

How to deal with anxiety

How did we get here?

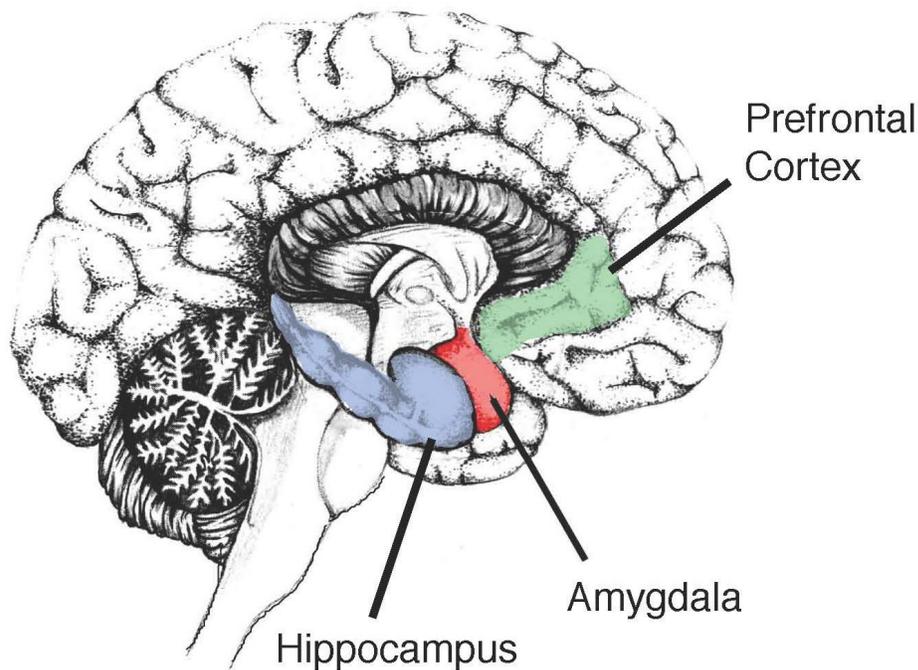
Every single person on this planet sometimes have feelings of anxiety or depression.

Negative emotions protected humans during harsh times and it's the reason your ancestors were able to survive so you could read this text today.

However, the ability to feel anxious or alert was far more useful when life was an everyday struggle. Today these same systems sometimes works more like a faulty fire alarm.

It's too sensitive and warns us of impending doom whenever we try things we are anxious of, even though the actual threat is minimal or non-existent.

These reactions are closely linked to the Amygdala, the part of your brain that is in charge of your emotions. The amygdalas job is to help you stay alive by activating the fight or flight instinct, a primitive system that activates your body to either fight or flee a perceived threat.



The good news is that the Amygdala isn't always in charge. Most of the time the pre frontal cortex, the most advanced part of your brain is in charge. The pre-frontal cortex takes input from all other areas of your brain and decided what to do. The pre-frontal cortex is also in charge of planning, time-keeping, attention and reminding you what to

do.

The pre-frontal cortex is pretty cool. He can help you plan where you want to live in five years, remind you to buy milk and keep you from screaming at your boss. He's pretty tough but he's not invincible. As superman has cryptonite the pre frontal cortex is allergic to lack of food, water and sleep.

A super awesome team



You should think of you and your brain as a super awesome team that go through life together, trying to make the most of it. You're like siblings, sometimes you squabble but deep down you all love each other very much and you all want each other to succeed. You all have different strength and weaknesses.

Amygdala

Strength: He's really good at warning you about tigers, if you're in a forest full of tigers, this guy is super useful.

Weakness: He's really nervous about those tigers and if he can't find any he's gonna pretend that the fact that your boss doesn't like you is as threatening to your safety as you having a tiger in your bedroom. The hungrier you get, the more convinced he'll be that we're all doomed.

Job: Keep you alive.

Pre-frontal cortex

Strength: He's pretty much takes care of everything, when you wake up in the morning, when to go to bed, where you want to be in five years, planning what to do on your day of. Making sure you won't get overwhelmed by feelings from the Amygdala. He's great.

Weakness:

The only time he's not around to help you out is when you make a conscious decision to

turn him off. When you drink too much alcohol you turn him off and then he can't help you. That's why drunk people make really bad choices. He can also become really weak if you don't eat, drink water or sleep enough.

Job: Take care of everything.

You

Strength: You're alive! You're in charge of a tall ape. Take a moment to think about how awesome that is. You could have been a butterfly or a salmon. But you're not. You're a human being with opposable thumbs. You are the smartest thing to ever live on this planet. Right now you can control every muscle in your body, you can communicate with others and you can go make yourself a sandwich with whatever you want on it. How awesome is that?

Weakness:

Maybe your job sucks? Or your family? Or your anxious? Or depressed?
Well at least you're not a bat.

Job: Your job is to enjoy the time in the tall ape.

Coping strategies

Shit happens. You might be reading this since something shitty happened to you recently and you're hoping we will help you out. You're in luck. Because we will. But bare with us for just a moment.

The difference between you and the happiest person you know isn't that they never experience awful things, it's that they have a game plan.

In case of shit, what then?

It's easy as A B C

In cognitive behavioural therapy we talk about how the consequences of an action shape behaviour.

It's fairly simple but we'll give you a few examples to get started.

A behaviour can either be reinforced by positive reinforcement, something awesome is added (like a candybar or money), or by negative reinforcement, something sucky is removed (anxiety is most common).

Behaviour can also be punished by either positive punishment, something sucky is added (getting verbally abused by your boss) or by negative punishment, something awesome is removed (money in a fine).

	Negative	Positive
Reinforcement		
Punishment		

A	B	C
Waking up and not feeling like doing anything	Feelings: Sad, Depressed, Thoughts: I'm a bad person Bodily sensations: Feeling exhausted Behaviour: Going back to bed, browsing the Internet for a few hours	Short term: Feeling relieved, not have to deal with problems, still feeling anxious. Long term: Problem remains, Reinforces behaviour. +
Forced to talk on the phone	Feelings: Sad, Depressed, Thoughts: I'm a bad person Bodily sensations: Feeling exhausted Behaviour: Going back to bed, browsing the Internet for a few hours	Short term: Feeling relieved, not have to deal with problems, still feeling anxious. Long term: Problem remains, Reinforces behaviour. +

External and internal behaviour

Everything is behaviour! Well it really depends who you ask, but if you ask me, everything is behaviour. :) It might be helpful to think of thoughts and feelings as inner behavior and the things you do as outer behaviour.

To figure out what things you want to do more of, and the things you want to do less of we've made a chart you can fill out.

	Inner	Outer
More of	<p>Feelings: Happiness Joy Determination</p> <p>Thoughts: I can do this People like me I'm awesome</p>	<p>Exercise Sleep well Take the subway Call people Speak up in meetings</p>
Less of	<p>Feelings: Anxiousness Depressed Lonely Sad</p> <p>Thoughts: I'm useless I'm boring No one likes me Worrying</p>	<p>Staying home Watching TV Youtube</p>

Start with behaviour!

Changing thoughts might be tricky. Changing behaviours is easier. You should start with the easiest ones.

Here's a list of all your the things you wanted to do more of

- Exercise
- Sleep well
- Take the subway
- Call people
- Speak up in meetings

Feel free to add more things to the list. On the next page you'll find a list of behaviours that you might feel like adding. Some are targeted towards people who have trouble with anxiousness and some are more targeted toward people who struggle in social situations.

Tiny steps towards awesomeness

Now that you've figured out all the things you want to do more of it's time that we put them in order. There's a scale here where you can put things in order, 100 is the scariest and 0 is the least scariest.

Order the things based on what you would find the scariest and what you would think

would be the easiest to get started with.

Scary level	Thing
100	Speak up in meetings
90	Have someone watch me write
80	Call a stranger
70	Say no to a friend
60	Call a friend
50	Post on someones facebook wall
40	Ask a stranger for directions
30	Take the subway
20	Send a text message
10	Send a message on facebook

Back to the coping mechanism

Great! Now we've found a list of things that are scary. Before we proceed we want to arm you with awesome tools so that you know what to do.

Focusing on the breathing

Remember a while back when we talked about the flight and the fight response? When the response is triggered our body activates something called the sympathetic nervous system. It's the same system that gets triggered if you get startled by someone. The system is completely harmless but it might feel extremely uncomfortable to get a response from this system.

The problem with too much oxygen

We often worry that we won't get enough oxygen, when in fact the problem when we breathe too fast (hyperventilate) is that we have too much oxygen in our body. A brown paper bag is often used to increase the carbon dioxide in the bloodstream. A common misconception is that lightheadedness and other symptoms is a sign that you're running out of oxygen, when in fact it's caused by too high levels of oxygen in your blood stream.

Relax, take a deep breathe

Taking a deep breath through your stomach and holding it in is a great technique to handle anxiety. It might sound too simple to work but it is effective as long as you're briefing the right way.

Breathing 1:

Exercise 1: Abdominal Breathing Exercise

Rationale: Deep breathing works by slowing your heart rate and making the level of oxygen in your bloodstream become normalized. Deep breathing also inactivates the sympathetic nervous system response and switches your body back to the parasympathetic nervous system that is active when resting i.e. it makes you relax :) . The rate of your breathing directly affects how calm you are. During rapid shallow breathing (hyperventilation) the rate of oxygen in the blood is too high which increases symptoms of nausea, anxiety, and feelings that you can't catch your breathe. Learning this breathing technique is valuable since it gives you a technique that is always available that can help you cope with anxiety and stress.

Instruction:

Abdominal Breathing Exercise

Note the level of tension you're feeling. Then place one hand on your abdomen right beneath your rib cage.

Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose into the "bottom" of your lungs—in other words, send the air as low down as you can. If you're breathing from your abdomen, your hand should actually rise. Your chest should move only slightly while your abdomen expands.

When you've taken in a full breath, pause for a moment and then exhale slowly through your nose or mouth, depending on your preference. Be sure to exhale fully. As you exhale, allow your whole body to just let go (you might visualize your arms and legs going loose and limp like a rag doll).

Do ten slow, full abdominal breaths. Try to keep your breathing smooth and regular, without gulping in a big breath or letting your breath out all at once. It will help to slow down your breathing if you slowly count to four on the inhale (one-two-three-four) and then slowly count to four on the exhale. "Remember to pause briefly at the end of each inhalation. Count from ten down to one counting backward one number with each exhalation. The process should go like this:

Slow inhale ... Pause ... Slow exhale ("Ten.")

Slow inhale ... Pause ... Slow exhale ("Nine.")

Slow inhale ... Pause ... Slow exhale ("Eight.")

and so on down to one. If you start to feel light-headed while practicing abdominal breathing, stop for fifteen to twenty seconds, then start again.

Extend the exercise if you wish by doing two or three "sets" of abdominal breaths, remembering to count backward from ten to one for each set (each exhalation counts as one number). Five full minutes of abdominal breathing will have a pronounced effect in reducing anxiety or early symptoms of panic. Some people prefer to count from one to ten instead. Feel free to do this if it suits you."

How was it?

For some deep breathing is calming, for others, it's uncomfortable when you start out. Some people find the exercise stressful or find that they notice negative thoughts popping-up during the exercise. It's only natural for that to happen and with practice you will notice that it will occur less. However we also want to teach you another exercise related to your breathing that might help you deal with these emotions.

Mindfulness

Many of you might have heard what mindfulness is, perhaps you've even tried it out? Mindfulness is originally a buddhist meditation technique that been shown to be helpful for individuals suffering from anxiety or depression.

Meditation without purpose

There is no goal in mindfulness. Mindfulness is done to remind yourself of the present moment and to stay focused here and now. To let go of the past and not to worry about the future.

Getting started with mindfulness

The first exercise will be the breathing anchor, an exercise that also makes you focus on your breathing. During this course there will be several mindfulness exercises you can try out.

Mindfulness 1:

Exercise 2: Breathing Anchor

Rationale: Deep breathing works by slowing your heart rate and making the level of oxygen in your bloodstream become normalized. Deep breathing also inactivates the sympathetic nervous system response and switches your body back to the parasympathetic nervous system that is active when resting i.e. it makes you relax :) . The rate of your breathing directly affects how calm you are. During rapid shallow breathing (hyperventilation) the rate of oxygen in the blood is too high which increases symptoms of nausea, anxiety, and feelings that you can't catch your breathe. Learning this breathing technique is valuable since it gives you a technique that is always available that can help you cope with anxiety and stress.

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