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How Elizabeth Olsen Coped with Frequent Panic Attacks in Her 20s



During a recent interview with *Variety*, Elizabeth Olsen discussed how she dealt with panic episodes in her early twenties.

According to the magazine, when discussing the children's book she and her husband, musician Robbie Arnett, authored about overcoming fears, Olsen admitted she didn't understand what anxiety or a panic attack was" until she was 21.

At that age, the actress began having panic attacks, which are defined by the Merck Manual as short moments of intense distress, anxiety, or terror accompanied by physical and emotional symptoms. "I remember I would get them on the hour every hour," she said. "I was crossing 6th Avenue at 14th Street, and I realized I couldn't cross the street I stood up against the wall, and I just thought I was going to drop dead at any moment," described Olsen, later noting that this was "weird" because she wasn't anxious as a child. "I was very loud and confident," she told *Variety*.

However, she certainly changed as she grew older. "If I went from cold to hot, hot to cold, full to hungry, hungry to full any kind of shift in my body, my whole body thought, 'Uh oh, something's wrong!'" she continued. She went to an ENT specialist because she felt like she was "spiraling," and he assumed her problem was due to vertigo.

"During a panic attack, the body goes into fight or flight mode and prepares itself to fight or flee," Melissa Horowitz, Psy.D., director of Clinical Training at the American Institute for Cognitive Therapy previously told *Shape*. "But the reality is that there's no true danger."

Olsen didn't find comfort until she got care from a mental health doctor. She discovered "brain games" that helped her stay in the

present time. "When I would walk down the street, I would just start naming everything I saw out loud to get myself out of the spiraling thoughts in my brain," she explained, noting that the technique was similar to acting exercises she'd done before. "That was a helpful tool."

Despite her reservations about taking medicine for her panic episodes, Olsen kept it on hand in case of an emergency. "Just having that in my bag felt good," she said.

In her experiences, the Marvel actress is not alone. According to the Merck Manual, at least 11% of American adults have a panic attack each year. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, around 5% of individuals in the United States may suffer from panic disorder, an anxiety condition characterized by recurring bouts of acute terror. You don't have to be diagnosed with a panic disorder to have panic attacks, and if you suspect you're having panic attacks, you may get support from a mental health expert.

Though mental health concerns are still stigmatized and difficult to address, statistics (and occasionally celebrities) show that they are more prevalent than you may expect.

Citation-

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