determine how long these thoughts last and what they're about. These paranoid thoughts can give way to more anxiety as well⁴. Often paranoia is a main symptom of such anxiety disorders as Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.⁵

"Regrets collect like old friends

Here to relive your darkest moments

I can see no way, I can see no way

And all of the ghouls come out to play"

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~ Florence +the machine

⁴ "Causes of Paranoia." Mind, July 2020.

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/paranoia/causes-of-paranoia/#:~:text=Anxiety%20can%20be%20a%20cause,also%20make%20you%20feel%20anxious.>

⁵Frysh, Paul. "Causes of Paranoia." Mind, September 9, 2021.

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/paranoia/causes-of-paranoia/#:~:text=Anxiety%20can%20be%20a%20cause,also%20make%20you%20feel%20anxious.>

⁶Genius, September 14, 2011. <https://genius.com/Florence-the-machine-shake-it-out-lyrics>.

Anxiety disorders are something in which around 40 million people in the United States experience. Over 240 million people in the world have anxiety disorders, and that doesn't include the people who are undiagnosed or only experience anxious feelings a few times in their lifetime. But no matter how small, it is tiring. And exhausting to both body and mind. There are so many symptoms and causes I wish I had more time to show you, so I will leave you with this. If someone you know has anxiety, do research. Learn what helps them. Have them go talk to someone who can teach skills in breathing control, focus on surroundings, and coping strategies. I have struggled with anxiety disorders all my life. If you're reading this, you're not alone. It will get better, I promise.

Citations:

"Causes of Paranoia." Mind, July 2020.

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/paranoia/causes-of-paranoia/#:~:text=Anxiety%20can%20be%20a%20cause,also%20make%20you%20feel%20anxious.>

This article's general idea explains the symptoms as well as causes of paranoia in individuals and why it takes place. This included how anxiety and paranoia are able to coincide and further mental health struggles. I thought this article worked well to show how the mental aspects of anxiety can go further besides just nervous feelings.

Fields, Lisa. "Hyperventilation: Symptoms, Causes, Treatment, Emergencies." WebMD. WebMD, October 29, 2021. <https://www.webmd.com/lung/lung-hyperventilation-what-to-do>.

Within this article it explains the basic scientific background as long as the symptoms and cause of hyperventilation in people. Within this article I also found it interesting that at the end it had treatment options for how to treat hyperventilation. In general it is more based on the cause and effect of hyperventilating which gave good information for me to use in the essay.

Sharma, Lucas. "Symbolizing Mental Illness: The Imagery of Raw Emotion." *Conversations*.

Conversations, September 11, 2018.

<http://www.conversationsmagazine.org/web-features/2018/9/10/wzsa3i79220v5m2xc00bl8mxmq4zob>.

This website had beautiful artworks which showed the emotions and feelings of different mental health disorders/illnesses. Within it not only was there the drawing of anxiety but obsessive compulsive disorder, depression, and more. I found these drawings very captivating and beautiful and wanted to incorporate them into my final essay.

Genius, September 14, 2011. <https://genius.com/Florence-the-machine-shake-it-out-lyrics>.

The song written by Florence the Machine shows the feeling and expression of how anxiety can feel like. I find this song and its lyrics to be beautiful, yet also a little dark in nature which I really enjoy.

Intention Statement:

Breathe is a lyrical essay about the feelings and impacts of anxiety on an individual. I wanted to focus on having the reader feel the experiences of what it's like to have anxiety disorders as well as be able to analyze the scientific side of the anxiety experience to help the reader understand what goes on in the body.

I chose to write this lyrical essay in both a first and second person point of view. I did this because I wanted the more creative side of my writing to make the reader feel like they were the one in the story experiencing it, hence the second person point of view. For the first person point of view I used that for more factual and scientific writing. My research sources were particularly helpful in my analysis portion of the essays since I was able to further explain anxiety using facts from the research I had done. It also helped to give me inspiration for what to write about since it helped to remind me of times where I had experienced what I was reading about while researching.

During my peer review, my readers really enjoyed the way I structured the essay in switching the fonts between the two perspectives as well as the color font changing to represent the anxiety. The most helpful feedback I received was just to try to write more. Although I did write more into my essays, if I were able to do it again I would give myself more time so I would be able to write more stories and analysis within my essay. An author I was specifically inspired by was Claudia Rankin and used the technique of second person perspective to help really envelop the reader into the story. Overall I feel generally proud of my work that I did for this lyrical essay, however as I mentioned before I would've given myself more time to work on this project. I really enjoyed writing this and I wish I had more time to write more:)