

**FEAR FACTORS: COGNITIVE  
BEHAVIORAL THERAPY TO GET  
CONTROL OF YOUR ANXIETY,  
WORRY, AND FEAR**



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COGNITIVE  
BEHAVIORAL  
THERAPY TO GET  
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YOUR ANXIETY,  
WORRY, AND FEAR**

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This book is designed to give you a jumpstart in getting control of your anxieties, worries, and fears. It utilizes cognitive and behavioral strategies to get to get the irrational side of your personality under control.

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# Introduction

“We have nothing to fear but fear itself.”—Franklin Roosevelt

Anxiety, worry, and fear are among the most debilitating of human emotions, a veritable Three Horsemen of the Apocalypse that robs many of us of our emotional as well as our physical well being. (Yeah, I know, the Bible only had four, be grateful.) Living with these paralyzing emotions is like living through the Chinese Water Torture, a slow drip, drip, drip that eats away at our emotional and physical health. While some would argue that, “It’s just the way I am,” it doesn’t have to be that way. This book is designed to show you that these are self-inflicted wounds to a large degree, and there are things that you can do to bring these feelings under control.

This book, like all of my books, will take a multifaceted approach combining cognitive, behavioral, and physiological strategies to attack these irrational emotions. You will learn the differences between anxiety, worry, and fear and the purposes that they serve. You’ll learn to distinguish between the healthy use of these emotions and the unhealthy. More importantly, you will learn that you can exercise a fair amount of control over these feelings.

This book is one of a series of Quickstart Guides that I have written. My purpose with these guides is to give you information in the most user-friendly manner. My intention is to give you what is essential, and strip away the nonessential, giving you some symptom relief quickly. My ultimate goal for the reader is to gain some simple strategies that will become the way you process situations that have caused you fear in the past, bringing you life-changing results and an ability to bring your anxiety, worry, and fears into control.

While I suggest that you read this book from start to finish, I want you to start using strategies in it immediately. With cognitive and behavioral changes, success builds upon success. Successful use of these

## 2 Fear Factors: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy to Get Control of Your Anxiety, Worry, and Fear

strategies can set you up for more of the same, building momentum and giving you a sense of control. And, you will learn rather quickly that these Three Horseman can be tamed more easily than you thought.

So, let's get started. You'll soon find that Franklin Roosevelt knew what he was talking about.

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November, 2014

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## What's The Difference, What's The Use?

Anxiety, fear, and worry each have a biological and evolutionary purpose. These emotions have evolved to protect us from danger. While they can never be completely eliminated, they can be tamed and brought under control. Although these three emotional states feel quite similar, there are some subtle differences in anxiety, fear and worry that we will get into first. By understanding subtle differences you'll begin to get an idea of the purpose that each of these emotions serves.

Anxiety is the term that we will use throughout this book for the feeling state that creates the problematic emotions that we would like to avoid. Anxiety is the feeling that there is an impending disaster that we cannot escape. Usually with anxiety we don't even know what the disaster is, where it's coming from, and what it will entail. We just "know that something bad is going to happen." The thought becomes a feeling, and the feeling becomes a bodily sensation, "proving" that our assumptions are correct. Something bad is going to happen, we know this because we can feel it "in our gut." This mind body storm drains our mental and physical ability to resist it and, left to run its course, we run the risk of becoming physically and emotionally ill. With anxiety, we can't pinpoint what's going to happen, we just have this feeling that it's going to, and it isn't going to be good.

Worry, while similar, is something that we do consciously to ourselves. It is a toxic emotion, a self inflicted wound, that we give ourselves with all the best intentions. We believe that worrying is a responsible and helpful thing to do to avoid the unexpected. We rationalize that by worrying about something, we will be ready if, and when, the unexpected happens. Ironically, many of us just worry and don't take

action steps to avoid potential problems, we worry as if having the thoughts will be enough. The futility here is that the unexpected is exactly that, unexpected, and by definition we couldn't be prepared for it no matter how hard we try.

Fear, on the other hand, can be literally life-saving and often makes life exciting and worth living. With fear, we know exactly where the anxious feelings are coming from and we believe that there is a behavioral response that will resolve the problem. We can either "fight"—act aggressively toward the threat, "flight"—run away from the threat, or "freeze"—remain paralyzed and hope that the threat will go away on its own.

Anxiety comes out of the blue, from nowhere, often creeping up on us suddenly and unannounced. Worry we do to ourselves with the intention of avoiding something that may happen in the future. Fear is a response that we have in the face of a threat that we believe is happening at that moment. Although there are subtle differences in these three states, the physical and emotional feelings are quite similar and do us similar amounts of damage.

Worry does serve a purpose. It evolved from the basic human needs to provide food, clothing, and shelter in anticipation of the changing seasons and natural disasters that humans face from the environment. Without this emotion our species would never have survived. Being prepared is a marker of an intelligent, mature, and responsible person. While you can't be prepared for the unexpected, you can certainly avoid a lot of problems with proper planning. While worry serves a purpose up to a point, it is very easy to cross the line from an appropriate amount of anticipatory concern into the danger zone of toxic worry.

Fear is an internal perception, existing entirely within our own imagination. It has a biological purpose in that it is designed to ready us for a physical response when confronted by a life threatening situation. People that can harness their fears are capable of incredible feats of strength, speed, and survival. We are wired to fight harder, be stronger,

and run faster when fear induced adrenaline takes over our minds and bodies. You can probably clearly understand the biological and evolutionary based purpose for fear. Fighting harder and running faster could keep you alive. The freeze response, where you are paralyzed with indecision, also has a biologically based purpose. Freezing is analogous to an animal “playing dead,” or “playing possum.” The threat thinks you are dead, and decides to leave you alone rather than eat you.

Losing our anxieties, worries, and fears is not only impossible, it is not advisable. We need a certain amount of these emotions for protection, alertness, and to be able to perform many of life’s required tasks at an optimum level. Worry needs to be replaced with a more healthy level of concern and fear needs to be replaced with a more rational and less emotional response. For many of life’s more challenging tasks a certain level of anxiety is needed. You may notice you perform better with many tasks when you are slightly nervous. A moderate level of anxiety can help you perform your best with tasks such as athletic events, exams, job interviews, and public speaking. Anxiety also makes some things more fun. Roller coasters, surfing, skydiving, motorcycles, mountain climbing, or even asking that special someone out on a date are all examples of the anxiety-fun link.

We not only have a need for anxiety, but we sometimes even create your own in order to benefit from the heightened sense of awareness and sensory acuity that it can give us. Many people put off doing important tasks until the very last minute. They do this because they instinctively need the pressure of an impending deadline to get the job done well. You may even be one of these kinds of people. If, as a student, you were the type who wrote term papers better the night before they were due, then that’s a pretty good indication that you needed the self-imposed pressure and anxiety that you yourself created to ace that paper. You may also be the type who enjoys self imposed anxiety through behaviors such as gambling, action sports, sales, dating, and other activities where you put yourself out there and risk physical or emotional hurt.

This chapter distinguished the differences between anxiety, worry, and

fear. Throughout this book we will use the terms interchangeably at times. Don't worry, it won't be confusing. We are seeking to bring you symptom relief for these troubling emotions and allow you to harness them and use them effectively. You don't need to be an expert on which emotion is which, but you need to become an expert on how to control your own subjective emotions.

“Fear is your best friend or your worst enemy. It's like fire. If you can control it, it can cook for you, it can heat your house. If you can't control it, it will burn everything around you and destroy you. If you can control your fear, it makes you more alert, like a deer coming across the lawn.”-Mike Tyson

## Your Mind On Anxiety : Basic Training

Anxiety, fear, and worry are very complex emotions. They are also quite cunning and devious, showing up in our lives whenever they want, and leaving when they are good and damn ready. Our approach to these disturbing emotions is going to be a mindbody one, where aggressive steps will be taken the moment these feelings rear their ugly heads. This chapter is about the basic premises of cognitive behavioral therapy, which will lay the groundwork for the mental training and skills that we will apply.

Cognitive behavioral therapy has been around for over 50 years. It has been proven to be the best therapeutic intervention for anxiety, fear, and worry. It is a action oriented approach which teaches clients useful skills and strategies that can be used to enable one to continue to function, and function well, while coping with these troubling emotions. A client learns what their own personal thought patterns are, identifying long held beliefs, and works to consciously change these in order to view things more realistically and increase functional abilities.

The basic premise behind cognitive behavioral therapy is that the way that we view events in our lives is more important than the events themselves. In other words, our interpretations, outlooks, and attitudes shape our perceptions and thus our reality. We essentially live in two separate worlds, the outside, tangible world, of people, places, things, and experiences, and the internal world of thoughts, feelings, emotions, and subjective interpretations. It is our internal world that decides how we feel about things. While we cannot change outside events, we can work to reconstruct our internal, subjective interpretations, gaining control of our anxiety, fears, and worry.

Feelings aren't facts. We think they are factual because they are our feelings, and our bodies usually respond in a way that reinforces this belief through the physiological responses that we have – racing heart, changes in breathing, sweats, shakes, and that sense of impending doom. It is our thought processes, and our interpretations, that sets this cognitive behavioral chain of events into motion. A healthier, more appropriate and realistic approach to these disturbing internal events starts with the way that we think about and interpret our external events.

Most of us are aware that we live in a state of almost constant internal dialoguing, having literally hundreds of conversations with ourselves every day. For example, what did you say to yourself this morning as you were getting out of bed? What did you say to yourself when you looked into the bathroom mirror this morning? These internal discussions occur so automatically that you probably didn't even notice them, they have become a part of the totality of your life experience. Cognitive behavioral therapy teaches that it is the quality of these conversations that you have with yourself that determine the feelings and emotions that you live with. These feelings and emotions determine the levels of anxiety, fear, and worry that you have.

There are many cognitive behavioral theorists who have gone into great depth to teach the details of cognitive behavioral therapy. You could read the works of Aaron Beck, Albert Ellis, Stephen Hayes, David Burns, or Marsha Linehan if you'd like. Don't worry, there is no need to, as I'll simplify their teachings into a useful format for you. In attacking anxiety, we will borrow from all of these great minds. We will discuss a variety of strategies and techniques and you will specialize in those that work effectively for you, rejecting those that do not.

It's helpful to be able to identify some of the thought patterns that you may have that are not useful for you. Many theorists call these "irrational thoughts," or "dysfunctional thinking." It is not so important as to label them as it is to be able to identify them, challenge them, and work to change them. David Burns, author of "Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy," has identified some of the typical thought

distortions that most people have. They are:

1. All-or-nothing thinking – You see things in black-or-white categories. If a situation falls short of perfect, you see it as a total failure. When a young woman on a diet ate a spoonful of ice cream, she told herself, “I’ve blown my diet completely.” This thought upset her so much that she gobbled down an entire quart of ice cream.
2. Overgeneralization – You see a single negative event, such as a romantic rejection or a career reversal, as a never-ending pattern of defeat by using words such as “always” or “never” when you think about it. A depressed salesman became terribly upset when he noticed bird dung on the window of his car. He told himself, “Just my luck! Birds are always crapping on my car!”
3. Mental Filter – You pick out a single negative detail and dwell on it exclusively, so that your vision of reality becomes darkened, like the drop of ink that discolors a beaker of water. Example: You receive many positive comments about your presentation to a group of associates at work, but one of them says something mildly critical. You obsess about his reaction for days and ignore all the positive feedback.
4. Discounting the positive – You reject positive experiences by insisting that they “don’t count.” If you do a good job, you may tell yourself that it wasn’t good enough or that anyone could have done as well. Discounting the positives takes the joy out of life and makes you feel inadequate and unrewarded.
5. Jumping to conclusions – You interpret things negatively when there are no facts to support your conclusion.  
Mind Reading : Without checking it out, you arbitrarily conclude that someone is reacting negatively to you.  
Fortune-telling : You predict that things will turn out badly. Before a test you may tell yourself, “I’m really going to blow it. What if I flunk?”  
If you’re depressed you may tell yourself, “I’ll never get better.”
6. Magnification – You exaggerate the importance of your problems and shortcomings, or you minimize the importance of your desirable qualities. This is also called the “binocular trick.”

7. Emotional Reasoning – You assume that your negative emotions necessarily reflect the way things really are: “I feel terrified about going on airplanes. It must be very dangerous to fly.” Or, “I feel guilty. I must be a rotten person.” Or, “I feel angry. This proves that I’m being treated unfairly.” Or, “I feel so inferior. This means I’m a second rate person.” Or, “I feel hopeless. I must really be hopeless.”

8. “Should” statements – You tell yourself that things should be the way you hoped or expected them to be. After playing a difficult piece on the piano, a gifted pianist told herself, “I shouldn’t have made so many mistakes.” This made her feel so disgusted that she quit practicing for several days. “Musts,” “oughts” and “have tos” are similar offenders. “Should statements” that are directed against yourself lead to guilt and frustration. Should statements that are directed against other people or the world in general, lead to anger and frustration: “He shouldn’t be so stubborn and argumentative!”

Many people try to motivate themselves with shoulds and shouldn’ts, as if they were delinquents who had to be punished before they could be expected to do anything. “I shouldn’t eat that doughnut.” This usually doesn’t work because all these shoulds and musts make you feel rebellious and you get the urge to do just the opposite. Dr. Albert Ellis has called this “musturbation.” I call it the “shouldy” approach to life.

9. Labeling – Labeling is an extreme form of all-or-nothing thinking. Instead of saying “I made a mistake,” you attach a negative label to yourself: “I’m a loser.” You might also label yourself “a fool” or “a failure” or “a jerk.” Labeling is quite irrational because you are not the same as what you do. Human beings exist, but “fools,” “losers” and “jerks” do not. These labels are just useless abstractions that lead to anger, anxiety, frustration and low self-esteem.

You may also label others. When someone does something that rubs you the wrong way, you may tell yourself: “He’s an S.O.B.” Then you feel that the problem is with that person’s “character” or “essence” instead of with their thinking or behavior. You see them as totally bad. This makes you feel hostile and hopeless about improving things and leaves very little room for constructive communication.

10. Personalization and Blame – Personalization comes when you hold yourself personally responsible for an event that isn't entirely under your control. When a woman received a note that her child was having difficulty in school, she told herself, "This shows what a bad mother I am," instead of trying to pinpoint the cause of the problem so that she could be helpful to her child. When another woman's husband beat her, she told herself, "If only I was better in bed, he wouldn't beat me." Personalization leads to guilt, shame and feelings of inadequacy. Some people do the opposite. They blame other people or their circumstances for their problems, and they overlook ways they might be contributing to the problem: "The reason my marriage is so lousy is because my spouse is totally unreasonable." Blame usually doesn't work very well because other people will resent being scapegoated and they will just toss the blame right back in your lap. It's like the game of hot potato—no one wants to get stuck with it.

In therapy, clients learn which of these dysfunctional thoughts are the default thoughts that get them into trouble emotionally and in their interactions with others. The first step is identifying what one says to themselves instinctively and automatically. I find that it gets complicated for clients to quickly recall these thoughts when needed. A simplified approach is to use acronyms that can be recalled and utilized easily and immediately with a little bit of training. A favorite acronym of mine is T F A C, short for think, feel, act, and consequences. In group counseling I like to put it on a whiteboard as a formula:

$$(T+F)+A=C$$

(T+F) are experiences in the internal world. A and C are experiences in the external world. So, as you can see, what goes on internally shapes the quality of the consequences that we get and the results that we receive. In therapy the internal experience, or the T + F, is identified as the area where problems occur. Our internal experiences, interpretations, biases, and expectations are where the problem originates in most areas of our lives. It can take quite a while for a therapy client to be able to identify the 10 dysfunctional thoughts that David Burns proposes. It is far easier to remember the acronym T

F A C if it is remembered as a word, “teefak.” Teefak, short, easy, memorable, and to the point. The way we think effects the way we feel, which affects the way we act, which leads to consequences. Once one understands the nature of the dysfunctional thoughts, it becomes much easier to identify what’s going on in the real world by breaking down events with the teefak model. As Cognitive Therapy teaches, it is necessary to get some separation from the internal events—the T and the F—before we act because there’s a pretty good chance our thoughts and feelings could be wrong.

One of the most important things to do in the early phases of getting your anxiety, worry, and fear under control is to become very familiar with this teefak model. Taking time out each day and noticing what your specific and individual thoughts and feelings are is vitally important, as you cannot change what you are not aware of. The beauty of this brief, conceptual model, is that it is easily remembered and can be used in the moment. “What am I thinking right now and how is it making me feel?” is a good question to ask yourself. Really key in on the internal dialogue and notice what you say to yourself. The nature of this internal discussion is your thoughts, it creates feelings, compelling you to act in specific ways.

Writing these feelings down on paper and looking at them in your own handwriting can be an eye-opener. In the early phases of skill development, use the teefak formula in the moment to notice how your thoughts are impacting your feelings and a written inventory, at the end of the day, where you take a look at specific moments can create valuable insight. Noticing what’s going on is the beginning of change. Remember, we are working on skill development and to keep any tool sharp it has to be used regularly.

## Your Body On Anxiety : More Basics

“It’s a strange thing, but when you are dreading the thought of something, and would give anything to slow down time, it has a disobliging habit of speeding up.”-J. K. Rowling

Anxiety is a psychological, physiological, and behavioral state induced in the human animal by a perceived threat to our well-being or survival. It is characterized by increased arousal, expectancy, and specific patterns of behavior designed to increase our ability to cope with adversity and the unexpected. In Chapter 1 we discussed the differences between the emotions of anxiety, fear, and worry, but for our purposes, we are going to group our physiological responses into one label, anxiety. While I could go on for this entire chapter on the scientific jargon, there’s no need to. If you’re reading this book, or you are a human being, you know what it feels like. That feeling of impending doom is probably all too familiar.

Anxiety is a perceptual experience bringing together mind and body in the worst possible way. We have a thought, which triggers a feeling that we perceive throughout our entire physical being. In some cases, our body’s response to this thought is so visceral that we can’t help but think that the thoughts are real. Our fight, flight, or freeze response is triggered, our sympathetic nervous system kicks into overdrive, releasing a host of stress hormones such as cortisol, and our body responds with physical reactions such as:

Dry mouth

Difficulty swallowing

Increased heartbeat

Profuse sweating

Poor concentration  
Nausea  
Shortness of breath  
Trembling

Most people first get diagnosed with an anxiety disorder after presenting themselves at an emergency room of a hospital. They go there believing that they are having a heart attack. After being told that they have “just a little anxiety,” they are usually given a prescription for a benzodiazepine such as Valium, Ativan, or some other medication. They often remain unconvinced that their anxiety was not some kind of cardiac event. The medication, if they decided to use it, works well in the short term, but does not address the underlying psychology and physiology of the patient. These physiological sensations, left unbridled, serve the opposite of their intended purpose. If not controlled, and controlled quickly, they prevent us from taking appropriate action.

If the anxiety is not dealt with or controlled, over time, these feelings can lead to:

Muscle tension  
Digestive disorders  
Immune system suppression  
Coronary disease  
Short term memory loss

These physiological systems are profoundly influenced by your unique psychology and coping style. It is not the outside stressors that are causing this response, it is the way that you control your thoughts and feelings that determine the degree to which you experienced these symptomatic responses. Chapter 2 addressed basic training for the mind. This chapter will address basic training for your body.

“Anxiety cannot exist in the present moment.”- Rene Bastarache

Much has been written in the field of counseling psychology in the past 20 years about mindfulness-based practices to improve mental health. Mindfulness has been defined as the intentional, accepting and

non-judgmental focus of one's attention on the emotions, thoughts, and sensations of the present moment. Mindfulness-based practices are being employed by health practitioners from a variety of disciplines to alleviate all kinds of mental and physical conditions with positive effects. It originates in the ancient practices of Buddhism, Zen, and contemplative religion. It can be spiritual, but doesn't have to be. All aspects of mindfulness based practices are designed to bring one into the present moment, where emotional states such as anxiety, fear, and worry cannot exist. Before you go on to the next paragraph, ponder that quote one more time, "*Anxiety cannot exist in the present moment.*"

The goal of this chapter, and in fact this entire book, is to allow you to learn to cope with anxiety, fear, and worry. Accepting these feelings, and learning to function and function well, despite them, is the only realistic goal. These feelings will never go away entirely, nor should they. Our goal is to learn skills to manage these emotions, keeping them at a level where we can continue to function effectively. Some of these skills will be used in the moment, when the disturbing emotions and feelings are an immediate threat, other skills will be practiced on an ongoing basis whether they are needed or not at that time. We are training our minds and bodies to be better equipped to cope with anxiety when it strikes.



## Mindbody Chill : Creating The Relaxation Response

Thus far in this book we have been examining anxiety, fear, and worry from a cognitive and physiological perspective. In this chapter we are going to begin to help you develop skills to cope with these emotions that combine body and mind into an efficient unit. You will learn ways to elicit states of calm, relaxation, and more rational thought.

The seminal book on relaxation, and the grandfather of all research in mind-body medicine, was “The Relaxation Response,” written in 1975 by Herbert Benson, a physician at Harvard University, and his co-author Miriam Klipper. The research was in response to the overwhelming popularity of transcendental meditation during the late 1960s and 1970s. In the book, Benson demystified meditation and presented the benefits of the practice for the masses. He found that the benefits that TM claimed were, in fact, true. He also found that the mysticism and spiritual connotations were not necessary to evoke what he called the relaxation response.

Benson teaches that there are four essential steps needed to create this response. They are:

1. A Quiet Environment—A place with as few distractions as possible is best. A quiet room, place of worship, or place in nature is best. Anyplace where you can focus is suitable.
2. A Mental Device—There needs to be an internal point of focus, a sound, word, or phrase that is repeated. Some like to fix their gaze on an external object. An awareness of your breathing patterns is one of the easiest to start with, as it is readily available and always with you.

3. A Passive Attitude—When distracting thoughts arise, and they will, they are to be disregarded and attention should be returned to your point of focus. Do not fight these distracting thoughts, rather accept them and allow them to pass. Adopting a passive attitude is the single most important factor in eliciting the relaxation response. Distracting thoughts will occur, let them happen, but don't dwell on them allow them to pass as you return to whatever focal point you have chosen. Misconceptions about what meditation is leads most people to give up before they learn to develop the relaxation response. There may be no instant nirvana, blissful, psychedelic experience. You are simply learning to accept distractions and returned to a point of focus. These misconceptions are the number one reason that most people give up on their meditation practice.

4. A Comfortable Position—This is important to reduce muscular tension that may be a distraction. Your position can be anything where you are comfortable. A chair, lotus position, pillow, or whatever you choose. It's beneficial if your spine is relatively straight and your head, neck, and shoulders are in line with your spine. Lying down is okay, but has a tendency to induce a state of sleep. Eventually, you may use this relaxation response to induce a state of sleep, but for general practice it's best to remain awake.

It's important to realize that there is nothing necessarily mystical or spiritual about this relaxation response unless you choose to make it that way. Starting off with 10 minutes per day of a relaxing meditative practice will be our first goal. What you are doing is training your mind and body to develop a calmer, more relaxed attitude throughout the day. As stated in the previous chapter, anxiety cannot exist in the present moment. Beginning with 10 minutes per day, every day, and building to more time as you develop your skills, keeps you "in the now," and teaches you to create this state at will. This is an important part of mind-body wellness and maintenance. Make a commitment to give yourself 10 minutes of this practice per day and within the next 30 to 90 days you will notice the positive benefits.

You may choose any focal point that you wish. I myself am partial to an awareness of breath meditation because it is a focal point that

is always with you and learning to control breathing activates your parasympathetic nervous system, developing the sensation of being able to control your body. Think about it for a moment, when you experience panic your breathing accelerates, frightening you and affirming that something terrible is going to happen. By learning to control your breathing, you are teaching your mind that you are in control. Taking a deep breath activates the parasympathetic nervous system, allowing you to dial down the level of anxiety that you are experiencing. Breath control will become a skill that you use both in the moment as well as for maintenance.

Let's start with breath control. Find a comfortable position that you can remain in without bodily distraction. Allow your eyes and gaze to soften, try not to focus on anything in particular. Take a fairly deep breath in through the nose and exhale through the mouth. Don't force this, just take in a substantial amount of air, and exhale. Just make it deep enough so that it would be audible to someone sitting next to you. After a few breaths, when you are ready, allow the eyes to slowly close and allow yourself to become aware of your bodily sensations—the weight of your body against the chair or floor, your feet on the ground, your arms and hands resting on your lap or legs. Take a moment to notice how your body feels during a brief scan of your body from head to toe. Notice where you feel comfort as well as discomfort. Accept these feelings and move on to the next part of your body. Don't try to change them, notice them and move on.

Begin to notice your breathing as it returns to its own, preferred rhythm. Don't try to force it or change it, allow it to do what it wants. Notice its rhythmic pattern, steady in and out. Don't force, allow and notice it. When you feel that your breathing is in your state of awareness, begin to count your breaths. Count in with the inhale, "one," and out with the exhale, "two," and with the inhale, "three," and out with the exhale, "four." Continue in a slow, relaxed manner to 10 breaths and begin the count over again at one.

If you become distracted, and your mind wanders, allow your focus to return to the breath. This distraction and returning to the breath

is not only to be expected, but is a good thing, as it creates the ability to accept. Any time you become distracted, take notice of the distraction and go back to your breathing. Should you lose count, no problem, return to one, relaxing and allowing the slow, gentle rhythm of breathing in and allowing the exhale. When you feel more capable and able to relax the counting will become unnecessary. Allow yourself to drift into a relaxed state of inhaling and exhaling, enjoying the sensations of relaxation that you experience.

Initially, I suggest you set a timer for 10 minutes. When the timer sounds don't jump up, rather open your eyes, allow the mind to adjust, and give the body a relaxing stretch. While it is vitally important that you set aside at least 10 minutes of uninterrupted time for this practice each day, you certainly are welcome to do more if you desire. You may also want to also do a second session in the evening to prepare yourself for sleep by practicing the exercise in bed with the goal of being to drift off into sleep at some point during the exercise. It is also very helpful to take breaks throughout the day where you practice deep, relaxing breaths.

Another method of eliciting a state of deep relaxation is called Progressive Relaxation. Part of being anxious and tense is holding muscle tension in the body. Progressive relaxation is a way of eliciting the relaxation response by utilize this tension as a biofeedback device. When a person is under stress, their muscles automatically carry more tension than necessary, often causing pain and fatigue. This sets up a feedback loop where the mind interprets this discomfort as evidence that anxiety, fears, and worries are real. After you tense and relax a muscle, the tension level returns to a level that is below the original level of tension. This contrast produces a level of relaxation that is pleasurable and enjoyable, creating the relaxation response.

Progressive relaxation works very well for people who engage in vigorous, physical exercise or work. It can also be used to speed up recovery from hard physical activity, help with muscle soreness, and produce a relaxing "body buzz" in a healthy, drug free, manner. Here is how to get started:

Find a comfortable position. Sitting or lying down makes no difference, don't fall asleep unless your goal is to sleep.

Loosen your clothing, belt and shoes. Glasses and contact lenses should be removed.

Eyes can be open or shut, your choice. Most find the exercise more relaxing with eyes closed.

During the exercise, you will tense muscle groups beyond their normal levels of tension. A three count is generally sufficient. Do not tense the muscles to the point of pain. Simply focus on how the tension feels, let the tension go, and focus on the contrasting sensations of relaxation.

Breathe deeply and regularly throughout the exercise. If your breathing is not relaxed you will not be able to relax your muscles.

Hold all contractions for a three count, relax, noticing the contrasting feeling.

Begin by tensing the muscles in your feet by pulling your toes up towards your knees.

Contract the muscles of the calves and lower legs.

Contract the muscles on the front of your thighs.

Tense the buttocks muscles, squeezing them tightly together.

Inhale, attempting to press your navel to your spine, sucking in your stomach.

Tense the pectoral muscles of the chest.

Tense the muscles of the upper back by attempting to touch your shoulder blades together.

Ball your fists, tightening the muscles of your lower and upper arms.

Pull your chin down, attempting to place it on your upper chest.

Contract your shoulders by attempting to raise your shoulders, pulling them up towards your ears.

Tense the muscles of your jaw and neck by gently touching your teeth together and stretching your cheek muscles out vertically.

Upon completion, remain still, noticing the sensations and the slowness of your breathing.

During the relaxation period following each contraction, you may find it helpful to say to yourself an associated word such as "relax," or "calm," or any word that you associate with being relaxed. This word

can become a trigger for this state of calmness that you can call upon during moments of anxiety, worry, and fear to elicit this relaxation response.

Both meditation and progressive relaxation have their place in your maintenance program, it's not necessary to choose one over the other, although you may have a preference. Use both, as they each have their place, depending upon what you are going through at a given time. Obviously, the meditation works more on your mind, and the progressive relaxation works more on your body.

Keep in mind that if you relax your mind, your body will relax. If you relax your body, your mind will relax. The relaxation response is a mind-body response designed to activate your parasympathetic nervous system, which allows you to relax and react more rationally to stressors.

It is important that you set aside time and develop a daily practice for these activities, however you should interject them into other parts of your day as well. For example, taking a few moments during the day to decompress by some deep breathing and brief meditation, or maybe doing some progressive relaxation for your neck, shoulders, and jaw when you feel tense at different times is a great idea. These exercises don't have to be a chore, you're working to make them part of your lifestyle, just like brushing your teeth, or taking a shower. It eventually will become just something that you do.

## Visualization: Seeing The Real You

In previous chapters, we have discussed the various ways that our thinking patterns play into our perceptions of anxiety, fear, and worry. There are various ways in which we think. We have discussed self talk and the role that it plays in the perception of anxiety and fear, but another way that humans “think” is through the use of visual images that we all carry inside of us. The perception of thinking is not only accompanied by words, but there are also visual images that flash inside our minds. Think about this for a second, what did the house that you grew up in look like? I’ll bet before words popped into your mind there was some kind of visual image that you then began to use words to describe. The reality of thinking is that we all have incredible capacity for visual recall. We also have great capability for visually predicting things that are going to happen to us. These visual recall and predicting tendencies play a huge role in our perceptions of anxiety, fear, and worry.

Scientific studies have consistently shown that the human brain cannot distinguish between that which is real and that which is imagined. Our brains have the ability to experience fantasized events with the same intensity as those that we are actually experiencing. Don’t believe me? Think about this for a moment, what happens before you go into an anxiety provoking event? Let’s say, for example, that you are giving a speech in an auditorium of 1000 people. Before the event your brain contributes to your anxiety when it creates a picture of you standing at that podium, stuttering, fumbling your notes, sweating, and turning beet red. As you picture the event in your mind, your body responds with physiological sensations that confirm your fears even before you

even set foot on that podium. If you look at this speech, in your mind, for days before and allow this frightening image to take life, you are bound to fail. The reason? You have literally practiced and rehearsed how you are going to fail. This negative mental rehearsal creates an association, neural pathways, and habits that you will be unable to change during the actual speech.

Sports psychology and sports hypnosis have long been in the forefront of human performance. Successful athletes tend to visualize, in their minds eye, how they intend to perform. In some sports, visualization is part of the practice and is built into the training. Martial arts, such as karate, use visualization as part of the practice. Karate Ka engage in solo training where they learn to move gracefully through space, visualizing defeating multiple opponents. Golfers line up their putts, visualizing the ball rolling into the cup. Basketball players visualize the ball swishing through the net while standing at the foul line. If you have participated in sports, I'm sure you can think of a few that you used yourself to set yourself up for a successful performance. These practices work because your mind accepts these practice events as being real. Bringing this attitude and practice to other life events, besides athletics, works equally well. Mentally planning a successful speech makes it far more likely that your talk in that auditorium is going to go well.

Visualization is something that successful people do instinctively. Others may have to learn to develop this valuable skill. When accompanied by positive self talk, visualization builds self-confidence, self efficacy, and goes a long way towards eliminating anxiety and fear. It allows the reinforcing of skills that you can literally hardwire into your brain patterns, creating new ways to handle situations that previously caused you great distress. This mental rehearsal must become part of your daily practice and should be used as often as possible to set yourself up for success. Use this to prepare for as many things as possible and positive changes will begin to occur.

Visualization and positive mental rehearsal is best done when some basic principles are understood. First and foremost is: THE MIND

AND BODY CANNOT DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THAT WHICH IS IMAGINED VIVIDLY AND THAT WHICH IS REAL.

This principle is so important to keep in mind it merits capital letters. If you “see” in your mind yourself failing, then it is likely that you will. Don’t allow failure to be part of your visualization! If you can visualize failure, then you can just as easily visualize success!

Mental rehearsal should be performed in both formal sessions as well as in spontaneous sessions throughout your day. For formal sessions the following strategies should be used:

1. Find a quiet place, free of distraction. If you have been using a particular place for your daily meditation practice successfully, then that place is probably perfect. You may want to build into your meditation practice some mental rehearsal.
2. Begin your visualization session as you do your meditation, breathing slowly, allow the mind to relax and settle.
3. Visualize yourself as if you were on a movie screen successfully performing your chosen task. See yourself performing the task effortlessly and flawlessly. Detach yourself from the picture, and view it without emotions. Try to make it as vivid as possible by the same methods that a movie director would use, adjust the lighting, color, sounds, etc.
4. After visualizing this movie from the outside, getting comfortable with the visual image, go inside the main character and begin to view the events from the inside and out. You have stepped into the main character and are now performing flawlessly.
5. All of this activity must be performed in the present, as if it was literally happening at that moment, in real time. Self talk, if it accompanies this exercise, must be in the present tense and in the first person.. Don’t say to yourself, “I will,” rather say “I am, I’m doing, and I did.” This is incredibly important, as it sets the stage for future, real-time, performance. Your mind accepts that you can do the anticipated task because it thinks you already have.
6. Make this fun. It’s a creative exercise, designed to make you comfortable with the feelings of success. The more vivid the exercise, the greater the comfort level with new behaviors and a new you.

As I said before, this mental rehearsal practice can be built into part of your daily meditation or it can be a separate activity. Brief, and even momentary visualization practice at random times throughout the day builds confidence. Before bedtime, as you are drifting off to sleep, is also a great time to do this activity as a tired mind is less self-critical.

Successful people in all walks of life tend to engage in greater amounts of positive visualization. They do not experience as much anxiety, fear, and worry as others because of this. They literally cannot “see” the disturbing events happening and therefore are able to cope realistically. This chapter is merely about your consciously striving to develop this same ability.

## Learning To SIT With Your Feelings

The paradoxical thing about coping with anxiety, fear, and worry is that the feelings are hard to extinguish and the harder that you try to eliminate them, the more resistant these feelings are. The challenge, especially in the early phases of learning to cope with them, is to accept that they will not be going away anytime soon. The goal is to feel the anxiety and continue to function anyway, developing a distress tolerance that eventually leads to mastery and control of the disturbing emotions.

Dr. Donald Meichenbaum, a pioneering psychologist in the field of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, has developed an approach to coping with stress, anxiety, and fears that, while not an instant fix, works extremely well in developing an individual's coping skills. He calls his approach Stress Inoculation Therapy, or SIT. Don't worry, no needles or shots are involved, just a willingness to get out of your comfort zone and learn to be comfortable there.

SIT is a type of psychotherapy intended to prepare clients in advance to handle stressful events with a minimum of upset. SIT is based on the idea that low levels of exposure to stress builds a tolerance and an ability to cope over time. These exposures to stressors are analogous to being inoculated as we are for prevention of physical ailments such as measles, mumps, or other diseases. While SIT does not pretend to make us immune to stress, it is designed to help us function with less distress and more efficiently when facing life's difficulties.

Stress inoculation has three components:

1. The initial conceptualization phase, where the therapist educates the

client about the general nature of stress, fear, and anxiety. The therapist also helps the client identify their own, unique stressors, and habitual ways of appraising and evaluating those stressors.

How does the client speak to themselves? What is the internal dialogue that surrounds the stressful event? Does this dialogue help or hurt the situation? How does the client's body respond? How does the client breathe, sit, stand?

The goal of this stage is to educate the client as much as possible about the nature of stress in general, as well as their own unique responses to it. Reviewing the first three chapters of this book provides some of the same information that a cognitive behavioral therapist would give to a client. Review these chapters as needed, becoming familiar with the nature of anxiety and the role that your thoughts and behaviors play in exacerbating the problem.

2. Skills acquisition and rehearsal is the second phase. In this phase the therapist helps the client develop positive coping skills to address the stressors, with the goal being "getting comfortable with being uncomfortable." The therapist and client work to utilize the client's unique resiliency factors. New ways of viewing and processing the stressors are explored. Clients focus on controlling their physiological responses through breath control and relaxation, as well as their internal dialogue. Negative self talk is replaced with a more positive, realistic, internal appraisal.

Some of this work is done in session, as the therapist discusses events that are disturbing to the client, and the client experiments with coping skills in the safety of the therapy room. Clients then practice these skills in the real world, returning to the therapy room to process what worked and what did not. The process is repeated, usually over the course of 8 to 15 weeks, while the client becomes "inoculated" through repeated, low level exposures. You can utilize some of the relaxation techniques from chapter 4 and visualization techniques from chapter 5 as a way to increase your resiliency.

3. Application and follow through is the final phase. In this stage the therapist looks to find opportunities for the client to develop even

more skills by intensifying the experience. A variety of simulation methods are used to increase realism such as visualization, modeling, vicarious learning, role-play, and repetitive behavioral skills. These are done until the skills are not merely learned, but over learned, making success second nature. As a self-help exercise, you can use these skills both in real time and in mental rehearsal “practice sessions,” where you visualize and imagine the anxiety provoking event and cope with the feelings through utilizing skills, practicing positive self talk, the relaxation response, and positive visualization. These skills should be done as often as possible.

To help grasp these concepts, think about what it was like when you learned to drive an automobile. Remember the initial anxiety, fears, hopes, and anticipation that went along with your first episode behind the wheel of a car? Over time, you went through these three stages to the point where you are now. You have probably overlearned what it takes to drive an automobile. If you are a typical driver, you probably do much of your daily commute on autopilot with your physical body driving the car, while your mind is somewhere else.

Stress Inoculation Therapy has been shown to be useful in treating all types of anxiety, irrational fear, and anticipatory stress. It is systematic and relatively permanent, as it accelerates the way in which we normally learn. The exposures, and tolerance of it, are a type of learning, controlled by a collaborative effort of therapist and client. The focus is placed on the behavior and progress, rather than the reasons the negative emotions exist. The goal of the treatment is to create behavioral change.

Stress Inoculation Therapy works particularly well for anticipatory anxiety that can result from future events such as delivering a speech, flying on an airplane, a job interview, or any upcoming event where your imagination can run wild. Breaking the event down into small tasks, and learning to cope using skills, can give you confidence to handle the situation when it actually occurs. For example, if going on an airplane flight is the anxiety provoking event, break it down into manageable bits. Practice, in your mind, what it will be like to drive to

the airport. Learn to vividly imagine that drive and use skills to master that particular part of the event. Next you would practice being able to cope with being in the airport and boarding the plane. You would follow with imagining the take off and flight itself, using positive self talk, relaxation techniques, and deep breathing. Finally, you would do the same for the landing and the exit from the plane.

Donald Meichenbaum's Stress Inoculation Therapy, while best done with a trained psychotherapist, can be used by anyone as self-help. Sitting down with a notebook, and making a careful study of your own unique stressors, and responses to them, is a great way to start. Some key points to remember if you are using SIT for self-help are:

1. Get comfortable with being uncomfortable. This paradoxical statement is critical to remember. Over time your comfort level, or "distress tolerance," will rise.
2. The stress will not, and may never, go away entirely. The goal is to increase your ability to function and remain comfortable in the face of the stressful event.
3. This is a process, not an event. While you may see some results immediately, to fully over learned these skills can take 3 to 4 months. The coping skills you develop, however, are likely to be more permanent and long-lasting than any you would get from medication alone.
4. Recording progress is extremely helpful, as you are doing this as a self-help strategy and need the feedback to monitor progress. A notebook dedicated to this, and daily practice will be required. As stated previously, this will take time, but it will be worth it.

Remember and accept that these feelings will continue to exist, although at a diminished and manageable level. Learning to SIT with these disturbing emotions will dramatically change your life.

## Becoming AWARE

If you've been implementing the coping strategies offered in this book thus far, you probably made some progress. By now, you may have noticed a greater ability to relax, developed some insight into your negative thought patterns, and have a greater sense of what goes on with you when anxiety, fear, or worry sets in. When it does set in, and it will, the goal will be to control it and continue to function anyway. As we learned in chapter 1, these feelings are necessary for survival and are part of the human experience. In this chapter we will learn a strategy that will combine many of the skills that, hopefully, by now you are beginning to develop and become comfortable with.

This strategy is called AWARE, an acronym which stands for Accept, Watch, Act, Repeat, and Expect. The strategy is highly useful because it is simple to remember, follows a logical sequence, and uses skills that are beginning to become a part of your lifestyle and personal wellness program. It's not a skill that you wait to practice, as the relaxation and mindfulness techniques are something that you are doing daily. This strategy allows you to attack anxiety using strengths and resiliency factors that you have developed. Utilizing this technique allows you to go from the victim to attacker, and prey to predator in your war on anxiety.

Let's break AWARE into its parts:

A= Accept

Accept that "it" is happening, calmly noticing and accepting the feeling. Be aware that fighting it with the goal of stopping it is an exercise in futility. Were not going to KO these feelings, our goal is to control them, make them smaller, dial them down, tie them up, or any

other metaphor that you can think of. Keeping these initial feelings at a manageable level is important as acceptance of the feeling leads to an ability to control it. Panic usually means that the feeling will eventually control you. Remind yourself that you have a plan for this feeling and you are ready for it. Some find it useful to engage in positive self talk immediately, reminding themselves of their ability to cope. In this, and in all of the AWARE steps, it's important to remember to BREATHE!

#### W= Watch

Watch your reactions, not with a sense of fear, but with one of curiosity. What am I feeling here? Where, in my body, am my feeling it? What am I saying to myself about this? At this point it's helpful to rate your level of anxiety, using a 1 to 10 scale. Ask yourself, "On a scale of 1 to 10, how anxious, fearful, or worried am I right now?"

Watching is very important because it allows you to see the situation, and experience your emotions, from an outside perspective. This develops a type of rational detachment from the experience, allowing you for more options and more productive responses. Defusing the emotional reactivity to outside triggers is the goal of the Watch stage. Remember, you are not your anxiety, fear, or worry. These feelings are merely your interpretation of a series of events going on in your external world.

#### A = Act

In the Act stage you'll begin to take control of the situation. You've gone from prey to predator and you are on the attack, using your skills to develop a feeling of control. The first step in each of the stages is to remember to BREATHE. Control of the breath creates a positive feedback loop between body and the brain. This allows for a feeling of control and leads to more productive thoughts and a more clear course of action. Bringing your breath under control is something that you've been working on every day. Remind yourself that you know how to breathe correctly, you've been doing it your entire life, and it's impossible to stop breathing. If you need extra control, focus exclusively on your breathing and slowly and gently breathe in on a seven count and exhale on an 11 count. Breathe slowly, with a sense of control, focusing on nothing but your breathing. Remember, your

breath is the ultimate biofeedback device, grounding you and bringing you feelings of safety and calm. If you get confused with the breathing, just remember to breathe in slowly, and exhale a little more vigorously. Be careful not to hyperventilate, slow and steady is the way to go.

Once you remember to breathe, the next step is to “dial down” your level of tension. By now you’ve given these feelings a 1 to 10 rating. If your initial assessment was a 10, calmly attempt to dial it down to a manageable level. Keep coming back to this step to assess how you’re doing. Use the 1 to 10 check in to maintain your curiosity and assess what’s working.

Check-in with your self talk. What am I saying to myself right now? Is there a more realistic and helpful way that I can mentally assess what’s going on here? How do I know my feelings are true? Are they true, or merely my interpretation? Is there another more positive interpretation that I’m missing? You get the idea.

Assess your behavior. Breathing slowly, with a sense of control, is the most important behavior to monitor. **CONTROLLED BREATHING!** If the situation calls for bold physical behavior, then do it, even if it feels staged or like you are acting. Your physical body, continuing to function, sends a powerful, reassuring message to your brain that you are in control of the situation. Your mind and body are now beginning to function in a positive feedback loop, where body is reassuring mind and vice versa. If necessary, fake it till you make it!

R = Repeat

Repeat skills thoughtfully and calmly, allowing your anxiety levels to drop. They may drop slowly or quickly, but they will drop down to manageable levels. Give your skills time to work, and assess your anxiety level periodically on the 1 to 10 scale. Remember to get curious about the anxiety, as doing so creates the perception that it is something outside of you.

Oh, in case I forgot to mention it, remember to **BREATHE** slowly, calmly, and steadily. Remember, it’s the combination of breath control, positive self talk and visualization, and assessment of anxiety levels that

create the positive feedback loop between mind and body that allows you to get control of how you are interpreting the triggering events.

E = Expect

Expect throughout this process that you will succeed. Expectation bias is a huge factor in any human endeavor. We get what we expect in most cases. The combination of practiced skills and positive expectation is unbeatable.

Why shouldn't you expect good results? After all, you've practiced the skills, you've used them in real time for all kinds of anxieties, both large and small, and your distress tolerance levels have gone up accordingly. You've made initiating of the relaxation response a part of your lifestyle.

And don't forget, every time you go through this process you get a little stronger, making the next anxiety provoking event a little easier to handle.

## Getting Out Of Your Head

” Get out of your head, and into your body.”-the author

Get out of your head and into your body is advice that I often give clients suffering from severe forms of anxiety. The intention behind this statement is to get my client to distract themselves from the whirlwind of disturbing thoughts in their head and to ground them to something more permanent and solid. It makes use of a survival instinct that all of us are born with. Finding some ways to connect your body with the physical environment literally “grounds” you, allowing your rational mind to have a base of operations for the skills that you have developed in your battle against anxiety.

Have you ever been riding in an elevator and been startled by its sudden movement? I’m sure you have. And I’m also pretty sure that your reaction was to reach out, grab onto something, and say to yourself or out loud, “Whoa!” No, I’m not clairvoyant. Just merely aware of a naturally occurring human reaction that occurs when we feel out of control.

Such an attempt is called grounding. Grounding is the tendency in humans to attempt to slow things down and regain control when we feel we are “losing it.” Losing it can mean any of a variety of different things. In that elevator moment, our immediate, classically conditioned response, is that we are falling, and the splaying out of the arms and hands is our natural way of regaining control or “getting grounded.” It is the first and most primal survival mechanism that a human being has. It’s a defense against the one fear that all humans have at birth, the fear of falling. It is one of the ways that doctors check the neurological

responses of an infant moments after birth. We do this when we feel out of control physically, mentally, or emotionally. Some ways that we attempt to do this are healthy. Many are not so healthy.

A lot of the not so healthy ways we attempt to get grounded are subtle and take a while for the damage to be noticed. Anything that takes us out of the moment and avoids feelings is potentially damaging and unhealthy. Substance abuse, overeating, anger, physical reactions such as hitting or punching things, are all good examples of unhealthy ways to attempt grounding and regaining control. An extreme example of maladaptive grounding attempts is self injurious behavior such as cutting one's self. Self injurious behaviors make the chaotic outside world stop briefly while the person remains focused only on the physical pain. The insidious thing about most maladaptive grounding attempts is that they feel pretty good and as a result become pretty reinforcing. Immediately reinforcing feelings and events tend to be repeated and are hard to correct because they work right away and bring instant, but temporary results.

Grounding techniques can be helpful when we feel a sense of overwhelm. Figuring out what we need to do to feel grounded safely is the challenge. Even if you think you don't use grounding techniques, the reality is that you do. Figuring out the healthy versus the unhealthy is step one. The next step is making a conscious effort to use appropriate grounding techniques whenever needed. All grounding attempts are rooted in the human need for control. Using these skills regularly can instill a sense of control, mastery of our environment, and a greater awareness of what's going on inside us.

Thus far, we have discussed breathing, meditation, and a cognitive strategies as a means of grounding us during times of distress. These are hopefully, by now, part of your daily wellness program. In addition to these life enhancing practices, I'd like you to add some form of daily exercise. It doesn't have to be anything strenuous or tedious. Exercise has been proven to be one of the best medicines that one can take to develop subjective sense of control over the self, the environment, and

one's physical and emotional state. And, side effects are minimal and mostly positive.

Here is a list of some of the positive “side effects” of proper exercise:

1. Stress reduction—As little as 15 minutes 1 to 2 times a day can increase production of norepinephrine, a chemical that can moderate the brain's response to stress and anxiety.
2. Positive brain function—Exercise induces endorphins and other brain chemicals that create positive feelings and alleviate symptoms of anxiety. Exercise has been shown to be as effective as antidepressants in the treatment of mild to moderate depression.
3. Improved self-esteem—More positive feelings about our bodies has a direct correlation on our self-esteem. Looking better = feeling better about ourselves.
4. Prevents cognitive decline—Declining mental capacity is a natural byproduct of aging. Studies show that exercise, particularly those that use mind and body such as yoga, tai chi, martial arts, and dance, have the ability to prevent cognitive decline and actually generate new neural pathways in people of any age.
5. Reduce anxiety—Periodic bouts of mild to moderate exercise improve the body's ability to calm itself down. A fit body returns to a state of relaxation quicker than an unfit body. The mind becomes trained to calm down as well, right along with it.
6. Improve brain capacity—Exercise increases blood flow throughout the body and a brain well-nourished by blood flow makes decisions and thinks more rationally and clearly.
7. Controls addiction—The brain releases dopamine in response to any form of pleasure whether it be from food, drugs, sex, gambling, or alcohol. People suffering with anxiety benefit from improved sleep, decreased stress, improved concentration, and the ability to produce

good feelings naturally and healthfully. It can counter the tendency of people suffering from anxiety to gravitate towards negative behaviors.

8. Improved sleep-Exercise improves the body's ability to relax both physically and mentally creating conditions more conducive to a healthy night's sleep. The link between anxiety, worry and deficient sleep is well known.

9. Increased productivity-Regular exercise is conducive to a regular schedule and those who stick with exercise tend to be more productive throughout the day, a key factor in the control of anxiety and worry.

10. Improved creativity-Moderate exercise has been proven to increase creativity for up to two hours after the exercise session ends. The daily "constitutional" has been a staple for great thinkers throughout human history.

The best mind-body practices are those that combine physical and mental activity in a time altering way. Stretching is a grounding strategy that can help one get more deeply into their physical being. Doing so is beneficial, as it gets the outside world to stop briefly, allowing one to go inside the body and to notice where one is physically at that moment. Stress can be physical, but anxiety is always mental and emotional. Going inside and noticing the physical world allows the emotional world to stop for a moment and take a brief timeout. This "emotional recess" creates a distance between our physicality and our internal world of emotion. Since anxiety is an emotional state, then the benefit is that anxiety stops. I often find that clients respond very well when I tell them to do something that gets them out of their negative thinking. Any mind-body activity can help. "Get out of your head and into your body," is good advice to combat anxiety and should be something that becomes part of your daily routine.

The type of exercise that you select is entirely up to you and your unique, personal preferences. It can range anywhere from powerlifting to ballet class, what you select is not as important as that you select something that you find grounding and will do on a regular basis.

Doing something daily is preferable, regardless of your exercise choice. Squeezing a brief walk or stretch, every day, between bouts of your preferred exercise, will enable you to maintain your daily practice of mind-body medicine. Just be sure to do something daily that can enhance your physical and emotional well being.

How can this information be used effectively to create and maintain positive benefits? Many are initially unable to perform certain forms of exercise that may be required to tap into your natural grounding skills. Running and strenuous forms of activity are not the only way to obtain this state of control. Aerobics, zumba, dance, biking, or a good old-fashioned stroll in the park, all have the same ability. If you have pre-existing injuries, you may have to get a little creative with what you can do. For example, a hip replacement person may be able to use an exercise bike, a knee injury person may be able to do aerobics etc. If you have cable TV, there are probably exercise channels freely available to you that you can watch and exercise along with. You Tube has literally thousands of videos on various types of exercise. There's something out there that will suit your personality.

We as humans are genetically wired to enjoy exercise, we just need to tap into this naturally grounding experience on a regular basis in order to experience the positive benefits that it can have on anxiety. While the physical benefits of exercise can take quite a while to materialize, studies show that positive mental health benefits can occur in as little as five minutes. Make some form of mind-body exercise part of your daily wellness program.



## Social Anxiety : Who Do They Think They Are?

Social anxiety disorder, or as it's known in the medical community, social phobia, is one of the most common anxiety problems that people face. It effects 12% of American adults at some point during their lifetime. It is characterized by an excessive and unreasonable fear of social situations. The anxiety feelings are accompanied by self-consciousness and fears of being harshly judged by others, criticism, looking foolish, humiliation, and committing some sort of grievous social mistake. 50% of people with social anxiety disorder have develop it by age 11, and 80% of those suffering with it have developed it by age 20, which means that most suffering from the disorder are lacking in social skills that are needed to navigate social situations in the first place.

Rather than go into details on what social anxiety feels like, I'll refer you back to chapters 1 and 2. You're probably all too familiar with how it feels anyway. The statistics in the first paragraph are merely the tip of the iceberg. Even those who do not meet the full criteria for social anxiety disorder will probably face situations during their lifetime that meet, at least partially and in certain social situations, the diagnostic criteria. I'm not a big fan of diagnostic criteria, and neither should you be. Our goal is to recognize these symptoms when they occur, view them more realistically, sweep them aside, and continue to function anyway.

By now you should be well along your way to developing a skill set that you are utilizing to not only improve your coping skills for

anxiety, fear, and worry, but also your emotional and physical wellness. You learned in chapter 4 how to create the Relaxation Response, in chapter 5, how to program yourself through positive visualization, in chapter 6, how to SIT with disturbing emotions, and in chapter 7 you became more AWARE of what is actually going on in those moments when you experience anxiety. In each chapter you have learned how to speak more rationally to yourself, utilizing the (T+F)+A=C model, “TEEFAK,” where you recognize the role that your thoughts and feelings play in how you respond emotionally. These skills are analogous to a cafeteria of tools that you will use in your fight against anxiety. You don’t have to eat all of them, but you do need to eat enough for nourishment. Pick the skills that work FOR YOU! There is no “miracle” skill. The best skills are those that work FOR YOU!

When faced with triggering social situations, we don’t always have the ability to literally walk away from them, as much as we’d often like to. Gaining some separation from our thinking is the first goal. Notice your thoughts. For example, instead of having the thought that, “I am really anxious,” it’s far more helpful to say to yourself, “I’m having the thought that I am anxious,” or “I am thinking that I am anxious.” At this point it’s important to BREATHE and assess the situation. Use the teefak model. What am I saying to myself right now? Can I talk about this to myself differently? Question your thinking both before the triggering social event and during.

Visualization is useful before social events. As part of your daily meditation practice, you should set aside a few minutes each day to positively visualize the social situations that cause your anxiety. Review the visualization skills in chapter 5. View the situation as if you are experiencing it in real time. Remember that this is “practice,” and your mind and body cannot distinguish it from the real thing.

Perhaps the most beneficial strategy for social anxiety provoking situations is to get curious, not about you, but about the situation. In chapter 8 we talked about getting out of your head and into your body. In this chapter, I’d encourage you to get out of your head and into

the situation that is causing the anxiety. Observe the situation from the outside, from a third person perspective. Don't use any self talk where you think the words I or me. The goal of this strategy is to observe the situation from the perspective of an outsider, as if it were happening to someone else, not you.

Part of this Observer strategy is to focus on other people. Social anxiety, by definition, is a fear of what "they" are thinking. As the Observer, become curious about "them." Don't ask yourself, "What are they thinking about me?" It's more productive to ask, "What do I think about them?" Turn the tables on them. Don't hesitate to be critical or judgmental of how they look, speak, or act. It's okay in this context. Don't be afraid to focus in on their faults. For example, noticing that your anxiety provoking mother-in-law is overweight and ugly, that your domineering boss has a huge nose and looks like Porky Pig, or that a frightening male co-worker has the voice of a teenage girl, may allow you to view the situation just a little bit differently. Internal humor, at the expense of those who are causing your anxiety, is appropriate. These are your thoughts, no one needs to know about them, and changing your thoughts changes the experience for you. Many of you may have heard the advice when giving a public speech to "picture the audience sitting there in their underwear." Try this next time you're going into anxiety mode before a social event. You'll be surprised at the subtle shift in your emotional response. Just be careful not to laugh out loud!

If your social situation is of a future event, plan for it in advance. For example, if you're anxious over having to give the toast because you're the best man at your friend's wedding, then the good news is you've got plenty of time to plan. On that day, you will be ready because you've mentally rehearsed, visualized, and role played physical behaviors that allow you to confidently stride to that podium, picture everyone in their underwear, and then hit it out of the park!

An underutilized technique to combat social anxiety is appropriate use of body language. As much as 93% of human communication is nonverbal and transmitted through body language. The way you sit,

stand, walk, and move sends out a message in any social situation. If your body language is confident, then people respond differently to you and you will feel differently about your interactions with them. Confident body language puts them in a subconscious, defensive mindset. It also puts you in a subconscious position of power. In your practice of visualization, see yourself moving and feeling confident physically. If possible, role-play the physical actions that you would like to make in this anxiety provoking social situation. Changing your physiology is one of the most effective and fastest ways to change your psychology. "Fake it till you make it," is very similar to the advice of Aristotle that to be virtuous, one must act as a virtuous person would act.

Keep in mind that all the strategies discussed in previous chapters of skills are available for you to use in social situations. There is no single formula or skill that will work for everyone in every situation. Your task is to find out what works FOR YOU and practice these skills diligently.

Social anxiety is one of the most irrational internal experiences that someone can have. We enter a social situation where we worry about what "they" are thinking and then presume to know the answer. My suggestion is that you master some of the basic skills outlined in this book and attack your social anxiety head-on.

Your new thought will be, "Who do they think they are?"

## Worry : A Poor insurance Policy

Worry is probably the most toxic human emotion, a self inflicted wound that we give ourselves with all the best intentions. We rationalize to ourselves that it is helpful and the responsible thing to do. In reality, it does nothing for us, makes us sick, shortens our life, and robs us of enjoying the present moment, a type of insurance policy that comes with too high a price.

Why humans worry is both simple and foolish at the same time. We believe that it is necessary to our survival. Worry is closely related to fear and anxiety. It evolved as an emotion because of the human need to provide food, clothing, and shelter in the anticipation of the changing seasons and natural disasters that man faces from the environment. “Be prepared,” is ingrained in us as a mark of intelligence, maturity, and being responsible. While worry is good up to a point, it is very easy to cross the line from an appropriate level of anticipatory concern and preparation into the danger zone of toxic worry.

Studies of performance anxiety indicate that as anxiety increases, performance improves up to a point. Beyond that point, as anxiety continues to increase, performance declines. The anxiety increases even more, making performance even more inefficient. Most people have a hard time backing off from the anxiety and worry, believing that if they worry more that they will somehow be successful. Kind of like the “if it doesn’t work, then force it,” mentality.

Edward Hallowell, M.D., in his book “Worry,” states that our brains are equipped to register fear and worry more sensitively than other

emotions. We are also not naturally wired towards positive thinking, pleasure, happiness, or contentment. This is because as man evolved emotions associated with worry had priority as incentives for survival and were more essential than emotions associated with pleasure. Humans are complex hunter gatherers whose survival is dependent upon brain power and thought. The brain of modern man interprets all danger as physical and sets off alarms geared towards a physical response—fight or flight. We misinterpret many psychological signals as threats to our physical safety, and our nervous system creates chemicals that prepare us for physical action. We have fewer outlets to be physical in the modern world, so we sit in a chemical stew created by our brains that makes us suffer emotionally and physically.

Like most interactions that humans have with their environments, worry is associated with a unique internal dialogue that most of us engage in with little effort or awareness. What we say to ourselves appears very real because we create our reality. Anxiety, worry, and fear do not exist in the present. They are the anticipation of some kind of pain in the future. Because we focus on these emotions, we tend to get more of them, pulled toward these events like a moth to a flame. We also experience physical maladies as brain chemistry creates the fight or flight response and our body goes through a destructive physical burnout.

How do we cope with this? We can't live life without preparing for the future. How do we live a life that responsibly prepares for our future yet focuses on the present moment?

American theologian and author, Reinhold Niebuhr, wrote what has become known as The Serenity Prayer. Whether you are religious or not, and regardless of your spirituality, it provides a useful tool to cope with worry. The prayer goes:

“God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

Categorizing future events in columns marked What I can change, What I can't change, and What, in time, I might be able to change, is

a good starting point. Putting the objects of worry on paper tends to take a little bit of the steam out of worry. The exercise clarifies what's worth your concern, and most people worry less because it's on paper. There's less need to obsess because you can always pick up the piece of paper and refer to it as needed. Writing out solutions to things that you can change gives a sense of control, and noticing what you can't control creates a sense of acceptance.

Many find that having a “go to” set of coping thoughts also helps combat worry. I am not a big believer in affirmations unless they are accompanied by an action plan. Like the '60's song said, wishing and hoping isn't going to get it done, but controlling your thinking with more positive self talk can assist you in making better decisions. “Proper planning prevents piss poor performance,” is one that works. Another is WIN—what's important now? Pick some strategies that will work for you from the earlier chapters of this book. If you are a chronic worrier, writing for 15 to 30 minutes per day in this manner can save you hours of needless and counterproductive mental gymnastics and give you back some control and serenity.

Break the cycle of toxic worry by awareness of your patterns and habits, and selection of strategies that you are comfortable enough to use on a consistent basis.

“What, me worry?”—Alfred E. Neuman

You may never become Alfred E. Neuman, but you certainly can become more functional and capable of handling what life has in store for you.



## Phobias: Riding The Hierarchy of Fear

A phobia is a specific and irrational fear of an object or a situation where the victim goes to great lengths to avoid the source of the fear. The avoidance and fear are usually disproportionate to the actual threat. The word phobia is derived from the Greek word that means aversion, or morbid fear. While most people have specific things that they are fearful of, for example snakes, spiders, or heights, these fears usually don't disrupt their quality of life. Fears cross into the red zone of phobias when they create marked distress, disrupt the victims lives, and cause interference in social and occupational functioning. In chapter 9, we discussed some ways to combat social phobia, AKA social anxiety disorder. In chapter 6 we discussed the SIT strategy to develop distress tolerance. In this chapter you were going to take a look at a strategy to attack other types of phobias more specifically and in greater detail.

With many phobias, the most common method that people use to cope is simple avoidance. For example, if you have a fear of snakes then it may be as simple as avoiding the tall grass in the summer or turning off the channel when Discovery TV is running Reptile Week. If you have a fear of heights, then maybe you hire someone else to clean your gutters or avoid hanging out of second floor windows. Often coping with these kinds of phobias is pretty simple. Technically, fears like these aren't really phobias at all because they do not disrupt social or occupational functioning. Sometimes, however, life puts you in a situation where these kinds of fears begin to get in the way. Whether or not your fear crosses the line into phobic fear is irrelevant here. This chapter will give you a strategy to cope and keep the fear from disrupting your life.

In keeping with the spirit of Stress Inoculation Training, the goal of this strategy will be to get used to the fear, creating distress tolerance by adjusting to the fearful object or event. Don't worry, I'm not going to force you to hold snakes, sleep with spiders, or go rock climbing. I am going to ask you to slowly and methodically take 10 calculated and safe emotional risks. The strategy that we are going to use in is called the Hierarchy of Fears. Sounds like an amusement park ride, but don't worry, it's pretty harmless.

As an example, let's say that you have the fear of flying in an airplane. It's not quite a phobia, because it doesn't interrupt your life. You just make conscious decisions to not fly on airplanes. A close friend is getting married in a faraway state and the only logical way to get there is by plane. You desperately want to go, but now you have to make a choice, face your irrational fear of airplane flight or risk your friendship and suffer the pain of your inability to handle something that you know is irrational, but you find overwhelming. You also have over two months to make the decision.

You decide to go to the wedding. The challenge now becomes to break down that overwhelming fear into manageable, bite-size, challenges that you gradually expose yourself to and learn to overcome. No, you don't have to go to an airport or put yourself physically at risk. Fortunately for 21st century phobics, the Internet makes it pretty easy to create a Hierarchy of Fears.

The first step is to create a step by step list of 10 or more fears that would progressively lead to your successfully overcoming your fear of flying. The list should be in order and sequential, based on your internal schema of what you imagine the whole process would look and feel like. Each step should be as specific as possible and have a clear, measurable outcome. Here's an example of such a list:

1. Look at still pictures of passenger planes. Make the pictures that you study vivid and real. Study some images showing planes from the outside and others with passengers seated inside while in flight.
2. Watch videos of planes in flight.
3. Watch videos of passenger planes taking off and landing. YouTube

is great for this. Desensitize yourself by watching all kinds and varieties of takeoffs and landings.

4. Imaging vividly booking your flight. Search online for tickets.
5. Roleplay and practice packing your bags for your trip
6. Drive to an airport. Maybe watch take offs and landings.
7. Imagine checking in for your flight.
8. Rehearse waiting to board the plane.
9. Board the plane, taking your seat.
10. Taking the flight.

Now that you have your list developed, the task is to work through the list using the skills that you have learned about in this book. While this work is best done with a therapist, plenty of people do quite well doing this as self-help. A good therapist will teach you how to work through the list and you will do most of the working through on your own, outside of formal sessions. You work through each fear using the skills you have developed. For example, you start by learning to cope with pictures of airplanes. After you develop a comfort level with those, desensitizing and inoculating yourself to the stressful feelings, you progress to videos, then to searching the Internet for the best prices for tickets, then role-play packing your bags for the flight, then maybe even going to the airport. At each step of the way you manage the intrusive thoughts and feelings through breathing, positive visualization, positive self talk, and work through the fears to make that step manageable. The process for each of the 10 steps will be worked on daily for as long as it takes to get reasonably comfortable with that step's challenge. For example, step 1, looking at pictures of airplanes, may not evoke as much anxiety as step 3, watching planes take off. Adjust the time accordingly. Do not move any further than the step that stops you that session.

Be patient with this process. Making new, neutral associations, will take some time. You will, however, make these associations more quickly than you'd imagine. Because you are systematically reprogramming your thinking, new learning will come quickly. If at any point during this process you find yourself needing to retrace your steps and adjust at a lower step, then do it. Each day that you do the

exercises. you will start at step 1 and progress to the step that you are currently working on. Once you can tolerate a step, work to master control of the next level. Try to set aside 15 minutes to half an hour each day for these exercises, twice a day or more is preferable. Once the exercise session is completed do not think about the object of your fear at any other time of your day. In our example here, you would not think about flying at any other time during your day except when you are doing these exercises. This is very important, as it is the random thoughts at other times that are the irrational ones that create fear.

While at each step, experiment with skills that you have, hopefully, already acquired. Control your breathing, engage in positive self talk, use vivid mental rehearsal, be AWARE, use what works for you. Continue with your daily practice of exercise and meditation or whatever you do to invoke the relaxation response. **DO NOT THINK ABOUT THE OBJECT OF YOUR FEAR EXCEPT FOR DURING THESE EXERCISE SESSIONS!** This point cannot be emphasized enough. This is the only reason that this strategy can fail. If you are doing two 15 minute sessions per day and obsessing about your fear for the other 23 1/2 hours, then you are setting yourself up to fail. Confining your concerns about the frightening event to your sessions, and gaining control of them, reprograms and restructures your mind and body to react in a more positive way. Remember, the goal is not to eliminate the fear entirely, it is to control the fear to the point that you can function effectively despite it.

Again, a competent therapist trained in cognitive behavioral therapy can be a big help with this strategy. Many people find that after going through this process with a therapist they are able to successfully do it on their own with other sources of anxiety. It can be quite effective if done as a self-help strategy. Just be sure to be systematic, patient, and thorough.

Have a great flight!

## Facing Fear..And Doing It Anyway

“I’ve lived through some terrible things in my life, some of which actually happened.”-Mark Twain

Fear is a necessary human emotion, sometimes life-saving, sometimes paralyzing, sometimes making life exciting and worth living. Fear causes changes in brain functioning and behavior, leading to actions such as aggression, running away, hiding, or freezing. It is a combination of cognition and learning, existing entirely within the human mind. Fear is closely related to anxiety, but with anxiety the perceived disaster is entirely unavoidable. With fear, the mind believes that there is a behavioral response that will resolve the problem. We either “fight”-act aggressively toward the threat, “flight”-run away from the threat, or “freeze”-remain paralyzed and hope that the threat will go away on its own. Like a lot of problematic human emotions, fear is hardwired in us as part of our evolutionary past. In early man, those that made the best use of fears were those that survived and passed this emotion on to their offspring. Like a lot of problematic human emotions, modern life does not require the intensity by which most of us experience these feelings.

Fear is an internal perception, existing, as Rod Serling would say, entirely within our own imagination. We learn fears through events that we have actually experienced, as well as vicariously through the experiences of others. Fear is best understood and dealt with from a cognitive behavioral perspective. Tony Blauer, a self-defense trainer from Canada, has studied the fear response in humans rather extensively. In his trainings, which I have attended and highly recommend, he addresses the physical and emotional response that

people universally have when confronted with fears. Blauer discusses the denial which immediately sets in as part of the freeze response. Freezing when terrified exists in the animal world when animals “play dead” as a protective mechanism. Blauer teaches that to do so when physically attacked, can be a fatal mistake. His trainings emphasize that all of us have an ability to fight back when confronted with any form of fear. “It’s not the danger that makes us afraid, it is fear of danger that makes us afraid,” he says, “if you didn’t fear fear, what might you do?” As Franklin Roosevelt said, “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”

Gavin de Becker is the author of “The Gift of Fear,” in which he explores fear as a modern day survival mechanism. His idea is that fear can be useful if it is understood, and in some cases can be lifesaving. He feels that all of us need to separate our irrational fears of danger from intuition that could save our lives. “We all know that there are plenty of reasons to fear people from time to time. The question is, what are those times? Far too many people are walking around in a constant state of vigilance, their intuition misinformed about what really poses danger.” DeBecker correctly feels that eliminating all fear is a very bad idea, and distinguishing valid fear from irrational fear is necessary. Fear keeps us out of danger, makes life exciting, and is necessary as part of the human experience.

“Fears are educated into us, and can, if we wish, be educated out.” – Karl A. Menninger

There are ways that each of us can learn about our own, personal fears, and how best to individually categorize and cope with them. Many of you are probably familiar with acronyms about fear such as:

FEAR-false EVIDENCE appearing real. This acronym is asking you to question your evidence. What is the evidence here? How do I know this to be true? Who says? What’s the likelihood of this happening really? These are the types of questions to ask yourself.

FEAR-false EXPECTATIONS appearing real. This describes the projection that many of us do when going into a situation that we

perceive as dangerous or a threat to us. Such expectations are usually accompanied by a visualization in the mind of some catastrophic outcome. Could there be a different outcome? What's in my control here? I'll just have to wait and see what happens. I'll find out when I get there. These are more realistic self statements. Getting such statements out on paper can help put them in perspective.

Asking the appropriate questions of yourself, and examining your thoughts, is the best way to deal with fear cognitively. Here are some ways to deal with fear from a behavioral perspective:

**Breathe!** Breathing deeply from the abdomen is one of the best ways to activate the parasympathetic nervous system. A deep breath in which you focus more on the exhale can help lower your anxiety level and enable you to function despite your fear. Stop your thought process and focus on your breathing, breathing in slowly on a 7 count, and exhale vigorously and slowly on an 11 count. Remember the 7/11 strategy, but if you can't, just remember to exhale longer than your inhale.

**Visualize.** See in your mind the outcome that you would like to have in this situation. The visualization does not have to be in big-screen cinematography. It just has to have a positive expectation. Work on visualization before stressful situations, as well as during them. Visualization before is one of the ways that athletes, martial artists, combat athletes, and military personnel set themselves up for success. Doing so allows you to get control of your imagination, which typically runs wild when fear sets in.

**Quantify your fear.** Asking yourself, "On a scale of 1 to 10 how frightened am I?," can allow you to step out of the box a bit in and separate your irrational mind from your rational mind and lead you to make a better choice.

An easy strategy to use and rehearse regularly is the AWARE strategy: A-Accept the fear. It won't go away, so try to control it and make it smaller.

W-Watch the fear. Give it a number from 1 to 10, breathe in the 7/11 pattern, and make the fear go down.

A-Act as normally as you can. Your physical body continuing to

function normally sends a powerful reassurance to the mind, bringing the emotional level down. Fake it till you make it works well in this situation.

R-Repeat, repeat, repeat, the above steps as necessary.

E-Expect the best. Expect this strategy to work, because it does!

The information in this chapter, combined with skills from previous chapters, will be of use to you in combating fears. In all reality, life is scary enough and we don't need to make it any worse than it is. Fear is a state of mind that has its' utility and benefits. An inability to control it, however, could be fatal. None of us can live our lives free of fear, the challenge of the human condition is to learn to control it and to use it to our advantage.

## 20 Seconds of Insane Courage : Performance Anxiety

“You know, sometimes all you need is twenty seconds of insane courage. Just literally twenty seconds of just embarrassing bravery. And I promise you, something great will come of it.”-Benjamin Mee

There are a lot of things that we do in life where a certain level of anxiety is the reason that it's fun. Without varied levels of anxiety life would be pretty boring, bland, and not very exciting. A lot of what humans participate in for fun has a certain level of anxiety attached to it. If you've ever been an athlete, performer of any type, been challenged by a project at work, or gone on a first date with a special someone, then you know that feeling. If you did well at these times, then the anxiety spurred you on to an appropriate sense of awareness, acuity, and performance. If you choked, then your level of anxiety got the better of you. Certainly, life is much more interesting, exciting, and fulfilling if you judiciously use twenty seconds of insane courage from time to time.

“Enough is enough!”

This is probably something you have found yourself say at some time when overwhelmed by some person or thing that you found challenging. It's something usually said in a state of frustration and overwhelm, an internal signal of surrender. Upon further examination, however, you'll probably find that when you felt this way it was actually too late, at that point enough was already too much.

The reality of human performance is that we all need a certain level of

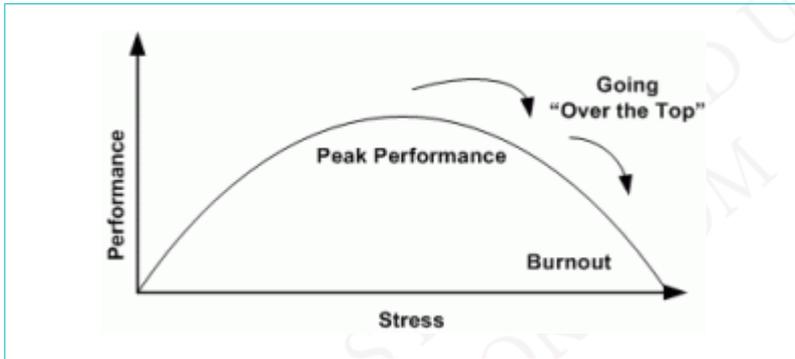
anxiety and arousal in order to perform at an optimal level. You may notice that you perform better with many tasks when you are slightly nervous. Moderate levels of anxiety are necessary in order to do well on tasks such as athletic events, exams, job interviews, and a host of other things that humans do that make life worth living. And, on the flipside, you probably noticed that when you have no emotional investment in an activity you have no interest in it and, as a result, don't perform well in that endeavor. This explains why many people put important tasks off to the last minute. They do this because they instinctively need the pressure of a deadline to get the task done well. You may even be one of these kinds of people. If, while you were a student, you were the type who did your term paper the night before it was due, then that's a pretty good indicator that you needed the anxiety that you yourself created to make it feel important enough to do it well. You may also be the type that enjoys self-created anxiety through behaviors such as gambling, action sports, sales, dating, and other behaviors where you put yourself out there and risk physical or emotional hurt. These behaviors, performed at a certain level, are in fact healthy and can lead to improvement and enjoyment in many areas of life.

In human performance, the relation between arousal levels and performance is known as the Yerkes-Dodson Law. This behavioral principle suggests that there is a relationship between levels of arousal and optimal human performance. Performance is improved as arousal and anxiety increases, but only up to a certain point, after which performance diminishes. This principle was first proposed in 1908 by pioneer psychologists Robert Yerkes and John Dodson. They noticed that rats, when given mild electrical shocks, actually performed better in navigating their way through a maze. When the shocks were increased, however, the rats became overwhelmed and their decision-making and performance at the task was impaired. Their experiment demonstrated that increasing stress and arousal levels could improve motivation and performance, but only up to a certain point.

If you take a look at how the Yerkes-Dodson Law affects human performance you can readily see its relevance. You probably aced an exam or job interview at some point when you were "really nervous,"

or maybe even “choked” during an athletic event. There are probably some things that you love doing because they are “exciting” that other people wouldn’t do because they are “too scary.” When one of my clients talks about an event they anticipate will create anxiety I ask the question, “Is it roller coaster scary, or cemetery scary?” I then explained that some behaviors, although scary, are actually fun. Other behaviors that cause arousal levels will never be fun. It is determined by unique personal preferences, experiences, and a host of other factors.

An awareness of the Yerkes-Dodson Law can improve your personal performances in a wide variety of areas. Becoming aware of just how much arousal and anxiety you need is the key factor. Some people instinctively know how much they need and subconsciously work to create it. Others have no clue how much they need, and find themselves failing during crucial points in their behavioral process. Self talk and arousal control are critical components in creating enough anxiety to perform well. Ask yourself “on a scale of 1 to 10, how much anxiety do I need to perform my best with this?” Examine times when you have done well when anxious and compare that to times when you “choked.” What were the differences? What was your self talk like at those times? What did you focus on that led to success or failure? Self-awareness is crucial to your ability to make the Yerkes-Dodson Law work for you. Visualization can help immensely in controlling your anxiety. Mentally envisioning an imaginary dial that you can turn to any number between one in 10 and dialing it to that level in your mind’s eye can help. Using your breathing to control physiological arousal can help you maintain the number that suits you best.



Experiment with ways that you can control your emotional and physiological arousal levels to enhance your performance and enjoyment. Start with simple tasks and activities such as athletics in order to develop some ability to control anxiety and arousal. “Dial in” the appropriate level of anxiety that is needed. Begin to move this activity to more complicated and critical tasks in your life such as job related and personal relationship tasks. If you choke during your weekend tennis match, it’s probably not a big deal. If you score poorly on your annual job review, it probably is.

So next time you find yourself muttering, “Enough is enough,” think again. If you’ve gotten to this point it’s more accurate to say, “Enough is too much.” An awareness of how much is enough for you can make the crucial difference in your performance.

“That’s why they play the games.”-Bill Parcells

## OCD: Learning To Expose Yourself

Obsessive compulsive disorder is an anxiety disorder which is noted for obsessions and, or, compulsions. Obsessions are worries that are out of control and out of proportion, creating a sense of unease, anxiety, or fear. Compulsions are rituals, urges, and behaviors that a person does in a futile attempt to keep the worry at bay. A person does not necessarily need both obsessions and compulsions to have the disorder. Being stuck with either obsessions or compulsions is enough to meet the diagnostic criteria. To meet the full criteria, a person must have the disorder to the extent that it impairs normal personal, social, or occupational functioning. Unfortunately, you don't need to meet the full criteria to suffer from its anxiety provoking grip.

Like many mental health disorders, a lot of people believe that they have it when, from a diagnostic standpoint, they merely have traits of it. For example, a person who is prone to keeping a neat home or work space attributes that to "my OCD." While OCD in its complete form can be completely debilitating, you may want to address some of the symptoms of the disorder that you find troubling whether you meet the full criteria or not. If you are bothered by these thoughts or rituals to any extent then you should attempt to moderate them. Those that suffer from full-blown OCD have their lives destroyed by controlling thoughts that they cannot stop and compulsive rituals that they engage in, believing that to do so will help to control those thoughts. Those with OCD repetitively perform rituals such as excessive handwashing, checking behaviors, counting behaviors and other activities that border on paranoia. This chapter is designed to help you with moderate to low degrees of OCD. If you are suffering from extreme OCD, then the first

line of defense is a combination of cognitive behavioral therapy and an appropriate medication. Research indicates that for extreme OCD this combination works better than either CBT or medications alone. If you are going to attack your OCD with medication, your best bet is to work with a therapist trained in CBT and a psychiatrist, rather than using your primary care physician.

OCD puts its victims in a vicious cycle of intrusive thoughts, which create an intense adrenal response which compels action. The victim knows that the actions are entirely irrational, but engages in them anyway looking for short-term relief. Doing the action temporarily does bring relief, but doubt kicks in rather quickly, and the person is compelled to repeat the cycle all over again with almost identical thoughts and behaviors. A person can get stuck in this for hours at a time.

For example, a person has anxiety about leaving home with the lights on. Without engaging in the ritual behavior, the person can't focus on anything outside of the home because their thought process is invaded by "Did I leave the lights on?" This compulsion causes them to return home multiple times, as they check each room to be "sure" that they turn the lights off. After a number of these checking rituals, quite often the same number of times for each episode, they finally leave the house, taking all that anxiety, cortisol, and adrenaline with them.

Some OCD victims don't engage in the rituals, they merely have the obsessions. They may obsess about being in public places because of "what if" thinking. For example, I once met a woman with OCD when I was working in an inpatient hospital unit. She suffered from excessive guilt, shame, and fear because she could not attend anything that took place in a crowd. Her obsession was, "What if I just start yelling out obscenities?" She felt paralyzed by the image in her mind of this suburban mom, herself, being publicly embarrassed and humiliated by this action that she couldn't help herself from performing. This is a prime example of OCD without the rituals. OCD without the rituals is often accompanied by these avoidance behaviors.

A third flavor of OCD is engaging and compulsions accompanied by little to no obsessive thinking. An example would be someone who engages in counting behaviors “because I can’t help myself,” counting cars, tile panels, and anything that comes into their visual field. They’re not sure what will happen if they don’t count, but they “just know it wouldn’t be good.”

The Cognitive Behavior Therapy of choice for coping with OCD is called Exposure Therapy. It is somewhat similar to the Stress Inoculation Therapy that you learned about in chapter 6. The basic principle of exposure therapy is that a person will become less afraid of something that they are exposed to, in controlled doses, over a period of time. By doing exposures, a person learns that the feared event almost never occurs, and if it does it is never to the magnitude that they anticipated. The person with a phobic fear of germs on door knobs learns that they don’t catch a rare disease and die. Someone with a fear of leaving home with the lights on learns that the lights were, indeed, shut off before they left. A person doing exposures also learns that their level of anxiety goes down faster if they don’t perform the ritual activity that is designed to control that anxiety. There will be initial anxiety, but it goes down faster because they are not feeding into it. While initially the very idea of exposure is met with a “Why in the world would I want to do that?” response, gradually over time a person sees the benefits.

As mentioned already, OCD can have either obsessions, compulsions, or both. In setting up your exposures consider which elements you have and decide which exposures make the most sense in your case. For example, if you have purely obsessions, then your exposures will be brief sessions where you sit and indulge the obsession. If for example you have thoughts that you could be a murderer or a pedophile, then sitting with that thought is your exposure. If you have a more classical case of OCD, such as a fear of contamination from physical objects for example, then exposing yourself to those physical objects will be your exposure for that.

Exposure Therapy must be done in a systematic and measured manner.

While there are numerous self-help methods to go about this, don't hesitate to contact a competent therapist knowledgeable in treating OCD with cognitive behavioral techniques. I suggest you start with the strategies mentioned here initially and if you need more support contact a therapist. To get started you will need a notebook and a willingness to devote at least 2 to 3 sessions per day of exposures of 5 to 15 minutes.

Let's start with an Exposure Log for someone who has Pure Obsessional OCD.

1. Identify the obsessional thought as clearly as possible, placing that thought on the top of the page. In this example the thought will be, "I think I could become a murderer."
2. Record the date and time of the exposure for that particular session.
3. In the first column, write down the thought. In this case "I think I could become a murderer."
4. In the second column, record the emotional intensity of this feeling on a scale of 0 to 100. In this column you are essentially asking yourself to put the probability in a percentage format, essentially asking yourself, "What's the statistical chance of me becoming a murderer?"
5. In the third column, you will record the thoughts, doubts, images or feelings that arise. Record what they mean to you. What would it mean to you if you were a murderer?
6. In the fourth column, create an alternative, healthier, response. In this column you will consider all the alternative possibilities of your becoming a murderer. This is where you develop an alternative argument to challenge the unrealistic, obsessional thought. Thoughts such as, "I don't even own a weapon, I am kind to animals, or am not even much of a meat eater," are examples of appropriate challenge thoughts. This column is the important one so put more emphasis on this column than the first three.
7. In the fifth column, you will reflect back on what strategy you used to defuse your emotions in column 4. By now, you probably have a set of strategies that you prefer. If you've been reading this book diligently, then you have coping strategies and have probably found that some work better for you than others. Which did you use in column 4?

8. In the sixth and final column, re-rate your current emotional intensity on a scale of 0 to 100. This percentage will serve as feedback for this exercise.

In the next example of an exposure log, we will create one for someone who has the classic OCD with both obsessions and compulsions.

1. Identify both the obsessional thoughts and we compulsion. In this example the obsessional thought is, "My hands will pick up germs and give me a fatal disease," and the compulsion will be, "I must wipe down every doorknob that I touch."
2. Record the date and time for that exposure.
3. In the first column, write down the obsession, "Germs on my hands give me a fatal disease," as well as the compulsive ritual, "I wipe down every doorknob I touch."
4. In the second column, write down the emotional intensity for both the obsession and the compulsion on a scale of 0 to 100. Here you were asking yourself the question, "What's the statistical percentage that I believe I will get a fatal disease by touching doorknobs?," as well as "How compelled am I to wipe these doorknobs down?"
5. In the third column, you will record the thoughts, doubts, images, or feelings that arise. Record what they mean to you. What would it mean to you if you got a fatal disease from touching doorknobs?
6. In the fourth column, create an alternative, healthier response. In this column you will consider all the alternative possibilities of catching that fatal disease. Here you will develop alternate arguments, countering the obsessional thoughts. "I touch a lot of other things besides doorknobs in don't get sick from them, Lots of other people touch doorknobs and don't get sick, I've touching doorknobs my whole life and still alive," are examples of good challenge thoughts. This column should be as detailed in this challenging as possible. Put some time and effort into this column, as it is the most important part of this exercise.
7. In the fifth column, identify any ritual that you performed. Did you wipe down any doorknobs? How many? How many times? This should only take a minute and should not the analyzed. You are seeking to cut down the number of times that this ritual must be performed.
8. In the sixth column, you will reflect back on the strategies and

techniques that you used to defuse the obsessions in column four. Over time you will notice that you may have a preference for certain strategies that, by now, have become part of your daily wellness plan. Notice the strategies that are working and use them during your exposure sessions.

9. In the seventh and final column, re-rate your current emotional intensity on a scale of 0 to 100. This percentage will serve as feedback for this exposure session.

Maintain a written record of each session, recording in each column as suggested in by these two examples, keeping track of the date. Use a simple notebook so that you have a logbook that you can refer to. Initially may be necessary to do two or three sessions per day. By keeping track of the dates, you will be able to record progress. Your progress may not be every single day, but as long as the trend is improving you'll be heading in the right direction. OCD can be very complicated and you may want to involve a competent cognitive behavioral therapist in your initial treatment. Reviewing your progress with a therapist and brainstorming what works will keep you going in the right direction.

Many counselors encourage their OCD clients to “take their fears head on.” I prefer to tell my clients struggling with all forms of anxiety to think about “attacking it from the side,” in a way that you control its intensity. By using exposure therapy consistently, recording and reviewing the results, and making constructive changes to your thought patterns and behaviors, you can get these fears under control.

## **PTSD : The Mind And Body Remember**

Posttraumatic stress disorder is a debilitating condition that may develop after a person has been exposed to one or more traumatic events, sexual or physical assault, warfare, exposure to violence or threats of imminent death. It is an anxiety disorder that leaves its mark through reoccurring symptoms such as flashbacks, nightmares, hypervigilance, and avoidance behaviors that get in the way of normal functioning. The symptoms occur for more than a month after the exposure to the traumatic events. While most people exposed to trauma will not develop PTSD, it is normal to experience symptoms for a month or less. Some people, for reasons not fully understood, cannot shake the symptoms and develop PTSD. Others, experience no symptoms of the disorder initially, and develop full symptomology after six months or longer.

PTSD is believed to be caused by an exposure to a traumatic event and can occur in anyone, whether they are predisposed to anxiety or not. Persons at risk of developing the disorder are combat soldiers, first responders, prisoners, victims of violent crimes, and anyone who has witnessed an event causing them to experience intense fear, horror, or powerlessness. Like all forms of anxiety disorder, it serves a survival purpose, with the avoidance behaviors serving as an attempt to protect one's very existence. Because of this need for avoidance, PTSD has a high correlation with alcohol and drug abuse, as well as violence and high risk behaviors.

Studies indicate that various therapies should be initiated as soon as possible after exposure to potentially traumatizing events. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Psychological Debriefing, if introduced

immediately, can allow one to process the events in such a way that the impact of the trauma is minimized. Psychological Debriefing is easy to initiate directly after an event. It consists of interviews that are designed to allow individuals to directly confront the event in the presence of a counselor, sharing their emotions and allowing them to restructure memories. Research on the efficacy of Psychological Debriefing is mixed however and experts differ on how effective it is in preventing PTSD.

Therapy for PTSD involves a combination of cognitive behavioral therapies, psychoeducation, and the provision of safety and support. Cognitive behavioral strategies should include exposure therapy, stress inoculation training, mind-body coping strategies such as meditation and visualization, cognitive restructuring, and support groups. Psychotropic medications, while often beneficial, should not be the sole therapeutic intervention and should be combined with counseling. Support groups can be extremely beneficial as they normalize the victims experience and empowers them to see that things can get better for others, as well as for themselves.

Thus far in this book you have learned how to implement mind-body relaxation in chapter 4, visualization in chapter 5, Stress Inoculation Training in chapter 6, the AWARE strategy in chapter 7, and types of exposure therapies in chapters 11 and 14. Any and all of these strategies can be highly effective in combating PTSD. In addition to these strategies, PTSD has been shown to respond well to a type of CBT known as Cognitive-Processing Therapy, or CPT. CPT was developed initially as a strategy to treat victims of sexual assault. CPT is best viewed as a combination of cognitive therapy and exposure therapy.

CPT is based on the belief that PTSD stems from conflict between one's pre-trauma beliefs about themselves and the world, such as nothing will happen to me, the world is a safe place, and post trauma beliefs such as the world is unsafe, and I am powerless. In CPT these conflicts are called "stuck points" and are processed by writing about the traumatic event in detail. A patient then reads their narrative aloud

repeatedly in the counseling room and on their own. The therapist helps their client to identify the stuck points and errors in thinking. These thinking errors are changed through a process which is known as cognitive restructuring, where the client learns to return to as many as their pre-trauma beliefs as possible. While, without doubt, the world will never be the same for a victim of PTSD, reclaiming as many pretrauma beliefs as possible is a therapeutic goal. Some of these thinking errors are self statements like, "What did I do to deserve this?" "I am a bad person," or "I should have done something." The therapist then helps the client gather evidence both for and against these stuck thoughts. CPT can be highly effective, but cannot be done entirely as a self-help strategy. A competent therapist is required for much of this work.

PTSD is one of the more complex to treat anxiety disorders and is perhaps the most difficult to treat using a self-help strategy. It is best to engage in treatment with a competent therapist that will guide you through the therapeutic process both in the counseling room as well as in the real world. The treatments mentioned in this chapter have all been shown to be highly effective, but no single strategy is useful in all cases of PTSD. Some people for example do not feel comfortable actively confronting reminders of their trauma, so SIT might be the preferred treatment for them. Some may be more introverted, so CPT may be a better choice, and so on. Regardless of the primary therapeutic intervention, all victims of PTSD must learn to regain control of their physiology and develop an ability to initiate the relaxation response as effectively as possible. None of the strategies mentioned in this chapter can be effective without having the ability to control the intense physiological arousal that PTSD creates.

As stated previously, PTSD does not respond well to a self-help strategy. This chapter is suggesting a combination of structured therapeutic interventions with real-world assignments. I'd suggest reviewing some of the strategies in this book, deciding which ones make the most sense to you, and contacting a competent therapist, asking their help in implementing a comprehensive plan of attack.



My name is John Sannicandro, and I've been in education, counseling, and coaching for over 30 years. I've been a practicing therapist for the past 20 years. This book, and others that I have written, was created as a result of my experience in the practice of psychotherapy and counseling. My first career was in education and coaching, and like many who have created second careers, it has been hard to separate the two. Traditional psychotherapy has been too stagnant, lifeless, and slow to suit my style.

Over time I have learned to combine therapies that are more action orientated as therapeutic interventions. Behavioral Therapy, Cognitive Therapy, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, Mindfulness Techniques, Hypnosis, and Bodywork, are some of the strategies that I utilize with clients to make lasting, meaningful change.

I am a Licensed Mental Health Counselor, a Certified Personal Coach, a Certified Mind Body Coach, and a Certified Hypnotherapist. I offer online counseling, coaching, and consultations through email or Skype as an alternative to traditional settings.

Please contact me if you are interested in improving the quality of your life.