## Panic Attacks, Phobias or Excessive Fear

Panic attacks, phobias, and excessive fear are seen as manifestations of a Shén (神) disturbance, especially involving the Heart and Kidney systems. These intense emotional responses reflect a deep loss of internal stability and are often linked to disharmony between the Heart (which houses the Shen) and the Kidneys (which store the Zhi and are associated with fear and survival). In TCM, fear (恐, *kǒng*) is the emotion associated with the Kidneys. In a balanced state, fear provides healthy caution and instinct. But when it is excessive, overwhelming, or chronic, it disrupts the flow of Qi, weakens the Kidneys, and destabilizes the Shen. What Are Panic Attacks and Phobias in TCM?

* Panic attacks are sudden, overwhelming episodes of fear or dread, often accompanied by palpitations, breathlessness, dizziness, or loss of control.
* Phobias are irrational, intense fears tied to specific situations or objects.
* Excessive fear refers to a general heightened state of insecurity, timidity, or dread.

These conditions represent a loss of Shen anchoring, with Qi rushing upward or scattering, and often involve Kidney weakness, Heart disturbance, or residual trauma.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Pathophysiology | Causes | Symptoms | Tongue | Pulse | Treatment | Formulas |
| Heart and Kidney Disharmony (心肾不交) | This is the most common root for fear-related syndromes. The Kidney Yin fails to anchor the Heart Fire, leading to Shen disturbance. | Chronic stress, overwork, long-term emotional strain, fear, Yin deficiency | Anxiety with fear, panic attacks, insomnia, palpitations, night sweats, tinnitus, sore back, or knees | Red, peeled or cracked | Thin, rapid | Nourish Kidney Yin, calm the Heart, anchor Shen | *Tian Wang Bu Xin Dan*, *Jiao Tai Wan* |
| Heart Qi or Yang Deficiency (心气虚 / 心阳虚) | The Heart lacks the strength to govern the Shen → resulting in emotional fragility, timidity, and susceptibility to panic. | Constitutional weakness, shock, blood loss, chronic illness | Palpitations, shortness of breath, panic in response to small stressors, cold limbs, pale complexion | Pale | Weak or irregular | Tonify Heart Qi/Yang, calm Shen | *Gui Pi Tang*, *Shen Fu Tang* (for collapse) |
| Kidney Essence Deficiency  (肾精不足) | The Zhi (willpower) is weakened, leading to instability, fear, poor memory, and loss of confidence. | Aging, congenital deficiency, overwork, excessive sexual activity | Phobias, persistent fear, mental fatigue, dizziness, tinnitus, weak knees | Pale or red with little coat | Deep, thin | Tonify Kidney Essence and Jing | *Zuo Gui Wan*, *You Gui Wan* (for more Yang deficiency) |
| Residual Trauma or Shock  (惊恐伤神) | Emotional or physical trauma (especially sudden) can scatter the Shen and sever Heart-Kidney communication. | Emotional shock, accidents, sudden loss, abuse | Fearfulness, jumpiness, nightmares, panic attacks, disconnection, spontaneous sweating, cold limbs | Pale or red tip | Wiry, irregular, or faint | Calm Shen, tonify Heart and Kidney, anchor spirit | *Gan Mai Da Zao Tang*, *Ding Zhi Wan* |
| Phlegm-Heat Harassing the Heart  (痰火扰心) | In some cases, especially where panic is accompanied by confusion or mental agitation, Phlegm and Heat may obstruct the Shen. | Poor digestion, Spleen deficiency, stress, emotional repression | Fear with restlessness, confusion, chest tightness, irrational fears, insomnia, nausea, greasy tongue | Red with yellow greasy coat | Slippery, rapid | Clear Phlegm-Heat, calm Shen, open Heart orifices | *Wen Dan Tang*, *Huang Lian Wen Dan Tang* |

In TCM, panic attacks, phobias, and excessive fear are signs of deep Shen disturbance, usually involving the Heart, Kidneys, and sometimes Liver or Phlegm. Causes include Heart-Kidney disharmony, Heart Qi or Yang deficiency, Kidney Essence deficiency, Emotional shock or trauma or Phlegm obstructing the Heart. Treatment involves calming the Shen, nourishing Kidney, and Heart, resolving Phlegm (if present), and restoring internal stability.