

The anxiety attack / The panic attack

Example:

Martine sits down, exhausted, on a bench. Since she moved from her home country to Switzerland, she has had to cope with everything by herself: her new job, a foreign language and way of thinking, the children, school, homework, shopping ... not to mention housework.

She waits there, in front of the meeting room, trying to find the courage to go in and discuss the team objectives for the next month with her colleagues. Everybody is there, the room is hot, and she can already feel tension in the air.

The meeting begins, and the discussions between participants aren't very constructive. Time passes quickly without much progress being made, and Martine starts to feel anxious about the time she needs after the meeting to finalise a few important documents before leaving to pick the children up from school.

Martine's anxiety increases with each passing second. Her hands tremble. She feels hotter and hotter. She's sweating and feels oppressed by all these people around her going on and on. Her heart starts pounding. Her head is spinning. She feels ill, as if she's going to be sick. She hopes she won't faint in front of everyone.

She can't hold out much longer. She can't breathe. She gets up and rushes out of the meeting room; she stumbles along, desperate for fresh air, her vision is blurred.

Martine is finally outside. She crouches down against the wall, holds her head in her hands and waits – seconds seem like hours – until she starts to regain her calm.

A week later, a similar attack prevents Martine from participating in another work meeting. She's worried and goes to see her doctor: no physical problem is found to explain her condition. From then on, she's afraid of going to team meetings; gradually, she starts avoiding even smaller meetings, whatever day or time they are held. Eventually, she has to open up to a colleague and apologise for missing so many meetings.