

Our Thanks.....

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You must not rely on the information contained in this book as an alternative to medical advice from your doctor or other medical professional. If you have any specific questions about any medical matter you should consult your doctor or other professional healthcare provider. If you think you may be suffering from any medical condition you should seek immediate medical attention. You should never delay seeking medical advice, disregard medical advice, or discontinue medical treatment because of information in this book.

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CONTENTS

1 Introduction	1
2 The Anatomy of Anxiety.....	4
A History Lesson!.....	4
An Anatomy Lesson.....	5
The Amygdala.....	5
Parts Of The Brain	6
The Sympathetic Nervous System.....	7
Muscle Problems.....	7
The Parasympathetic Nervous System.....	9
Anxiety Symptoms	10
General Bodily Symptoms	10
Muscular Symptoms	10
Chest Symptoms	11
Emotional Symptoms	11
Sensory Symptoms.....	12
Head Symptoms	12
Stomach Symptoms	13
Sleep Symptoms.....	13
Depersonalisation & Derealisation	13
Fear	14
External Fear	14
Internal Fear	14
Subconscious Fear.....	15
Panic.....	15
Situational Panic.....	15
Random Panic	15
Night Panic	16
Stimulation Panic	16
In Summary	16
3 Never Mind The Labels!	18

Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD).....	19
Social Phobia	19
Panic Disorder	20
Agoraphobia.....	20
Specific Phobias	20
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)	21
Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)	21
Am I Mentally Ill?	22
In Summary	22
4 The 10 Steps	23
Step 1 – Anxiety or Lifestyle.....	25
Diet.....	26
Dehydration.....	26
Caffeine	28
Alcohol	30
Balanced Diet	30
The 5 Main Food Groups.....	32
Healthy Weight!	33
Salt.....	35
Food Additives	36
Vitamins and Minerals	36
A Final Word On Diet.....	38
Breathing.....	40
Posture	43
Exercise	45
Smoking.....	47
Sleep.....	49
But I Can’t Sleep.....	49
So What Can I Do If I Can’t Sleep?	50
The 7 Rules To Better Sleep!	51
In summary.....	53
Step 2 - Understand Anxiety	54

Avoidance.....	55
The Vicious Cycle!	58
So What Do I Have To Do For Step 2?	59
Step 3 – Do You Really Need That Medication?.....	60
Types of Medication.....	61
Anti-Anxiety drugs.....	61
Anti-Depressants.....	62
Beta-Blockers	63
Anti-Psychotics	63
Sleeping Tablets	64
Ask yourself.....	64
Step 4 – It’s Good To Talk!	66
Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).....	68
Psychodynamic Therapy.....	70
Integrative Psychotherapy	71
Group Therapy	72
Person-Centered Therapy	72
“Mindfulness”	73
Summary	74
Step 5 – Get Busy	75
Martial Arts	77
Active Relaxation.....	77
Sometimes you need to say NO!.....	78
Summary	78
Step 6 – Stop Seeking Reassurance!	79
Health Anxiety.....	79
Finding Reassurance From Anxiety	81
Spotting The Scam!	83
Looking Up Symptoms	85
Summary	86
Step 7 - Challenge Negative Thoughts	87
Anyone for TEA?	88
Be Positive!.....	89

Thinking During a Panic Attack.....	91
You Are Who/What You Associate With!.....	92
Suicidal Thoughts	93
Step 8 – Get The Message To Your Subconscious!.....	95
Graded Exposure.....	98
The Grand Plan!	99
Step 1	99
Step 2	99
Step 3	100
Getting Started!	101
What’s The Worst That Can Happen?	102
How Should I Feel?.....	102
Adapting The Technique!	102
Sticking Points	103
Divert Your Mind During Daily Graded Exposure.....	103
Just Do It!	105
“Flooding”	107
Safety Behaviours.....	108
Step 9 – Remember, Yesterday Is In The Past	109
Depression	109
Situational Depression	110
Clinical Depression	110
That Little Voice.....	110
Eureka?.....	112
Step 10 – Give Yourself Time And Be Patient!	114
5 Where To Turn.....	117
Massage Therapy	118
Hypnotherapy	119
Telephone Helplines.....	119
Counsellors.....	120
Personal Trainer	120
6For Relatives.....	121

For Partners.....	121
Supporting Each Individual Step	123
Young Children	126
7 Conclusion.....	127
Daily Checklist	129
My Story	131
Dear Doctor....	138

1

Introduction

"There is always sufficient reason for despair, but there is never sufficient purpose. "

Robert Brault

"Real difficulties can be overcome, it is only the imaginary ones that are unconquerable. "

Theodore N. Vail

Imagine that it's 10,000 years ago and you're a caveman! There are no supermarkets or corner shops and if you want to eat you'll have to hunt for the food yourself. You grab your loincloth and spear and off you go in search of wild animals to kill. You need to stay alert and pay attention; if you don't you'll end up being the meal for the animal! Your body responds to this situation triggering what is known as the "fight or flight response"; it's the best way your body can make sure you survive this situation. Your body is preparing you to either fight the animal or to run away to safety. This is how your mind protects the body from harm in a dangerous or even life threatening situation.

Of course we no longer have to face dangerous situations to get food, although your local supermarket on a Friday afternoon may feel like it! In today's world there are other physical threats that trigger the "fight or flight" response. If we were to find ourselves caught up in a riot perhaps, or maybe we're in the bar having a quiet drink and a fight breaks out, or perhaps even when we're driving along and someone suddenly pulls out in front of us! In these situations our mind responds, giving us what could be a critical edge to get out of the situation as best we can! These are the times when anxiety is not only normal, it's actually desirable!

The Internet is full of books, videos, medications, CD's, DVD's and programmes that offer to make us "anxiety free". We visit their websites and are told that anxiety is something to fear, to be avoided and something that is abnormal. They tell us that we need to get rid of our anxiety because it's damaging and undesirable and, with their help and plenty of your money, you can do it! For people who have problems with anxiety and panic, this is what you want to hear.

Before we start into anything further, understand this:

Anxiety is a normal human emotion.

Everyone experiences anxiety.

You cannot get rid of anxiety nor would you want to.

So what are we looking to achieve? Well our goal is not to get rid of anxiety but rather

- to learn to stop inappropriate anxiety
- to learn to not fear anxiety and to accept it as a normal emotion

Let's imagine you have to attend a funeral. You go along to the funeral and during the service you can't stop laughing. The issue is not with the emotion of laughter but with the inappropriate situation; obviously you wouldn't want to get rid of laughter forever.

Conditions such as Social Anxiety Disorder, Generalised Anxiety Disorder, Agoraphobia, Health Anxiety, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder etc. are all examples of inappropriate anxiety. Anxiety about meeting people, anxiety about health, anxiety about going out...they all come down to the same issue just with the anxiety attached to different things. It's simply inappropriate reactions to normal, safe situations.

Let's hop into a time machine again and go back several hundred years. Travelling anywhere involved a horse in front! This was the time when "horsepower" really was horse power! What would your reaction be if a Ferrari sports car went whizzing past? How is it able to move? How can this be possible? Where is the horse pulling it? How can it go so fast? What emotions do you think you would have as you watch this mysterious contraption? Fear? Confusion? Panic?

And why would we feel that way?

We fear what we don't understand.

If we can start to understand our anxiety, there is no longer anything to fear.

In the past you may have bought other programmes or books on anxiety and panic. Perhaps they will have tried to teach you how to simply learn to cope and accept the way you feel. That's not what we're going to do. We WILL be giving you the important knowledge that you need to get right to the core of the problem and then giving you the tools and strategies to be able to do something about it! It's not about simply "coping" with anxiety, it's about getting back the life you deserve.

This book is not a medical textbook. We aren't doctors, therapists or psychologists. It was written by someone who has been there (and a wife that got dragged along for the ride); someone who struggled with Generalised Anxiety Disorder, Health Anxiety and Agoraphobia. Someone who has spent many, many hours researching anxiety and finding through trial and error the things that work and the things that don't. We've been through this for 20 years and come through the other side and I believe that qualifies us to help you! And if we had known what we know now, it certainly wouldn't have taken 20 years! The end result is a 10 Step programme that not only addresses your anxiety and panic issues but goes on where others fail, to look at how you can move on once you have begun to put your past issues behind you. It really doesn't matter what you may have been told before; this is your permanent solution to your anxiety disorder. No-one is a lost cause. No-one is too severe. You can be helped. And

we will help you, I promise.

I'm going to say something now that at this point you may find very difficult to believe but by the end of this book, I hope it will make sense to you.

It is simply this; anxiety is your friend. If you are able to appropriately interpret it, anxiety can help to direct your attention and provide drive and focus. Anxiety over a situation can drive us to change it, to avoid it or to change our approach to it. Anxiety can be the mind's way of responding to a situation where something doesn't feel quite right but we just couldn't put our finger on what the problem was!

People that suffer from anxiety disorders generally fall into two groups.

Avoiders don't want to face up to the reality of the situation. Avoiders don't want to understand. Ignorance, as they say, is bliss. Unfortunately avoiding anxiety doesn't make it go away; if anything it can make it worse.

Confronters are ready to grab this problem and do what they need to do. They want to know everything about and they are ready to change it given the right tools.

The fact that you are reading this, I hope, means you are a confronter and together we will beat this! If you're an avoider then right now is your time to make the decision to face your anxiety and beat it!

It's OK for you to be cynical at this point. It's also OK if you're one of those who thinks "I'm sure this programme works for some people but it won't be right for me". Maybe you have tried lots of other things in the past that haven't worked. Maybe you think your problems are just too severe. All we ask is that you at least give us a chance to prove to you that this works because it really does! It doesn't matter how your anxiety presents itself, whether you have been diagnosed with Generalised Anxiety Disorder, Agoraphobia or whatever, we can help you.

Just to reassure you, we will not be asking you to go against your doctors advice or that of other medical professionals. We aren't one of these programmes that tell you, "your doctor wouldn't understand". We aren't going to ask you to do anything out of the ordinary or dangerous. Quite the opposite. If you are seeing your doctor regarding your anxiety disorder, we WANT you to go to them with this book and discuss it with them. We have even included a short letter for them at the back of the book since we know they won't have time to read much. Check the index for "Dear Doctor"!

Let the journey to a better future begin!

2

The Anatomy of Anxiety

“He who fears he shall suffer, already suffers what he fears.”

Montaigne, Essays, 1588

Before we start into the 10 Steps, it's worth taking some time to look at the background of anxiety and the physical processes involved. You might not want to read this chapter; it's quite medical in places and you might not follow it, but that's OK. We go into a lot of detail which some of you will be interested in, others of you might prefer to not go into quite that much detail. However if you are one of those people that want to really understand everything, then I think you will find it fascinating to read and hopefully it will take away some of the mystery around anxiety.

Never make the mistake of underestimating the impact that anxiety can have on the human body. As you will see before the end of this chapter, it really is quite amazing what anxiety can potentially do.

Before we get started you must remember that when we start looking into individual symptoms that not one single one of them is in any way dangerous or harmful.

A History Lesson!

Let's start by going back over a hundred years to the start of the 20th century. Ivan Pavlov was a respected Russian scientist who was involved in research looking at the digestion of food in both humans and animals. It was while he was doing this research that Pavlov got involved in other areas of research relating to this, such as the secretion of saliva. Pavlov noticed that whenever a dog sees food it starts to produce saliva (ever seen a dog drool?). This saliva is needed in order to make the food easier to swallow. Pavlov became fascinated when he saw that there were times that the dogs started to drool when there wasn't any food in sight. Pavlov discovered that the reason the dogs were behaving this way was because they saw people wearing white lab coats. It turned out that every time the dogs were served food, the person who served them was wearing a white lab coat. So, every time the dogs saw someone in a white coat they assumed that they were about to be fed.

Pavlov wanted to understand more about how this worked so he came up with a series of experiments. One of these experiments involved Pavlov sounding a bell every time the dogs were fed. If the bell was sounded just before meal time, the dogs learnt to associate the sound of the bell with food. After a

while, at the mere sound of the bell, the dogs would start to drool.

Modern science now refers to this as **classic conditioning** or as a **conditioned response**. It sounds complicated but it really isn't. It's simply a way of learning that happens through rewards and punishments. Through these rewards and punishments, an association is made between a behaviour or an action and a consequence.

For most parents this is how we raise our children to understand the difference between right and wrong! Because young children need to be taught how to behave, but aren't able to necessarily understand, we teach them that "bad" behaviour results in a punishment and "good" behaviour means a reward. This is called conditioning because it's a behaviour that has had to be learnt rather than something that happens instinctively. Remember children aren't born knowing the difference between right and wrong.

Those feelings of anxiety and that "fight or flight" response we have talked about are built in to our bodies without us having to learn them. They are completely normal! The problem is that in a person with anxiety the subconscious mind connects these responses to situations that don't need it – the anxiety is therefore inappropriate.

In other words:

Dangerous situation = Anxiety	Appropriate, genuine danger
Facing dangerous animal = Fight or Flight	Appropriate, genuine danger
Going out the house = Anxiety	Inappropriate, no danger (Agoraphobia)
Being in a crowded room = Anxiety	Inappropriate, no danger (Social Anxiety)

Coming back to Pavlov's dogs, it's obvious that there was no need for them to drool just because they heard a bell ringing; after all it's not as if the bell was food! Our anxiety is no different; the subconscious triggers feelings of anxiety and panic simply because that is what it has learnt or, to use the technical term, been conditioned to do.

An Anatomy Lesson

The Amygdala

Scientists discovered a while ago that those feelings of anxiety and panic are triggered by a small organ within your brain called the amygdala. The amygdala's job is to record emotional reactions to things that happen. Think of your amygdala as a "secretary" for your brain with an emotional filing cabinet, taking notes on experience, and recording how best to deal with similar situations in the future. Scientists have been able to show that anxiety disorders such as generalised anxiety, panic attacks, phobias and obsessions (OCD) all happen within the amygdala because of the way these past similar or actual experiences have been recorded.

Let's take an example of a person with Agoraphobia. A conscious decision is made to go out. That

decision is then taken to the amygdala for a “second opinion” to check if there is anything emotionally significant about it. The “emotional filing cabinet” is searched and a file is found labelled “going outside”. That file is open and found to say “dangerous situation, must sound alarm”.

So What Happens To Create Anxiety and Panic?

Whenever our amygdala decides to sound the alarm, whether in response to a genuine danger or not, it sends a message to all the other parts of the brain, which causes the classic symptoms of anxiety and panic. For a split second the symptoms are there even before your conscious brain realises why! Your body is ready to save itself from this dangerous situation even before conscious thought has had time to get involved. If you think about it, this is a highly efficient system. You are ready to respond in less time than it takes to think about it! If you were to discover a fire the first thing you would do is set off a fire alarm. Everything else such as helping to evacuate people is done after that. It’s basic survival – react first, ask questions later!

Once your Amygdala has sounded the alarm, the conscious mind now gets involved, analysing the situation further by looking at the information available to it; from what you can see, hear and feel. A decision is made as to whether or not the response was justified and, if it is judged to be, the amygdala remains on alert.

Parts Of The Brain

Just for fun, let’s quickly talk about the different parts of the brain:

- The Thalamus is what deals with what you see and hear. It processes this information and passes it on to the cortex.
- The Cortex is what gives sights and sounds meaning, allowing your brain to recognise and understand what it’s actually seeing or hearing. It is believed that one particular part of the cortex, known as the prefrontal cortex, is vital in turning off the anxiety alarm after a threat has passed.
- The Hypothalamus is responsible for producing a number of important hormones in our body. These hormones control, amongst other things, things like hunger and thirst, body temperature and sleep patterns. What it also controls is the release of pituitary hormones, which are used in association with the adrenal gland, to produce the stress hormone cortisol.
- The Amygdala which we talked about earlier is the emotional core of the brain, responsible for attaching emotional significance to any data that passes through it. It is also the job of the amygdala to process smells. The amygdala deals with smells itself, which is why particular smells, for example a familiar perfume or flower scent from childhood, have been shown to produce much stronger memories than just familiar sights or sounds.
- The Bed Nucleus of the Stria Terminalis (BNST) plays a role in anxiety. Although the amygdala triggers that immediate burst of fear, it is the BNST that causes the longer term feelings of anxiety.
- The Locus Ceruleus is part of the brain and is one of the parts of the body that produce the

chemical noradrenaline. This is the chemical that produces many of the classic signs of anxiety for example racing heart, sweating etc..

- The Hippocampus is your main memory centre, storing the raw information coming in from the senses along with any "emotional baggage" that has become attached to it as it passes through the amygdala.

In a potentially dangerous situation we need more than just our brain to be prepared to face the threat. After all you wouldn't be in a position to "fight or flight" if it was only your brain that was ready!

The Sympathetic Nervous System

The sympathetic nervous system (SNS) is part of what is known as the autonomic nervous system which acts as the general housekeeper for the body, looking after basic functions such as heart rate and breathing rate. When the SNS processes the alarm from the amygdala, it uses its ability to control both heart and breathing rate to cause them both to increase. There is a perfectly valid reason, of course, that your body wants to do this; it means that more oxygen is being transported around the body, ready for the increased demands of either "fight" or "flight".

In order to perform its normal functions, the SNS produces small amounts of the chemical noradrenaline, also known as norepinephrine; after the SNS is alerted it increases its production of noradrenaline, but also starts producing its bigger, stronger brother adrenaline. Noradrenaline is designed to affect specific organs in the body over relatively short periods of time. Adrenaline, also known as epinephrine, on the other hand is capable of lasting for much longer and causing an effect on the entire body. The adrenaline released by your adrenal gland, like the noradrenaline, causes your body to break out into a sweat. This sweating is designed to keep your body cool no matter what course of action you choose to take. For some people the most noticeable problem is sweaty palms, for others its sweaty armpits; the exact pattern of sweating varies from person to person.

Muscle Problems

One of the other major effects of this extra noradrenaline is in alerting the muscles of the body, large and small, to contract. Think of this as turning your body into a coiled spring, with your muscles ready to react to whatever may happen with the maximum possible speed. This contraction of the muscles also allows them to produce greater strength than they would otherwise. Think about a professional athlete on the blocks at the start of a race; some muscles are contracted and are ready to go while opposing muscles tighten to stop any movement happening yet. The athlete is able to hold their position, ready to spring into action when the starter pistol is fired; this is referred to by the rather technical term "isometric tension". It's not really a surprise that a lot of people experience fatigue with anxiety with the fact that their muscles are being constantly held ready for action. This state of readiness uses up a lot more energy than when muscles simply cycle through their normal patterns of

tension and relaxation.

Muscles in the state of isometric tension frequently start to get sore after a while because in this state the flow of blood to them is less than normal. This soreness can also be caused simply by that constant state of tightness which isn't how muscles are designed to behave! Your muscles are designed to be sometimes tight and sometimes relaxed. When your muscles aren't able to relax they eventually get sore and you start to get muscle spasms as a result. The spasms can happen to virtually any of your muscles and can cause, amongst other things, tremors and twitches. On more than one occasion I experienced this twitching sensation in my chest muscles and was convinced that this meant I was having a heart attack since my heart was apparently doing 300 beats a minute!

Your muscles are attached to your bones by things called tendons. Whenever a muscle contracts this causes the joint to be moved in a particular direction. With long term tension in the muscles, the tendons, which aren't flexible themselves, are kept under pressure. This long term joint and tendon strain can start to cause pain in your joints. One such joint that some sufferers have problems with is their jaw joint, or to give it its full name the temporo-mandibular joint (TMJ); this typically results in jaw pain from tension and grinding teeth and is often felt as toothache.

Other places where problems can happen are in the back and around the head. A lot of headaches are caused by muscle tension which starts at the shoulders and comes up through the neck and up to the top of the head. This gives the sensation of your head being squeezed tightly. If you have problems with frequent headaches when you get anxious then massage from an appropriately trained practitioner is a very effective treatment. The practitioner will massage the top of the head and neck and specifically rub the muscles directly under the base of your skull. One of the biggest problems that I had was with muscle tension in my shoulders and neck which I interpreted as a feeling of dizziness and became convinced that this meant that I was going to faint.

We mentioned the stress hormone cortisol earlier when we were talking about the hypothalamus. Cortisol does a couple of important things. Firstly it raises the level of glucose in the blood which ensures that there is more energy available. Secondly it increases your sensitivity to both noradrenaline and adrenaline. If we are finding ourselves with repeatedly high levels of anxiety, our body becomes even more sensitive to cortisol which means that it takes less and less to produce an effect. In addition this also means that it takes smaller and smaller amounts of noradrenaline and adrenaline to cause higher levels of activity for longer periods of time. It is this increased sensitivity that often means sufferers of frequent panic attacks can often feel quite panicky long after the original trigger or panic attack. An increased sensitivity to adrenaline and noradrenaline can also cause headaches.

When it comes to recording memories of events, the hippocampus needs an efficient supply of energy to be able to do this. The problem is that, as we have mentioned earlier, cortisol causes that energy to be directed towards the muscles ready for "fight" or "flight". As a result memory can be affected and some find that they have problems remembering things that happened when they were anxious or panicked. Some people also find that when they are feeling particularly anxious that their mind "goes blank".

The Parasympathetic Nervous System

Within the autonomic nervous system, we also have what is known as the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS). Once it has received the alert from the amygdala, the PNS has the job of slowing down bodily processes that aren't essential at a time of high anxiety or panic. For example, it slows down things like digestion and waste removal to make sure the body is focused only on what is absolutely essential. The body has directed its sole attention to your current situation and to looking for potential dangers, taking in every little detail from your hyper-alert senses.

Since your body has decided to only focus on the essentials and not on things like waste removal, this can result in rather unfortunate results which give rise to the saying "I was so scared I (insert bodily function of choice) myself!". The slowing down of your digestive system, which mean it is working less efficiently, can result in things like constipation, diarrhea, indigestion, heartburn, acid stomach and problems with urinating. Anxiety also causes the production of stomach acid to increase, another possible source of indigestion.

Many people suffering from anxiety also experience problems with sex and sexual function; either with things not quite working as expected or just simply not being in the mood. This is because the PNS slows production of the hormone responsible for sexual function called gonadotropin releasing hormone (GnRH). The release of cortisol also restricts the gonadotropin releasing hormone and as a result can cause problems with sperm production, ovulation and general sexual function. In the last few years research has shown that anxiety also causes another hormone called gonadotropin-inhibiting hormone (GnIH) to be released. This means that not only is there less hormone that promotes sexual function, but there is also more of the hormone that reduces it!

While the "fight or flight" response causes your immune system initially to be stronger, people who are anxious have been shown over time to have a weakened immune system. Initially the immune system is boosted in preparation for healing injuries that might happen in the fight or flight. As time passes the changes, which were designed for the short term, actually leave the immune system generally weakened. This is why people with anxiety disorders have been shown in medical studies to be much more likely to catch any illnesses going around such as the common cold. There are studies currently ongoing in an attempt to work out why this happens.

Anxiety Symptoms

Before we start talking about anxiety symptoms, I don't want you to be reading and re-reading this section all the time. This isn't a list of things for you to go and develop! What will be obvious to you when you look at this list is that anxiety can and does produce a whole lot of different symptoms. I don't want you to worry when you see this list; if anything most people find it a relief to see that some of the things they have experienced in the past, and didn't know what they were, turned out to be symptoms of anxiety. Remember that every single one of these symptoms is completely harmless!

General Bodily Symptoms

- Blanching or Blushing; your face either looks pale or looks red and flushed
- Body temperature (either up or down)
- Burning sensations to the face, neck, hands, fingers, arms, legs and skin
- Clumsiness; lack of co-ordination
- Coldness; cold chills/feeling cold
- Cravings for sugar/sweets/chocolate
- Chronic fatigue; being completely worn out/exhausted
- Difficulty speaking; problems coordinating the mouth and tongue
- Dry mouth
- Dry, watery or itchy eyes
- Electric shock feeling – “body zaps”
- Excess energy and inability to relax
- Feeling of “falling” when you aren't
- Feeling like the floor is moving when it's not
- Feeling like you are going to faint or pass out (you aren't)
- Feeling “weird”, “strange” or “odd”. If you've experienced this you will know what it means!
- Frequent need to run to the toilet!
- Increase or decrease in sex drive (or even no interest)
- Numbness and/or tingling sensations
- Overly sensitive; easy to startle
- Sweating – uncontrollable and profuse

Muscular Symptoms

- Aches; general soreness and aching
- Back and neck pain; stiffness/tightness/muscle spasms
- Chest pain, chest tightness
- Chest tremors (chest feels like its vibrating)

- “Choking”; a feeling of tightness around the throat
- Difficulty swallowing
- Dizziness
- Frequent headaches
- Grinding teeth
- Jaw pain that feels like toothache
- Lump in the throat, tight throat, something stuck in your throat
- Muscle twitching; muscles that vibrate, tremor, pulse, throb or shake
- Muscle weakness especially in the arms and legs
- Rib cage tightness as if there was a tight band around your ribs
- Shooting pains/stabbing pains and odd feelings of pressure in the neck, head or face
- Tightness around the head, sometimes feeling like a tight band is squeezing all around

Chest Symptoms

We talked earlier about how noradrenaline and adrenaline increase your heart and breathing rate and how cortisol makes you more sensitive to them. The end result is that over time it takes less and less anxiety to produce the faster heart rate and breathing rate. This can result in symptoms which are probably the most terrifying of them all and are frequently believed to be the signs of a heart attack to people who haven't experienced them before.

- Feeling like you have to force yourself to breath
- Find it hard to breath, feeling smothered and short of breath
- Frequent yawning to try and catch your breath
- Heart palpitations/racing heart/pounding heart
- Heart “flutters” or “skipped beats” (and this is perfectly safe!)

Emotional Symptoms

Remember that the amygdala's alarm causes parts of the brain to generate responses that spread out to effect the whole body. Don't think that these responses can't affect your emotions because they clearly can. For some people the anger and depression that they feel because of their disorder feed of each other to the point where they feel like they are about to lose control.

- A heightened fear of what people think of you
- Afraid of being trapped in a place with no exits
- Always feeling angry for no apparent reason
- Constant feeling of being overwhelmed
- Depression
- Fear of being in public

- Fear of dying or losing control
- Fear the something bad is about to happen
- Fear of making mistakes or making a fool of yourself to others
- Fear of passing out
- Fears about completely irrational things, objects, circumstances, or situations
- Fears of going crazy, of dying, of impending doom, of normal things, unusual feelings and emotions, unusually frightening thoughts or feelings
- Feeling as if you are going to cry a lot of the time
- Generalised feeling of fear about everything
- Heightened self-awareness, or self-consciousness
- Lack of emotion; feeling “numb”
- Mood swings
- Need to find the nearest toilet before you can feel comfortable
- Need to always sit near exits or have a planned route of escape

Sensory Symptoms

- Distorted, foggy or blurred vision
- Eyes playing tricks – seeing things that aren’t there eg flashes or “spots”, including when eyes are closed
- Increased sensitivity to light (caused by dilation of the pupils)
- Pulsing in the ears, throbbing sound in the ear(s)
- Reduced hearing or deafness in one or both ears
- Ringing in the ears, noises in the ears, noises in the head (including low rumbling sounds)
- Tickle or itch in your ear that you can't seem to get at
- Feeling as if something is stuck in your ear or that something is blocking your ear
- Unusual taste in your mouth “tinny” or “metallic”

Head Symptoms

- “Brain fog” – a feeling of foggiess sometimes described as feeling as if your brain is wrapped in cotton wool
- Derealisation (discussed later)
- Depersonalisation (discussed later)
- Difficulty thinking or concentrating
- Disorientation
- Feeling of floating when you close your eyes
- Feeling completely overwhelmed as if there is too much to do
- Short term memory problems – remembering things from a few days/hours/minutes ago
- Short term learning problems – finding it hard to remember new information

- “Spaced out” feelings

Stomach Symptoms

- Diarrhoea
- Constipation
- Excess wind
- Loss of appetite (sometime nausea at thought of eating)
- Nausea
- Stomach cramps/upset
- Vomiting

Sleep Symptoms

- Difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep
- Nightmares/bad dreams
- Imaging sounds that wake you up
- Waking up with a “jolt”
- Nighttime panic attacks
- Nighttime sweats
- Feeling worse in the mornings

Remember that the symptoms that we mention aren’t a checklist for you to tick off. Some people have a few, other people have a lot. You don’t need to have a large number of them to have an anxiety disorder. The number of symptoms you experience shouldn’t be connected to the severity of your problems either; just because you have a lot of the symptoms doesn’t mean your anxiety problems are severe.

Depersonalisation & Derealisation

Perhaps the symptoms that seem to cause the most distress to those that experience them are those of derealisation and depersonalisation. They are quite difficult to explain to others so I think that it would be helpful if we talk about them here! These are the symptoms that lead sufferers to believe they are losing their mind or going insane. I have experienced both of these myself but when I started to think about writing down what they felt like for this book, I found it quite difficult!

So here goes...

With derealisation you feel as if you aren’t a part of what is going on, or perhaps that what is happening is actually a dream. Maybe you feel like all you are doing is watching what is going around you but that you’re not actually there.

Depersonalisation is similar. Again, you feel like you are not a part of what is going on, or that you are

dreaming. The big difference is that in depersonalisation it's about how you see yourself rather than the world around you; you feel like you are simply watching yourself but aren't totally in control. The difference simply comes down to whether or not that "dreaming" feeling makes you feel like you are separated from yourself (depersonalisation) or the world around you (derealisation). You can, of course, experience both of these at the same time. Sometimes people also talk about these feelings as being "disassociated", "detached", "spaced out" or "like in a dream".

Fear

When we think of being very anxious or feel panicky, we typically feel scared. These feelings of fear typically go hand in hand with anxiety and panic, and I am sure that as an anxiety sufferer you will have experienced many episodes of fear. But what exactly is fear?

Fear, like anxiety is an emotion. Don't think of fear as a bad thing. It isn't. Fear makes you careful, it makes you watch your step. It can stop you from hurting yourself jumping from that height, touching that possibly hot object. Fear warns us when we find ourselves in a dangerous situation. Fear tells us that perhaps we should avoid that situation or escape from it. Fear stops us from doing something stupid that could hurt us. Fear can be motivating.

If we find something that we are scared of, it's important that we think about what is actually the source of the fear. It's perfectly normal to feel fear, if say someone was pointing a gun at us but for a lot of people some fears, like anxiety in anxiety disorder, are inappropriate. Fears can be completely irrational but still perfectly real to those who experience them; have you ever heard of omphalophobia? It's a fear of belly buttons!

Being able to recognise a fear is a big help in overcoming it. Fear doesn't mean standing terrified unable to move and screaming. Fear can be as simple as those negative thoughts at the back of your mind that hold you back from doing something. If you can recognise the thoughts that are holding you back from doing something are actually just fear, and that fear doesn't have to be listened to, then then you can move forward. A successful person is not one who doesn't experience fear but rather one who acts despite it.

Did you know that there are 3 different types of fear? :

External Fear

An external fear is caused by something outside of your control. It is activated by certain triggers such as spiders, heights, flying or dentists. Often this type of fear is referred to as a "phobia". It's easy to recognise external fears because of their obvious association to something. For example when you see a spider, you experience fear.

Internal Fear

Internal fears, unlike external, are not specific to individual situations. Although they can still be caused by external events, the fear is generally non-specific. Some examples may be a fear or failure of a fear

of rejection. Because there is often no clear trigger, it can be difficult to recognise an internal fear and that makes it particularly damaging as it often holds people back from enjoying new experiences.

Subconscious Fear

A subconscious fear goes much deeper than an internal fear. This type of fear is not perceived as a fear in the same way that a person scared of spiders would experience fear. In fact it goes so deep that it's often not recognised as being a fear at all but is seen as a core belief. A core belief is something we believe of ourselves. You may think that you aren't good at communicating with people for example when in fact you are. Behaviour like this causes what we call limiting beliefs. Limiting beliefs alter how you see the world; for example you may believe that you aren't capable of a better paid job because you aren't good enough. When you find yourself deciding that you can't do something, ask yourself if that is genuinely true, especially if people around you are telling you something different. Is the way you feel being caused by a deep irrational, subconscious fear?

Panic

There aren't just different types of fear, there are also different types of panic! Let's take a look at these.

Situational Panic

Situation panic is the most common and easiest to understand. With this type of panic there is an obvious cause; in other words when I have to face, or even just think about, a certain situation, place or activity, I panic! The circumstances that set off situational panic are generally the same every time. Whenever a person who is experiencing situational panic removes themselves from the situation that is causing the problem, then the feelings of panic stop. The problem with just removing yourself from that situation, and then avoiding it in future, is that there is a long term risk that more and more situations are avoided and the problem just gets worse. This is because as the situation that is causing panic becomes totally avoided, there is no opportunity for the subconscious to learn that what you are actually feeling panicked about is actually safe. At its worst, this can turn into Agoraphobia.

This type of panic falls into two categories; frequent situational panic and infrequent situational panic. With frequent situational panic the panic attack happens either all the time or most of the time. Infrequent situation panic, obviously, means it happens occasionally. Someone with infrequent situational panic can be exposed to the thing they fear and feel scared but not always have a panic attack.

Random Panic

Perhaps the most terrifying of all panic attacks is those that can come at any time and don't seem to be

tied to any specific cause. When the feeling of panic is random a number of fears can develop as a result. For example if you experienced an episode of panic, you may decide that you are no longer able to go shopping again to avoid having another panic attack. When panic is random like this sufferers often mistakenly decide that they are having a heart attack, going insane or perhaps losing control.

Night Panic

For some, the only form of panic they experience happens at night after they have been asleep; this is also referred to as “night terrors”. Sometime this can happen if anxiety has left the brain overly sensitive to change, which causes it to interpret small physical changes in the body as a threat, activating the fight or flight response. Night panic can be especially scary simply because of the suddenness of going from being asleep to being panicked. People wake up very confused to find themselves experiencing the physical sensations of fear and anxiety. Often the fear of this night time panic makes sufferers scared to go to bed at night.

Stimulation Panic

Stimulation panic is entirely lifestyle related. Simply the body has had an “overload” of stimulants such as caffeine, nicotine or energy drinks. The solution to this is rather obvious!

In Summary

Having seen how the “fight or flight response” happens, what effects it can have and how it works I hope that this will have removed a lot of the mystery surrounding anxiety and panic. You should now understand that all these sensations you experience are perfectly normal when you have an anxiety or panic disorder. Having seen the wide range of sensations that your body on alert can produce, you need to take the next step. Forget about them! It’s going to be a lot easier for you to try to ignore them if you understand why these things are happening to you. If you don’t understand you only end up asking yourself, “How could this possibly be part of my anxiety?” or thinking, “This couldn’t possibly be my anxiety, I must have something seriously wrong with me”.

With all the different symptoms that sufferers can experience, anxiety has unfortunately become something that people just don’t talk about. As a result people with anxiety disorders feel very isolated, believing themselves to be the only one to have had these experiences. The Internet doesn’t help much either creating inaccurate or misleading expectations; the end result being that the sufferer feels that they are on their own, are abnormal (or even severely mentally ill or going insane) and ultimately can’t be helped.

As you read on, we will help you to break down your anxiety disorder further and help you to tackle it

in easy to follow steps. It might seem daunting now but hopefully you are beginning to realise that it's not that hard to understand and you can do something about it. Let's move on now to talking about different diagnoses and what they mean.

3

Never Mind The Labels!

“My life has been full of terrible misfortunes most of which never happened.”

Michel de Montaigne

“If you see ten troubles coming down the road, you can be sure that nine will run into the ditch before they reach you.”

Calvin Coolidge

I’m sure I don’t need to tell you that anxiety can show itself in many different ways. In the last chapter we certainly saw that there was a huge variety of different symptoms that sufferers can experience. For some people their anxiety is something that is an intense, short-lived feeling (for example with a Panic Disorder). For others anxiety is something that is there all the time, either in relation to a specific trigger (Agoraphobia) or just a general feeling of anxiety (Generalised Anxiety Disorder). Some people may experience both, having periods of intense panic as well as a general level of background anxiety in life in general.

According to current research, scientists have classified 7 types of anxiety disorder:

- Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)
- Social Phobia
- Panic Disorder
- Agoraphobia
- Specific Phobia
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

Before we look at each of these, remember that when it comes to dealing with an anxiety disorder the label is unimportant and with the 10 Step method it doesn't really matter what form your anxiety takes.

Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD)

This is the most common form of anxiety. Sufferers describe a general feeling of permanent anxiety over things, sometimes even things that are highly unlikely to ever happen. As we have said before anxiety is a normal emotion; where it becomes a problem with GAD is where the anxiety is happening regularly without any specific cause and not attached to any particular situation. This is why it is called “generalised”! Of course most people worry about things from time to time, however the key difference between normal worry and GAD is that GAD just keeps on going, lasting more than six months. In addition, with GAD the amount of time spent worrying is completely out of proportion to the problem itself.

Typically the most common symptoms of GAD are

- Muscle tension especially in the back, neck and shoulders
- Constantly feeling on edge, easily upset, moody and irritable
- Constant feeling of tiredness or getting tired easily; lack of energy
- Problems with concentration and racing thoughts
- Sleep difficulties
- Headaches
- Nausea
- Lack of perspective over everyday problems
- Irrational focus over normal everyday bodily sensations

Social Phobia

Social Phobia, also known as Social Anxiety, is the name given to people who have a fear of social situations; this can be anything from going out to dinner, being in a crowd, standing in a busy supermarket, going to a public toilet or even just using the telephone. Sufferers constantly feel like they are being watched; like everyone is watching and judging them. A Social Phobia goes far beyond just being “shy”; someone with social phobia is obsessed with the idea that they are somehow being judged by everyone. This reaches the point where sufferers go out of their way to avoid being placed in that kind of situation. Some professionals believe that this particular form of anxiety is far more common than people think but is unfortunately not being identified well enough. Those with Social Phobia may be seen by other people as being withdrawn and disinterested in other people or perhaps just thought to be unfriendly. It’s not that sufferers are being unfriendly but their fear and anxiety is holding them back.

Symptoms of Social Phobia include:

- Continually high levels of fear that they will embarrass or humiliate themselves in social situations
- Almost always having high levels of anxiety or panic attack brought on certain social situations
- The person recognises that this fear is unreasonable but still suffers severe anxiety or simply avoids the situation, even at a heavy cost to their everyday lives

Panic Disorder

People with panic disorder can feel intense panic (or believe they are about to start panicking) without knowing the actual reason. Having a panic attack does not mean a person has a panic disorder; a panic attack is a sign of extreme anxiety which can be about specific known fear. The most common sign of any anxiety disorder is a panic attack, however panic disorder involves having these panic attacks without there being any obvious trigger for it. If you have ever had a panic attack you will know exactly how it feels; needless to say the feelings are so intense that the sufferer generally believes that they are about to die. This leaves those with panic disorder living afraid of having another panic attack and the sensations that it brings. Essentially they are living in fear.

Agoraphobia

Contrary to what many people think, Agoraphobia is not a fear of open spaces at all but rather a fear of being away from a place of safety. The typical fear for someone with this condition is that they become trapped in a situation from where there is no escape or where they think it might be difficult to escape from. Often a person who suffers from Agoraphobia becomes obsessed with only being in a place and situation where they feel like they have total control. The person typically feels tense over normal day to day activities such as going out or talking to people.

Agoraphobia typically starts by sufferers avoiding places that make them feel anxious and uncomfortable, or perhaps where they previously had a panic attack. This leads on to avoiding more and more places for fear of getting a similar feeling until ultimately it can reach the stage where the person doesn't leave the house. Quite how restricted a person becomes varies a lot; some people may be quite happy getting about locally but start to feel uncomfortable if they are more than say 5 miles from home. For some it can even reach the stage where they restrict themselves to one particular room in their house. There is no hard and fast rule for where the boundaries might be.

Almost everyone has times in their life where they choose to stay at home because that makes them feel less vulnerable. For the person with Agoraphobia however this is a very intense feeling that doesn't go away, with a constant need to feel safe all the time.

Specific Phobias

Specific phobias are extremely common and many people have at least one thing that they find scares them. That might be a fear of heights, mice, spiders, flying, dentists etc.. If encountering something causes an overwhelming and irrational fear (and the emphasis is on irrational) then this is a phobia. For the majority of people having a phobia against something specific doesn't cause any problems on a day to day basis if they can simply avoid the thing that scares them. For example there are people who have a fear of oranges. While they may feel rather silly that they are petrified of a piece of fruit, at least avoiding oranges is pretty unlikely to cause any great effect on everyday life. Where avoidance becomes an issue is when staying away from something creates problems. For example a phobia of dentists, as opposed to severe dislike, can be problematic for obvious reasons. A severe fear of heights might dictate job opportunities (no jobs in skyscrapers), but may go as far as being a fear of ladders or

staircases.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

PTSD arises as a result of a traumatic event (or an event which the person experiencing it found to be traumatic) which caused the person who experienced it to feel horror, completely helpless and terrified. It can occur weeks, months or even years after the original event.

In patients suffering from PTSD the traumatic experience is constantly been relived time and time again, sometimes in flashbacks or with thoughts or images suddenly appearing in their thoughts. Often sufferers will have nightmares that directly relate to the experience. Reminders of the original experience too often bring about strong emotional reactions to the point where sufferers may choose to avoid anything that may remind them of the event. They may also find themselves trying to bury memories of the event, feeling emotionally numb or detached and unable to express affection towards others. On the other hand a person may also find themselves getting easily upset and irritated to the point of aggression, unable to concentrate, extremely alert and easily startled, panicking easily at anything that reminds them in any way of the original trauma. PTSD causes sufferers to feel isolated and alone and often with problems getting to sleep.

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

OCD is probably the most confusing and frustrating of all the anxiety disorders, not just for the sufferer but for their families as well. The name OCD refers to two quite different things, which is obsessions and compulsions. An obsession refers to a thought that you just can't get away from; a compulsion is an action that you can't stop doing. To suffer from OCD you may have either obsessions, compulsions or both. It is a common misunderstanding that OCD requires compulsions (such as repeated hand washing or checking doors are locked); having obsessive thoughts in itself is sufficient.

Just thinking about something all the time is not enough to be considered an obsession; an obsession is based around a perceived problem that most people don't even think about. An obsessive thought is unwanted and intrudes when thinking about other things. However someone with OCD knows that the thought comes from within them, as opposed to Schizophrenia, where a person believes it comes from outside. Compulsions, when they occur, are the outward signs of obsessions. For example an obsession may be with cleanliness, a compulsion could be constant hand washing. People with OCD usually know that their behaviour is irrational, but those who have compulsions continue to perform them because they need to in order to relieve the anxiety that they have before doing them.

Many people have little idiosyncrasies that could be considered typical OCD behaviours but that doesn't mean they have OCD. Some people, for instance, have the urge to go and check "one more time" that they have their keys in their pocket or that the TV has actually been turned off before leaving the house! The comedian Peter Kay did a wonderful comedy routine about the little odd habits people have around getting up, like looking at the alarm clock and, if the time doesn't end on a five or a zero, going back to sleep until finally they wake up at a time when it does! When it comes right down to it these are little quirks that you could put out of your mind if you had to and that wouldn't cause you

to worry that something terrible would happen if you didn't do them.

Did you know that a health anxiety, worrying all the time about your health, is actually a form of OCD? Health Anxiety is based around an obsession that a person is (or is about to become) ill. With Health Anxiety there may also be compulsions which include constant pulse checking, temperature checking or blood pressure monitoring.

Am I Mentally Ill?

While we're on the subject of labels, I think the worst label that anxiety sufferers struggle with is being labelled as being "mentally ill". For people who have seen the movie "One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest" the term brings up images of padded cells, bars on the window and electric shock therapy! Certainly within the UK anxiety sufferers may be asked to speak to psychiatrists and community psychiatric nurses and probably be referred to a "mental health team". I experienced this myself many times and I really didn't like it but you know what, it really doesn't matter! Unfortunately nowadays everything has to come down to a label and on paper you aren't an individual, you're a condition. Remember, at the end of the day we're all unique so never mind the labels! For what it's worth I personally don't believe that having an anxiety disorder makes you mentally ill. Why? Clinically there is nothing wrong with you. There is no x-ray, scan or blood test that can identify anxiety. There is no tablet that can change how you think. Every symptom, sensation and feeling are normal responses generated by your body. Granted they are being generated inappropriately but they're still normal. How can you call it a disease or a mental illness then?

In Summary

For many anxiety sufferers it is not uncommon to relate to more than one of the 7 classifications. Indeed it is possible to have 4 or 5 or even more! From my own experiences I know I can certainly relate to a lot more than just the 1! Many who have suffered with unresolved anxiety for years will have experienced different presentations; I have personally had periods of Agoraphobia, Health Anxiety, OCD and Generalised Anxiety Disorder but never all at the same time.

When we take the labels away though it all comes down to the simple fact that's it about the inappropriate triggering of an emotion.

4

The 10 Steps

“Anxiety is a thin stream of fear trickling through the mind. If encouraged, it cuts a channel into which all other thoughts are drained. “

Arthur Somers Roche

“We have to fight them daily, like fleas, those many small worries about the morrow, for they sap our energies. “

Etty Hillesum

You may think it’s rather a bold claim but I really do believe it; the 10 Steps is **the** solution to coming to terms with your anxiety disorder and it can, and will, work for you.

Before we start looking at the individual steps, I need to tell you how important it is that you really embrace each and every one of them, and integrate them into your daily routines and into your everyday life. Only by doing this will you be able to experience true freedom from your inappropriate anxiety. All the pain, the confusion, the frustration, the anger, the horrible symptoms and the panic will end, and your life will open up to new experiences, new relationships and new opportunities.

Read through each of the 10 Steps very carefully and take time to really listen to what they are saying. Read each step more than once. Don't get caught in the trap of thinking you can pick out a handful of the steps and skip the rest out. Each of the steps works together to support each other and help to build the foundation for your recovery, getting you ready to change.

If you would like to, feel free to speak to your doctor, counsellor or therapist about this programme. I can assure you that every single one of the steps is based on sound scientific evidence and practice not to mention the genuine, permanent recovery of many anxiety sufferers. The 10 Steps programme will not conflict with most other forms of therapy.

Let’s look at it this way. Imagine I want to build a wooden bookcase. To do this I need three things. I need the raw materials (the wood), a design to work from and I need the right tools to assist me in completing the job. You already have the raw materials in the form of your own mind. The 10 Steps are both your design and your basic tools. Other therapies such as hypnotherapy, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy etc. are additional tools which are available to help you reach your completed design! Of

course the 10 Steps can work on its own, but clearly having some face to face help and encouragement from someone who understands your individual needs can help you further. Remember that these therapies by themselves are not solutions however very few, if any, claim to be. The solution, and the ability to implement it, is within you! Even with the design, the tools and the raw materials the bookcase won't build itself; time and effort is needed to actually go and do it! If you take that time and make that effort you will be free of your panic and anxiety and take back control.

Unfortunately, especially in the age of the Internet, there are a great number of programmes out there all claiming to have the solution to anxiety. Some of these do contain useful information that can be helpful, others are just plain nonsense. Selling anxiety solutions to vulnerable people who would pay almost anything for the solution to their difficulties is in extremely poor taste at best and essentially fraud at worst. The fact of the matter is that with many of these "solutions" if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is! There is no magic tablet to sort out your anxiety overnight. There is no "instant cure" for anxiety as much as I would love for there to be one. I'm not saying that the 10 Steps are complicated but you will need to do your part as well. This isn't some sort of anxiety-removing magic wand!

The question you may be asking is, "How do I know that this programme will work?" or perhaps, "What makes this programme different to all the others I have tried in the past?". If you question this programme then take it to your doctor and discuss it with them; this programme is not about going against conventional medical thought, it's about working within it and alongside it. In fact even if you don't question this programme, take it to your doctor and let them see it anyway! Everything in the 10 Steps is about helping you think about your anxiety differently, suggesting things that you may not have thought of, condensing conventional medical knowledge and giving you all the information you need to finally rid yourself of inappropriate anxiety.

Step 1 – Anxiety or Lifestyle

I'd like you to imagine that I've bought myself a nice new car. For the first year it runs perfectly and every day I drive for hours and hours. After doing 20,000 miles the service light comes on but I decide to ignore it. I get a letter through the post reminding me about its first service, but I'm just too busy to do anything about it. After a few months I notice that the brakes aren't as good as they used to be, the tyres are so worn that in wet weather the car skids and every morning when I try and start the engine it takes 4 or 5 turns of the key to get it going. Any idea what the problem is? Do I need to buy a new car? I think it's pretty obvious that the issue is simply that I just didn't look after my car properly. It doesn't have a major fault, it just needs some basic maintenance. If I want to have a car that runs well, I have to make sure I maintain it.

Let's apply the same logic to anxiety and panic disorders. Have you ever thought about the fact that maybe some of the symptoms of anxiety and panic you may have experienced can actually be caused or made worse by your lifestyle choices and could actually be dramatically affected by simple changes? Think of your body as a machine whose performance is decided by how you maintain and look after it.

We will look at a number of important areas and talk about them in detail.

- Diet – what we eat and drink
- Posture - the way we hold ourselves
- Breathing
- Sleep
- Smoking
- Exercise

Diet

When we talk about diet here we are talking about two things; what we eat and what we drink. Diet is an extremely important factor in the way we feel and should not be underestimated.

Let's look at this further.

Dehydration

I'd like to start by talking about drinking, particularly water. Whenever we don't drink enough we become dehydrated. Dehydration is simply caused by a lack of fluids. Never underestimate the effects of dehydration, even mild, on your body. Despite the fact that it's such a simple problem that is so easy to fix, the list of symptoms is quite considerable. It only takes a 2% loss of the normal fluid level for your body to start to notice. The first symptom is the obvious feeling of thirst, but how often do we ignore feeling thirsty until another more convenient time? It may surprise you to learn that some of the symptoms that you associate with your anxiety may also be symptoms of dehydration! Think about that for a moment. Are all your anxious feelings and symptoms really just a result of anxiety alone?

When you're anxious it's very easy to blame your anxiety for every little symptom and sensation you get. People with anxiety disorders often find it very difficult to be objective with physical sensations. On a warm summer day, for example, having not had anything to drink for a while and feeling a little light-headed, a non-anxious person will probably think "I need a drink". Often though an anxious person starts with looking for the worst possible interpretation in every situation (it's a common part of the condition!) and it's called catastrophisation. We talk about catastrophisation more later on in the book.

With continued dehydration the effects increase and can cause a dry mouth and lips, dry eyes, headache, light-headedness, weak muscles, dizziness when standing and fatigue. Perhaps less noticeably, dehydration can also cause constipation, decreased output of urine and urine becomes more concentrated. Of course these last few make a lot of sense since after all if you aren't taking water in, you can't put water out! I'm sure most people would expect that if they aren't drinking enough that they would feel thirsty and have a dry mouth, but how many people would associate muscle weakness and lightheadedness with the simple need for a drink? Many anxious people who suddenly find themselves feeling lightheaded, with a headache and dizziness will probably jump straight to the worst case scenario and start thinking that they have a brain tumour. Never mind the obvious and simple causes! This is common thinking for someone with anxiety. We have gone from an easily fixed problem to being focused on the physical sensations with a whole heap of unnecessary worry on top. Simple solutions are overlooked and all the exotic and serious possible explanations are examined. Even when other people are telling the person, "You need to drink something", often the thoughts turn to, "But what if they are wrong?".

Dehydration is one of those things that seems to reinforce an anxious person's thinking. The United

States Department of Agriculture Agricultural Research Service has done some studies which have shown that dehydration also causes confusion and bad moods. What effect is that going to have on someone who is anxious?

The BBC documentary programme Panorama recently looked into the question of how much should someone drink a day. Their conclusion was perfectly simple - we should drink when we feel thirsty. That's how the African Special Forces operate when they are running around the desert with a heavy backpack. In recent years there seems to be a lot of people pushing us to drink larger and larger quantities of water a day, insisting we should measure how much we drink. The British Medical Journal in 2011 stated that there was no need for anyone to measure how much they drank a day; again the advice is simply drink when thirsty!

So what should we drink then? The most obvious source of hydration is water. It might be boring and uninteresting but don't overlook the various health benefits linked to drinking water every day. Drinking water makes your skin look good, makes you less likely to get a urinary infection and also improves digestion. There have been suggestions made in the past that have linked water to weight loss. There seem to be three reasons why this may be the case. Firstly drinking plenty of water is often part of a general lifestyle improvement. Secondly when we make sure that we drink sufficient amounts of water and that we stay properly hydrated then our bodies are able to work far more efficiently. Finally if we are drinking more water it is likely that this water is replacing something else, perhaps fizzy drinks, which are clearly a source of those extra calories that help pile on the pounds!

EXERCISE

I'd like you to try this exercise at least once, but preferably as often as you can.

Think about the last time you experienced high anxiety levels or panic.

On a piece of paper, write down the way you felt; list all your symptoms and how they developed and progressed.

Next, I want you to write down how active you were beforehand, what you were doing when you started to feel anxious or panicky and what did you have to eat and drink in the run up.

Think carefully about what you were doing before and afterwards. What did you choose to do and did you eat or drink anything?

Finally, if you can, I'd like you to give your piece of paper to someone else to read back to you, and I want you to imagine that they were the one to experience that event. What conclusions would you come to? What advice would you give?

Let me give you an example of something that happened to me quite a while ago now - my last major panic attack. If I was just focusing on my symptoms I would say: "Really bad day! Felt really panicky and anxious. Felt lightheaded, faint, sick and breathlessness."

If I do this exercise and I look again at the situation this is what I would say: "It was the deadline for

submitting my tax return. I couldn't find a lot of the paperwork I needed. I was running around the house trying to find it. I didn't have time to stop for breakfast or lunch so I hadn't eaten or drunk anything at all. About 2pm in the afternoon, drove to the accountant. About half way there I felt a bit lightheaded. I started to worry more and more and began to hyperventilate. I then started to feel faint and really panicked - I thought I was actually going to faint. I panicked some more and started to feel sick and breathless. I was shaking. When I got home I went straight to bed. I didn't eat or drink anything until I calmed down a couple of hours later. Felt terrible the rest of the day".

When I was able to take a step back from what happened to me that day it became obvious that the trigger was simply a LIFESTYLE CHOICE of not eating or drinking! My wife, of course, had already told me that at the time but I couldn't accept it. Once I started experiencing the symptoms of dehydration and feeling hungry, the anxiety took over and blew everything out of all proportion.

Anyway, back to the exercise. I would like you now to write down the honest answers to the following questions:

1. Could my lifestyle choices have contributed to the initial physical sensations?
2. Objectively looking back at things can I better understand how this started?
3. Can I see how things started to spiral out of control?

It may be that you conclude that diet/dehydration wasn't/isn't a factor in your anxiety but it's important that we have thought about it. Maybe it's not causing it, but is it keeping it going?

Caffeine

Caffeine is a stimulant. And what does a stimulant do? The dictionary defines a stimulant as "a substance that raises levels of physiological or nervous activity in the body". Caffeine is found in tea, coffee and energy drinks. We drink caffeine to give ourselves more energy and to wake ourselves up. This "stimulating" effect may be helpful in that way, but studies have shown repeatedly that caffeine is also capable of producing anxiety. For people who already have an anxiety disorder, adding caffeine to the equation isn't going to help. From as far back as the 18th century, medicine has known that high levels of caffeine causes nervousness. Since the late 1920's we've also known that caffeine causes people to feel "jittery" and irritable. We also now know that caffeine can also make people feel depressed. I'm sure I don't need to tell you that many of the effects of drinking too much caffeine are the same as those caused by anxiety. About 45 minutes after you drink that cup of coffee, the effects drop off as the caffeine is fully processed by your body and that boost of energy you experienced drops.

Before you start thinking about throwing out all the tea, coffee, energy drinks and cola etc. in the house

hold on! There are a few other things you need to think about.

Going from drinking a lot of caffeine every day to suddenly drinking nothing can cause caffeine withdrawal, especially headaches. It's not a serious problem but it can be unpleasant. If you have anxiety you certainly don't want to be doing something that can cause you more anxiety! If you do want to reduce the amount of caffeine you consume, do it gradually. Remember if you really like your tea and coffee, you can always buy reduced caffeine or decaffeinated varieties.

There are no hard and fast rules for how much caffeine people should have in a day. Some people are a lot more sensitive to its effects than others, but common sense would dictate that someone who is anxious shouldn't be introducing even a moderate level of a stimulant to their body. Caffeine has been shown in scientific studies to have both long term health benefits as well as drawbacks. The one thing that all these studies have in common is that caffeine, like anything, should be consumed in moderation. The general opinion is that for most people 300-500mg a day of caffeine is appropriate, the equivalent of 2-4 cups of coffee a day.

Let's imagine a non-anxious person has just drunk a large cup of strong black coffee first thing in the morning. Unfortunately for this person they were very busy and didn't have a chance to eat anything before they started work. As a result the person feels light-headed, jittery and slightly sick. At this point the person has a quick think about the way they feel, realise they haven't had anything to eat, curse their own stupidity and go and find some food, a glass of water and a quick sit down. The situation quickly resolves itself.

Now let's think about the anxious person in the same situation. The anxious person examines and re-examines the way they feel, getting more and more worried. It might be the coffee and not eating but what if it isn't? What if it's something else? Something more serious? How can I be sure? What else could it be? What if eating something and sitting down for a minute doesn't work? Perhaps they should hold off on eating and doing anything else and keep checking how they feel and see what happens next?

The anxious person has managed to turn a simple problem into anxiety, essentially creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. All that needed to happen was for them to just stop for a minute and get something to eat. Now the anxious person has managed to add in sensations of anxiety on top of everything and so the person is feeling panicked that they have just developed a new medical condition and that something is seriously wrong. By this stage, the non-anxious person of course has already sat down for 5 minutes with a sandwich and is now absolutely fine and back to normal, ready to get on with their day!

One final point we need to make about caffeine is to mention that you shouldn't take vitamin and mineral supplements at the same time. Research suggests that it prevents your body from absorbing them efficiently. Caffeine has also been shown to cause a certain amount of calcium to be lost in your urine. It's not a big amount, and it's easily replaced when you have milk in your tea and coffee but of course, if your caffeine comes from energy or soft drinks, it's certainly worth remembering.

Alcohol

Many of us like to enjoy that pint of beer or glass of wine and that's really not a problem. Unfortunately some people choose to use alcohol as a way of dealing with anxiety. At first, alcohol appears to be affective given its calming effects, lowering of inhibitions and sense of euphoria but it's certainly no solution! When we choose to use alcohol to help with anxiety issues then all we are doing is avoiding our problems. It's very easy for someone with, for example, social anxiety to see a couple of drinks as an easy way to help them in that situation. Alcohol may appear to be helpful but it doesn't help you to identify problems and deal with them, it simply just covers things up. At best all it does is reduce how much you feel the effects of anxiety.

If we choose to rely on alcohol, that's when problems occur. When that occasional drink goes from being wanting to needed, then there is a problem. Too much alcohol long term can do a lot of damage to the body particularly the brain, liver and heart. As that need increases and the amount of alcohol being drunk goes up, the benefits soon wear off and drinking becomes part of a routine.

So what are the signs that there is a problem?

- you drink because you need to, not because you want to
- you wake up with shaky hands and feeling nervous
- you start to drink earlier and earlier in the day
- your work starts to suffer
- your drinking starts to affect your relationships
- you carry on drinking in spite of the problems it causes
- you find you have to drink more and more to get the same effect
- you start to 'binge drink' regularly.

Once you get hooked, coming off alcohol causes extreme anxiety. This is due to the fact that the amygdala, which we have talked about before, plays a big role in alcohol withdrawal.

If you have answered yes to any of the points above, go and see your doctor right away and have a chat with them. Self-medicating with alcohol isn't going to resolve your issues, it's just going to give you a whole lot more! By the way, if your anxiety happened as a result of your drinking then it's quite possible your issue isn't an anxiety disorder, it's the effects of alcohol. If that's the case, then you should still go see your doctor right away.

Balanced Diet

Now that we've spoken about what we drink, let's have a look at what we eat. I'm sure you've heard in the past about how important it is that we eat a balanced diet, particularly if you've ever tried to lose

weight, but our diet is about a lot more than simply what we weigh. Making the right choices is crucial to not just our physical health but also to our mental health.

There have been lots of studies done looking into the relationship between what we eat and the way we feel; most of us eat certain foods to make ourselves feel better, such as a bar of chocolate! Scientists were interested to see which came first; do we pick the food because of the way we feel or is it the other way round?

MIND, the UK based mental health charity surveyed a number of their users. The results were very interesting.

- 88% of the people surveyed said that their mood improved when they lessened the amount of foods that were classed as “stressors” such as sugar, caffeine, alcohol, chocolate, wheat-containing foods, additives, dairy and saturated fats , and increased the number of “supporters” foods such as water, vegetables, fruit, oil rich fish, nuts and seeds, wholegrain food, fibre and protein
- 26% of people saw an improvement in panic attacks and anxiety
- 80% of these people saw benefits when they cut down on sugar
- 79% saw benefits when they cut down on caffeine
- 55% saw benefits when they reduced the amount of alcohol they drink
- 53% saw benefits when they cut down on eating chocolate
- 80% saw benefits with drinking more water
- 78% saw benefits when they ate more vegetables
- 72% saw benefits when they ate more fruit
- 52% saw benefits when they ate more oily fish

Of course the people that were surveyed represented those with a range of different mental health conditions, all who presumably had different diets, so there is no guarantee of results but with those kind of figures it is clear that diet certainly plays a big part in the way we feel. The survey also made mention of the positive effects of eating meals regularly, particularly not skipping breakfast, or even any other meals. It might be tempting to say, “I don’t have enough time at the minute!” or “I’m too stressed to eat right now!” but regular meals are necessary for your body to run at its best. Although it was noted that the survey was purely based on personal opinions of those surveyed, the dietary advice was supported by the British Dietetic Association. In response to the survey their spokeswoman stated that eating oily fish and plenty of fruit and vegetables were well known to be good for general health and many people would feel better if they changed to a healthier diet.

Again a note of caution before you go and throw out any “stressors” you have in your cupboard! If you have been used to consuming high levels of sugar then going instantly cold turkey can create unpleasant (but completely harmless) sensations. Remember that the key is a balanced diet. A balanced diet contains all sorts of foods including those fats and sugars but in moderation!

The 5 Main Food Groups

A healthy balanced diet should contain all of the five main food groups.

Fruit and vegetables, preferably fresh and plenty of them. Fresh fruit and vegetables are packed with vitamins and minerals, and the current recommendation is that we eat at least five portions a day. These should make up about a third of our daily diet.

Carbohydrates are foods high in starch such as bread, potatoes, pasta, rice and cereals. These should make up another third of our diet and should be our main source of energy. With these starches it is better if you can make them wholegrain so this means buying wholegrain bread, wholegrain pasta, brown rice etc.. The wholegrain varieties are higher in fibre, an often overlooked dietary need, and typically have more vitamins and minerals than their refined equivalents.

Protein is essential in your diet to help your body grow and repair itself as well as being a great source of vitamins and minerals. Protein is the main building block component of all our body's cells and is the source of between 10-15% of a healthy diet's energy. Meat is a particularly good source of protein, vitamins and minerals, especially iron, and is the body's main source of vitamin B12 which is essential for healthy cell function. Vegetarians take note that alternative sources need to be found! Fish is also a good source of protein and packed with vitamins and minerals. Oily fish in particular is an excellent source of Omega-3 fatty acids, which are essential for healthy cell function, but which the body isn't capable of producing itself. The healthy diet should have at least two portions of fish a week, one of which should be an oily fish such as sardines, herring, salmon, trout and mackerel. Other sources of protein are eggs and pulses, examples of which are beans, seeds and nuts. While nuts are an excellent source of protein they also tend to be high in fat so should need to be eaten in moderation.

Milk and dairy products are the fourth food group. Although they are an important source of protein, they are also, and more importantly, an excellent source of calcium which is crucial for building healthy teeth and bones. Just a word of caution though that dairy products are high in saturated fat but these days there are plenty of lower fat alternatives such as skimmed or semi-skimmed milk and low fat cheese.

Fats and sugars is the final group and the one that should be consumed in the lowest quantities. Although they are an important source of energy they do contain low levels of other nutrients and they are high in calories which can cause unnecessary weight gain.

Fats come in different varieties. The one that everyone needs to watch out for is saturated fat which is found in things like cakes, biscuits, pies, cheese and sausages. This is the type of fat that raises the cholesterol level and increases the risk of heart disease. Unsaturated fats on the other hand can actually help lower cholesterol and contain required fatty acids. They are found in nuts and seeds, olive and vegetable oils and oily fish.

Reducing how much fat you consume can easily be achieved by making little changes to your diet like swapping to lower fat alternatives, changing from butter to margarine, changing from lard to olive oil, minimising or eliminating oil when frying and trimming excess fat off meat.

Sugar is naturally found in milk and fruit but it's those hidden, processed sugars that you really need to watch out for. These are found in fizzy drinks, biscuits and cakes, sweets, chocolate and pastries – anything sweet really. Perhaps less obvious as a source of added sugar are those processed savoury foods such as ready meals, baked beans and pasta sauces. One of the big sources of sugar that people often overlook are those energy drinks. Compared to say fruit juice, energy drinks provide no vitamins and minerals, just a whole lot of refined sugar and caffeine! Remember that drinks containing refined sugar cause rapid rises and falls in energy levels. For some people this can be a problem, whether it's an anxious or non-anxious person, and is worth bearing in mind. Rapid changes in your blood sugar levels have a big impact on feelings of anxiety.

Healthy Weight!

Every time we open a magazine or turn on the TV all we seem to hear about is the latest diet or way to lose weight. I think we all know that being overweight is bad for our health with problems increasing the more overweight you are. The problem with all these diets, and there is no question some of them do work, is the fact that they are often only a short term solution. What happens when you come off the diet? If you go back to the same old eating habits that you had before then the weight will just go back on again. The pattern of following a strict diet plan followed by returning to a poor and unhealthy diet is often referred to as yo-yo dieting. Being overweight isn't good for our long term health but neither is having a body weight which yo-yos up and down!

The best way to eat is simply to eat a balanced diet. Who cares if the latest Hollywood celebrity has just lost 3 stone in a week on their revolutionary new programme! Combined with regular exercise, having a healthy diet will help you to lose weight and to stay that way. With a healthy diet you won't be taking in more energy than you need which is what causes your body to lay down fat stores and your weight to go up. Don't forget that a healthy diet can still have those fats and sugars so it's not as if you will never again taste chocolate and cream cakes! It's all about balancing the quantities and sources.

So what is a healthy weight anyway? Healthy weight varies from person to person. Some people are naturally small in build, others have a naturally larger frame. For some people this means that you will never reach that size 0! Of course it isn't healthy to be underweight either. The Body Mass Index is a useful guide, relying as it does on a person's sex and height to give a range which their weight should be within but it isn't foolproof and you are best talking to your doctor if you need to. Many professional rugby players have a BMI that suggests they are morbidly obese despite having healthy diets and being extremely fit. Why? Because muscle weighs more than fat!

Since different people naturally have different body shapes, they also have different dietary needs. Some people need lots of energy, others not so much. Even if your body needs high amounts of energy

and you are the perfect weight, it's still important to think about where that energy comes from. If is coming from cakes, sweets and chocolate and other food high in saturated fat then it still effects your cholesterol levels and ultimately your heart health.

EXERCISE

I'd like you to draw up a chart like the one below and complete it for at least 2 weeks.

Date / Time	Anxiety Score 1-10	Diet	Fluid Intake	Exercise
1 January 2012 (Morning)	8	A bowl of cereal	1 cup of tea	None
1 January 2012 (Morning Snack)	8	2 chocolate biscuits	1 cup of coffee	None
1 January 2012 (Afternoon)	9	Fish and chips from takeaway	Can of cola	None
1 January 2012 (Afternoon Snack)	7	Packet of crisps	None	None
1 January 2012 (Evening)	8	Pizza and garlic bread	2 beers	10 minute walk
1 January 2012 (Evening snack)	8	2 Chocolate bars and packet of nuts	2 glasses of cola	None

As you can see the day is split into 6; the 3 main meals and snack times in between. The Anxiety Score goes from 1 (feeling completely anxiety free and calm), up to 10 (complete panic).

What I'd like you to do now is to look at your diet again (in line with what we talked about above) and determine if your diet is as healthy as it should be, and is it a good diet for someone with an anxiety disorder? See if your overall anxiety score is being affected by your diet – don't just look at one line at a time though look at earlier in the day and the day before as well.

As important as it is that we have a balanced diet, we also need to think about where our food is coming from. It might be convenient eating all those ready meals and tinned foods all the time but the problem with processed food is that in order to make them last longer they contain all sorts of chemicals to preserve them. Think too about the quality of the food. When you eat chicken for example is it a nice fresh chicken you cooked yourself or is it poor quality chicken nuggets that are maybe only 50% chicken and made from mechanically recovered meat. You REALLY don't want to know what mechanically recovered means!

Salt

One of the things commonly added to many foods is salt. Salt has been used as a preservative and a flavour enhancer for thousands of years and is even mentioned in the Bible! Our bodies need a certain amount of salt in order to work properly but too much salt causes high blood pressure. Again it's about moderation. The maximum recommended amount of salt you should be looking at in a day is about 6g, which is about a teaspoon full. Even if you don't add salt yourself to your food, some foods are naturally high in salt anyway just because of the way they have been prepared. Bacon, pickles, salted and roasted nuts, smoked meat and fish tend to be naturally high in salt. These foods shouldn't be eaten in large quantities or all the time. Other foods can contribute a lot of salt to your diet not because of the amount of salt but because of how often they are eaten. Bread and breakfast cereals are good examples of these.

Plenty of foods contain salt as an added ingredient, the actual quantities of salt varying considerably even just between different brands of the same thing. Example of these foods are ready meals, pasta sauces, pizza, sausages, baked beans, crisps and tomato ketchup. Some of these foods can be bought in reduced salt varieties. There is no big secret to watching how much salt you take; it's about reading the labels and simply adding it up. Foods that contain 0.3g or less of salt per 100g are considered low in salt; 1.5g per 100g is considered high. As we have already said, look to keep it below 6g per day. It's not about cutting out foods high in salt it's about, you guessed it, balance!

Are you one of these people that automatically grabs the salt with every meal? Even without tasting your food the first instinct is to grab the salt? This is the most common way of salt getting into our foods when we add it ourselves as either a seasoning or in cooking. It is also the easiest one to monitor and change! Think before you add that salt. Taste the food and see if it needs it. Start by adding a little and taste again. You can always add more salt if you need to but you can't really take it back if you have used too much.

Make sure you put your own salt on food and don't let someone else do it for you. Before you think "I would never do that", have you ever been to a chip shop and when asked the question, "Salt and vinegar?", your chips are suddenly drowning in vinegar and absolutely covered in salt! Even if you say you just want a little salt, you will probably find that their idea of "a little" and yours are somewhat different.

So now to the big question! What have I got against salt and what does it have to do with anxiety? Well, too much salt reduces the amount of potassium in your body. Potassium is essential for proper functioning of your nervous system and when there isn't enough of it the result is anxiety, muscle weakness, insomnia and many other symptoms common to anxiety disorders. It's an easy thing to fix which all comes down to eating a balanced healthy diet. Once again we have another easy to fix lifestyle choice that can cause symptoms of anxiety or make existing anxiety worse!

Food Additives

Moving on to food additives, have you ever thought about what is actually in some of your food? All these complicated chemical names and “E” numbers? Many people will tell you that there is no question their anxiety symptoms are very strongly linked to one particular food additive or another. I have a friend who has experienced episodes of night panic until he finally found out that every time it happened he had eaten certain types of food containing the additive monosodium glutamate (MSG). Not enough evidence exists at the minute looking at the effects of certain food additives on people with anxiety disorders, but is it so hard to believe that some people are sensitive to certain additives that don’t bother others? After all, some people are allergic to nuts but most of us have no issues! Just with the sheer amount of additives there are, between colourings, preservatives, flavourings, bulking agents and flavour enhancers, there are so many things that get added to our food that it shouldn’t entirely be surprising that these additives could cause negative effects. This is where your food diary is invaluable, as it is your best chance of spotting any relationships there might be between your anxiety and your diet. Just make sure that you don’t see disaster in every food that you eat! There are Internet sites out there that would have us all eating raw beans and nuts and virtually nothing else to avoid any risk of anxiety, which is clearly a ridiculous idea.

Fortunately more and more people are become aware of what they are eating and manufacturers and producers are responding to public pressure to improve their products. Are you old enough to remember good old tinned tomato soup? In the 1980’s a tin of tomato soup was a very scarlet colour. If you have ever had home-made tomato soup you will know that it tends to be more of an orangey-red. So why was it scarlet? Because apparently the colour made it look more attractive so food colourings were added. Now that we are all getting much more health aware, and with changes in government guidelines, a lot of our food is now closer in colour to what it should be or, if not, made that way using natural sources of colourings from beetroot to seaweed. Quite what is considered “natural” colouring however can sometimes be rather unusual; the colourings cochineal and carmine are made from ground up dead insects! Whether your food is coloured with artificial colourings or natural colourings the fact is that it’s something that wouldn’t be there if you made it yourself.

Whilst some people are sensitive to certain additives, don’t panic, it doesn’t mean you are! Again, your food diary can help you see if there are any patterns between times of anxiety and certain foods and allow you to see what effect reducing or removing certain things from your diet has on your anxiety.

Vitamins and Minerals

Ideally we should get all the vitamins and minerals we need by eating a healthy balanced diet. Unfortunately for a lot of us this doesn’t always happen as we skip meals or eat “junk food” because we are too busy to sit down for a decent meal. Some of these vitamins and minerals have a big impact on anxiety. Even with the right amounts, if our body is spending extended periods of time in “fight or flight”, your stores can be used up a lot quicker than normal as your body keeps itself ready for an

action that never happens!

B vitamins are a group of vitamins collectively referred to as the Vitamin B complex since they all come from the same source. The Vitamin B complex is responsible for making sure your nervous system, metabolism, brain, hormones and immune system are all in good working order. This is why the Vitamin B complex, or specific B vitamins, are quite often recommended for people experiencing anxiety and panic.

- Vitamin B1 (found in spinach, peas, green beans and brussel sprouts), also known as Thiamine, helps to boost both mood and memory and a recent study concluded that it improves the body's resistance to stress.
- Vitamin B3 (found in chicken, bacon, liver and fish), also known as Niacin, is involved in metabolism, which is the breaking down of chemicals for energy as well as using energy to build molecules. Vitamin B3 is also involved in the production of serotonin, which is the hormone that positively affects mood. Serotonin is what is known as a neurotransmitter which means that it carries messages between nerve cells.
- Vitamin B5 (found in avocado, yoghurt, eggs, cauliflower and broccoli), also known as Pantothenic Acid, creates a natural chemical which is essential for maintenance of the adrenal gland, which regulates the body's response to stress.
- Vitamin B6 (found in tuna, beef, chicken and potatoes), another name for which is Pyridoxine, is necessary for normal brain development and function. It assists in creating serotonin, which affects mood, and noradrenaline, which is part of the natural fight and flight response. Vitamin B6 also helps to produce melatonin (an important part of your body clock which helps to regulate your sleep patterns), helps making haemoglobin (the part of red blood cells that carries oxygen around the body), helps in creating anti-bodies, maintains nerve function and contributes to keeping blood sugar in the normal range.
- Vitamin B9 (found in liver, spinach and asparagus), or Folic Acid, helps balance neurotransmitters
- Vitamin B12 (found in milk, salmon, cod and eggs), also called Cobalamin, like Vitamin B6 helps with the production of serotonin, noradrenaline and melatonin.

You may be asking why you would want to have anything containing vitamins B6 and B12 which are involved in the production of noradrenaline since noradrenaline plays a big part in those feelings of anxiety and panic. Remember that the problem is not with the existence of anxiety, a normal human emotion, but with inappropriate anxiety. That's why it's important to keep the physical components of an anxious response working properly, as when they are functioning properly and under normal conditions, they actually help you cope with stress.

Vitamin C (found in peppers, broccoli, brussel sprouts and kiwi fruit), or Ascorbic Acid, strengthens the immune system, helps your adrenal gland to work and maintains brain chemistry. Vitamin C is quickly reduced during times of stress and anxiety. Unfortunately your body can't store vitamin C the way it can with a lot of other vitamins and minerals, so we need to make sure we eat or drink sources of it

every day. A good source would be to start your day with a nice glass of pure orange juice! Some have suggested that in larger quantities it may help combat anxiety but at this time no studies have been done to support this.

Vitamin E (found in nuts, olives, apricots and spinach) actually covers eight different compounds with the same function. They are involved in transporting oxygen to your brain, improving general brain function and as well has a calming effect.

Calcium and Magnesium are both minerals that are well known to promote relaxation and helping to regulate your immune and nervous systems. Calcium (found in milk, bread, nuts and fish) is a natural tranquiliser and magnesium (found in salmon, cucumber, celery, peppers and spinach) can also relieve tension, anxiety and nervousness. If you were to take calcium and magnesium supplements, these are best taken at bedtime since this is the time your body can best use them, alongside a vitamin B6 supplement, as vitamin B6 helps determine how much magnesium your body's cells can absorb.

Zinc has been shown to have an effect on our ability to regulate stress for people who have a zinc deficiency or where the balance between zinc and copper is off. Too much zinc however has been shown to cause feelings of anxiety as well as other problems so whether or not you should be taking extra zinc should be discussed with your doctor.

If you choose to take vitamin and mineral supplements remember to stick to the recommended dose. If you take more than one, make sure you read the labels to see if you are getting too much of one particular vitamin or mineral. They may be substances that your body needs to work properly but that doesn't mean that you can pop vitamin tablets like they were sweets!

A Final Word On Diet

When it comes to the best way of avoiding unnecessary additives and excess salt, nothing beats cooking from fresh yourself! Cooking your own food from scratch doesn't have to be expensive. Shop around your local market, greengrocer and butcher and think carefully about how you buy your food. If you are buying fruit and vegetables in the supermarket it is usually cheaper if you buy them loosely rather than in made up packs. With some vegetables such as potatoes or carrots it is cheaper to buy them unwashed and wash them yourself. Look at the budget ranges in a lot of the supermarkets as well for meat, fish, fruit and vegetables – often they are exactly the same product as the more expensive brand but just unusual shapes. If you can't afford those meats that are low in fat, don't worry! Trim off the excess fat yourself and fry them without adding any additional cooking oil. If you can't afford the price of out of season vegetables then one possible solution is frozen vegetables, many of which these days are quickly frozen to preserve as many nutrients as possible.

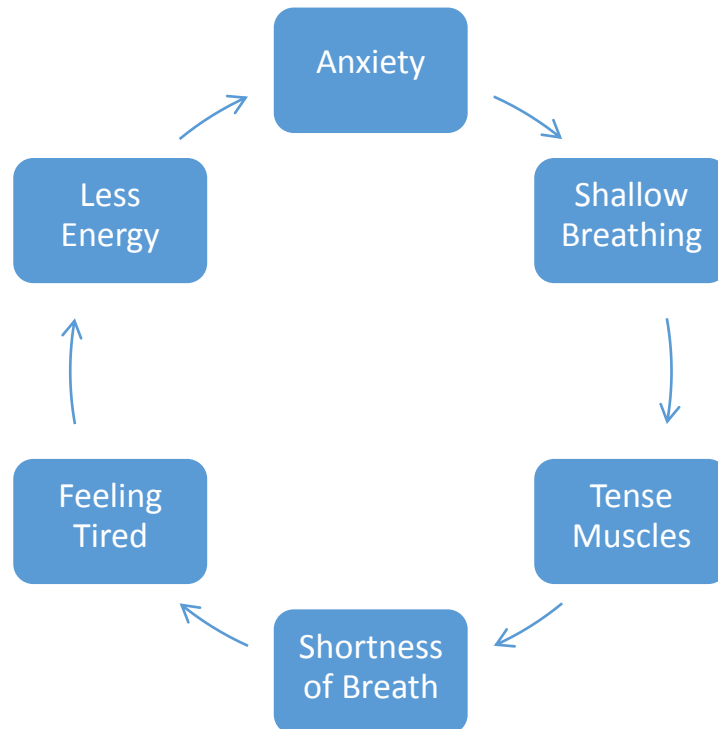
Remember to think about how you actually cook your foods; cooking removes important nutrients that ideally you want. Raw and steamed foods are the best way of ensuring you keep as many nutrients as possible.

Just by following the simple advice we have given in this section, you can start to take control of your own body. There is no need to panic if you are doing the wrong thing now; you can fix it quite easily. Don't make the mistake of suddenly changing everything overnight. If you change too many things it will be difficult to tell which particular change made the difference when you see improvements in your anxiety.

Our discussions on diet come down to one simple thing. If I don't maintain my car properly with oil, brake fluid, radiator fluid and fuel then nothing I do will make that car perform well, no matter how much I try. If I try completely the wrong fuel in my car (petrol instead of diesel) I will also have a great deal of difficulty in getting my car to move! Addressing diet is the first step in not just freedom from anxiety disorders but in having a healthy mind and body.

Breathing

Have you ever thought that the way you breathe could actually be contributing to your anxiety and panic? For the vast majority of us breathing is something that happens without us giving it any thought. We breathe in and our blood cells receive oxygen and release carbon dioxide. We breathe out and the carbon dioxide is exhaled. Not breathing properly can upset this process and can contribute to anxiety and panic sensations. No doubt some people reading this are thinking, “How on Earth can I breathe differently?”.



Studies have proven that many anxiety sufferers often take shallow breaths from their chest. Shallow chest breathing can lead to hyperventilation, where you are breathing faster than necessary, and this leads to sensations very similar to those of a panic attack. This type of breathing means that your blood is not getting enough oxygen, which means your heart starts to beat faster, your muscles become tense and you feel dizzy. The vital supply of oxygen your body needs is not fully available. Chances are you won't even realise if you are breathing in this way.

"The entire autonomic nervous system (and through it, our internal organs and glands) is largely driven by our breathing patterns. By changing our breathing

we can influence millions of biochemical reactions in our body, producing more relaxing substances such as endorphins and fewer anxiety-producing ones like adrenaline and higher blood acidity. Mindfulness of the breath is so effective that it is common to all meditative and prayer traditions."

Anxiety Fear & Breathing - Breathing.com

Some people tell you that if you are feeling anxious you should hold your breath but common sense should tell you that, if we are feeling like that, the last thing we need to be doing is getting less oxygen. The less oxygen we get, the more likely we feel worse and that just ends up being one more thing to be anxious about. The old paper bag over the mouth and nose trick works for some people, making them think more about slowing their breathing and giving them an easy way to see what is happening. The priority is to think about taking slow, deep breaths.

Yoga and meditation often talks about something called "mindful breathing". All this means is simply that we become more aware of how we are breathing and make a deliberate effort to take slow, deep, regular breaths. When we focus on our breathing and on ensuring this normal rhythm then any sensations caused by not breathing properly during anxiety and panic disappear. Many experts will tell you that deep breathing is the most crucial change for anxiety sufferers to make. It's easy to check if you are breathing deeply or not; simply place your hand on your stomach and see if it moves up and down as you breathe. If it does then that means you are taking proper deep breaths. If it doesn't it probably means you are shallow breathing. During times of panic and anxiety concentrating on the way you breathe is a good distraction from whatever caused you to get into that position in the first place.

Sometimes people with anxiety ignore thinking about breathing and are unwilling to even consider it because they think that anxiety is much too serious to be affected by simply breathing techniques. Don't believe it! Breathing is an essential body process which, if it's not done efficiently, has a big effect on the way we feel. When we do breathe efficiently we can have more relaxed muscles, less stress and slower heart and respiration rate. Putting it simply, it does the opposite of what happens during the "fight or flight" response!

EXERCISE

The next time you are feeling anxious I'd like you to try the following:

- Either stand up straight or sit down in an upright position. Don't slouch! If you are sitting down make sure you are not compressing your chest through bad posture (discussed in the next section)
- Slowly breathe in through your nose for a count of 4 as deeply as you can. Make sure that your whole chest expands fully.
- Immediately exhale through your mouth (don't hold your breath) as if you are blowing out a candle for a count of 8. The crucial part of this exercise is to ensure that we breathe out at a far slower pace than we breathe in.
- Repeat this 10 times. After each full cycle say to yourself "I can feel myself relaxing" and think about the tension in your body disappearing.

Posture

Most people really don't think about posture until they start to experience problems such as back and neck pain. I'd like you to take a minute to think about your posture. Do you slouch or do you sit up straight? Do you stand tall or do you walk hunched over like a monkey?

The problem with poor posture is that we often prevent our chest from being able to move properly when we breathe. This causes shallow breathing which we talked about earlier. It isn't just our breathing that's affected; when our internal organs have unnecessary pressure on them it restricts their natural movement and they don't work as efficiently. This can cause problems for processes like digestion.

Having bad posture over time frequently causes back, neck and shoulder pain. Most common is lower backache and a feeling of tightness across the shoulders. It makes sense. Our muscles are designed to perform in certain ways and when we adopt bad posture they aren't able to do their job properly. Some muscles are being stretched and others compressed unnecessarily. No surprise that these muscles hurt! For some anxious people that tightness and pain in the chest muscles is instantly deemed to be the start of a heart attack!

Over time continuing to adopt bad posture can lead to restricted movement as the muscles and ligaments adapt to hold this position. This can lead to pulled muscles, ligaments and tendons. Our muscles rely on our bones being aligned properly to support their movement. When this doesn't happen the muscles have to work harder and they get tired easier. We all know that people who are nervous, anxious and lacking in confidence tend to hunch over. Studies have shown the people who are anxious become more anxious as a result of the physical sensations associated with bad posture. This leads to a vicious loop. Anxiety leads to bad posture. The bad posture causes more anxiety.

Headaches are a common side effect of bad posture. When we sit with our shoulders and head slumped forward, especially for long periods of time, the muscles in our neck, shoulders and upper back tighten. This eventually causes muscle spasms and restricted neck muscles, leading to a tension headache. This tightening of the neck combined with natural tightening of the jaw muscles when we are stressed can also cause severe jaw pain.

Now for the good news! Poor posture is something you can fix immediately. Even just by being aware of our posture and thinking more about the way we hold ourselves, we can start to make a difference right now. Exercise, which we talk about in the next section, can be used to tighten and strengthen our core muscles which can help a lot to support our bodies in the correct posture. The stronger our core muscles, the easier it is to maintain good posture, and to both sit and stand up straight.

Other things that can affect our posture include handbags, briefcases, shopping bags and other similar heavy items. Do you always carry your handbag or briefcase etc. in the same hand or is your handbag always on the same one shoulder, hanging down your side? Most people do, so it's perfectly normal,

but take a moment to think about it. That weight is always on that same side; always the same side shoulder and arm muscles supporting the weight, always the same side back muscles compensating to keep your back straight. There is a very simple way to rectify this; just alternate which side you use! It will feel odd at first, but keep it up and it will come to feel totally natural. If you carry a backpack with two shoulder straps, use both shoulders rather than just slinging it over one.

When we start to think about our posture we will start to see benefits right away. With good posture we look younger, slimmer, taller and more confident. It may take some practice to be adopting good posture out of habit, but with practice, thought and maybe some exercise, it gets easier and easier. When we take away any sensations caused by our posture, hold ourselves better and project more confidence this can provide a big help with anxiety.

Exercise

Exercise is an extremely valuable tool in relieving symptoms of anxiety. Not only does it have a role in getting rid of some of the unpleasant symptoms, but it also gives you an overall feeling of health and wellness, both mentally and physically.

Nowadays a lot of us have become lazy. Even compared to just 50 years ago we have technology to do everything for us. We have machines to wash our clothes, we have steam mops so we don't have to get down on our hands and knees to clean floors, we ride in cars, we can do our grocery shopping without leaving our chairs and more. Our lifestyles may have changed to adopt this technology but our bodies haven't! Our bodies still need the same amount of physical activity to maintain our health. It's been clearly proven that keeping ourselves active and exercising regularly reduces the risks of developing some health problems. The most interesting risk reduction is that with regular exercise the risk of depression and anxiety is reduced by 30%. Many doctors in the UK are now turning to exercise for their patients. A study looking specifically at exercise and anxiety disorders found a 25% reduced risk of anxiety disorders in people that exercise regularly.

When we exercise we burn away the chemicals that are created when we are anxious such as cortisol, noradrenaline and adrenaline. At the same time exercise releases endorphins into our system. Endorphins are responsible for feelings of elation and wellbeing. Other chemicals like dopamine and serotonin are also released, giving a feeling of safety and security. As a result our mood is lifted and feelings of stress are reduced. When feelings of anxiety become overwhelming, exercise can help to return that feeling of control back to you, as well as improving your confidence and providing a sense of achievement and satisfaction. If you have problems getting to sleep remember that exercise leaves you more naturally tired and as a result more likely to sleep better.

We talked before about maintaining a healthy weight. Regular physical activity of course helps to burn off those extra calories. Not just that but we increase our muscle mass which doesn't just make us stronger but helps us with our posture. If that wasn't reason enough, exercise helps us maintain flexibility, improve the movement of our joints and increases our bone density. The list goes on! Exercise also reduces levels of bad cholesterol and can sometime raise the level of good cholesterol. As a result this reduces our risk for heart disease and other problems.

When we exercise we give our immune system a boost. Our lymphatic systems transport white blood cells around the body which are responsible for helping fight against infection. For them to be transported efficiently around the body needs two things; gravity and movement. This movement means exercise, where our muscles contract and positions change.

For exercise to really be of benefit it needs to be regular and almost part of a daily routine. You don't need to go to a gym if you don't want to; simple things like going out for a brisk walk are extremely useful and, if you can find someone else to go with you, it can also be a social occasion! You don't need

to overexert yourself – you will be surprised how easy it is to get started. Think about how satisfying it will be every time you complete an exercise session.

If you haven't been used to exercise and are worried about starting, then perhaps the easiest way to get started is what is known as green exercise. Green exercise gets you outdoors doing things like walking, gardening, horse riding, cycling and conservation work. MIND, the mental health charity, is trying to get green exercise more recognised due to its significant benefits and how easy it is to take up. In a study 71% of people asked said that they felt better after a walk outdoors compared to just 28% that felt better after a walk indoors. MIND also found that for some people green exercise can be just as effective as talking therapy. That's not to say of course you shouldn't be involved with talking therapies!

A recent study was reported in the UK media which suggested that people with depression who were taking medication and who also exercised found no benefits. This was a simple case of the media getting it wrong. The study, carried out by researchers from the Universities of Bristol and Exeter and the Peninsula Medical School, wasn't about whether exercise was effective in treating depression. That had already been proven by other studies. Instead what the study wanted to do was look at whether or not receiving extra advice and encouragement to actually do the exercise was helpful in people with depression. Despite what was reported, the conclusion did not say that exercise was ineffective against depression. What it did say was the people who were given extra advice didn't have lower levels of depression than the other group who exercised without encouragement. This is nowhere near the same thing as saying exercise doesn't work! The study went on to say that the advice strategy wasn't completely pointless either; they said that longer term, the group which had been given the advice were far more likely to continue exercising. Obviously, given the benefits that we've already listed, there are still advantages to continuing physical activity. Sadly the apparently negative result got into the headlines and created a myth that simply wasn't true.

Although exercise may sound too much like hard work, a lot of people who enjoy exercise will tell you that they actually find it relaxing and very satisfying. The rhythmic patterns of running, for example, can certainly help focus and clear the mind. For some people though, the thought of exercise is a source of anxiety in itself. The feeling of breathlessness, sweating, and elevated heart rate are all symptoms of anxiety and of a good workout! We will talk more about this in Step 8.

Remember our body is a machine. A complicated machine but still a machine. Imagine if I left my car sitting for a year completely unused. What would happen? It might start to rust, the battery would go flat and parts might seize up. Even though I may have maintained the car properly, I need to use it for it to stay in good working order!

Smoking

I can hear the sigh of the smokers right now at this section! I'm sorry to have to tell you this but smoking is linked to anxiety disorders!

Did you know that in some cases smoking can actually cause an anxiety disorder in the first place? In other cases it can make your anxiety worse and make your problems seem a lot bigger than they actually are.

Let me address the first big myth about smoking. Despite what you may have been told, a cigarette does not calm you down! The act of smoking may make you feel that way but I promise you it's a psychological effect that's all in your head! If you look at what's actually in that cigarette, you will find that nicotine itself is actually a stimulant! This nicotine will actually make your body more agitated and anxious immediately after smoking, after which the effects wear off and are replaced by depression which leads to the need for another smoke. The stimulant effect of nicotine is very similar to that felt from the "flight or fight" response. As well as the effects of nicotine, the smoke itself causes sensations of not being able to breathe properly and can increase the risk of having a panic attack. We don't need to tell you that smoking is extremely bad for you. It's really rather ironic to think that the one thing people think helps with anxiety is the one thing that that could actually be making it worse!

It's true that people with anxiety disorders do seem to find it harder to quit than other people. There is a fear of the stress and anxiety involved in quitting and the feeling of not being able to cope without having a cigarette to fall back on.

I'm not going to lecture you on what smoking does to the body. Let's think for a minute about how much money you spend on cigarettes in a week. Multiply that number by four and that's roughly how much you spend every month. Are you surprised? Now multiply that number by twelve and that's how much you spend in a year. Does it seem a lot? It probably is! Now take a moment to think what else you could be spending it on. You could be spending that money on things that weren't bad for your health and which didn't make your anxiety worse!

How long do you think it takes after quitting smoking to start to see benefits? 24 hours! That's right, the day after you stop your breathing starts to improve and continues to improve until about 9 months after quitting, where your lung capacity can have improved by up to 10%. A mere 2 days after quitting your body is completely free of nicotine and your sense of taste and smell starts to improve. Between 2 and 12 weeks later your circulation will improve which externally will improve the condition of your skin and will also make physical activity easier. With improved circulation you will find that you have more energy, feel less tired and your likelihood of getting headaches is reduced. Your teeth will stop being discoloured by the nicotine and your breath and gum health will improve. As well as the physical benefits, quitting will increase your concentration and improve your overall mental wellbeing. Don't

forget that's it not just your health you need to think about, what about the people around you when you smoke who are subjected to the effects of passive smoking?

If that isn't enough reason to quit, let's get back to the relationship between smoking and anxiety. Scientific studies have shown that people who quit have lower stress levels afterwards. The addiction to smoking means that smokers feel stressed between cigarettes as the nicotine levels fall. Smoking only provides a temporary relief to this stress. The only way to break the vicious cycle is to stop and allow the body to recover from the addiction.

If you're a smoker, please go and see your doctor right away. There are plenty of things you can do to help you kick the habit such as nicotine patches and other methods and there are programmes to suit everyone. If you can, go make that appointment right now! I'm not going to tell you that it's going to be easy because as I am sure you know it's not, but you CAN do it. And when you do, you will be so glad you did.

Sleep

Sleep is our body's way of shutting off from the world around it and regenerating itself. It's our escape from all our worries and a fresh start every morning.

Did you know though that sleep allows your mind to strengthen memories of new things that you've learnt, a process known as consolidation? To put it in simple terms, sleep can actually help you to learn! It has also been shown that people who don't get enough sleep find that their academic and intellectual performance suffers too and, as most people know, if you have an important exam or test the best thing you can do the night before is get a good night's sleep! Sleep also improves physical performance. A recent study showed that athletes that made an effort to sleep more found, after a couple of months, that they had a faster sprint time and more stamina!

If you're trying to lose weight you might not think of sleep to help you out but getting a good night's sleep can provide a couple of advantages. When the body is tired the level of certain hormones rises, one of which is the one that controls appetite and as a result tired people feel hungrier. It has also been found that for dieters who sleep well the weight loss is mostly fat whereas for those who don't sleep well, the loss tends to be mostly muscle.

When we don't get enough sleep we start to have problems with what is known as anticipatory reactions. This is the scientific name for one of our basic brain process that has a big role in anxiety disorders; when we are anxious we typically overthink everything and see the worst in every situation. Without sleep this problem gets worse. There is a reason why people say, "It'll seem better in the morning"! Getting a good night's sleep is one of the most effective ways of reducing anxiety. Studies have found, unsurprisingly, that when anxious people suffer from a lack of sleep, the result is increased anxiety. Sleep is essential for healthy emotional functioning for everyone but especially for those with anxiety. People tend to think that of lack of sleep just makes people bad-tempered but it can have a much greater emotional impact than that.

Sometimes the thought of not sleeping makes anxiety problems worse. It's another source of anxiety. Lying in bed not sleeping, staring at the ceiling, often just means extra time to be constantly thinking about the daily worries.

But I Can't Sleep.....

If you struggle to get to sleep there is little benefit to be had lying in bed for hours stressing about it! If you need to, get up and go do something to help you relax. Try some meditation, drink a glass of warm milk, have a nice warm bath, listen to music or read a book. Getting to sleep needs you to be totally relaxed and the very last thing you are is relaxed when you're lying in bed worrying about being awake!

The cause of your sleep problems might just be simply that if you have put your entire life, or large

chunks of your life, on hold to accommodate your anxiety issues then maybe you just aren't that tired! Are you doing enough? This is a common problem with severe Agoraphobia where every day is spent at home. This is another reason why exercise is such an important lifestyle choice for you to make; aside from all the benefits we talked previously, one of the most obvious benefits is it helps you get to sleep at the end of the day!

So What Can I Do If I Can't Sleep?

If you are having difficulty sleeping then don't panic! I know it can be hard not to, but it really doesn't help the situation. What we need to do is look at what is known as sleep hygiene or, to put it another way, the lifestyle patterns that you have surrounding your sleep routine. We then need to apply what is known as Stimulus Control Therapy. Sleep hygiene is what your doctor will first ask you about if you go to them with sleeping issues. It's about the actual conditions that you are creating for going to sleep in and whether they are setting you up for a good night's sleep or a bad one! Stimulus Control Therapy is designed to break up the negative associations that you have built up around sleeping and instead develop positive associations between your before bedtime routines and your sleep environment. The aim is to help you to re-associate bedtime with getting to sleep quickly and to help you establish a regular routine.

Let's first think about your attitude to sleep. Do you expect to be lying awake for long periods of time? Are you convinced you won't be able to get to sleep even before you go to bed? These expectations create a vicious cycle. We can't get to sleep because we don't expect that it is going to be possible and then when we don't sleep that expectation is reinforced! It may not surprise you then to know that one of the biggest factors with sleep disorders is actually this belief which creates stress and anxiety around the entire experience. You may have had problems with night time in the past which has created negative feelings for you which as a result mean that as soon as you get into bed you suddenly feel wide awake. As with all aspects of our anxiety, it's important to understand the influence that the way we think has on our emotional state and general health. Our beliefs about sleep significantly affect the quality and quantity of sleep in a very real way. To be able to challenge sleep problems it's vitally important that you take on board the information we give you and challenge your negative thoughts.

You've heard the saying, "Time flies when you're having fun". Well, when we are lying in bed trying to sleep the opposite is true. Even a few minutes can seem like hours. A lot of people overestimate how long they take to fall asleep and underestimate how long they actually sleep for.

For people with anxiety the quality of our sleep is often poor. The cause of this is that our mind is still running through things even as we sleep and the next morning we wake up still feeling tired as if we hadn't been to bed!

So what can you do if you have problems with sleep?

The 7 Rules To Better Sleep!

By following these techniques, many people have been able to successfully resolve their sleep problem and if it's a problem for you, so will you!

1. It might seem obvious but only go to bed when sleepy. Being sleepy is not the same thing as being tired. You're sleepy when your eyelids droop, you find your head nodding and you start yawning. The last thing you need to be doing is lying in bed worrying about not getting to sleep when you aren't sleepy.

2. Allow yourself about 20 minutes to get to sleep. That doesn't mean you should be watching the clock though; use your best estimate to calculate the time. In fact the best idea is turn your clock around so that you can't see it anymore! If you can't fall asleep or you wake up and find it difficult to fall back asleep, get out of your bed, go to another room and do something to relax you. Make sure you don't do anything that is too stimulating! As we talked about earlier, having a glass of milk or a warm bath are the kind of things you should be doing. When you go back to bed, try again and if necessary repeat as many times as you need until you do fall asleep.

3. Your bed and bedroom are for sleep and nothing else (well, maybe one more thing)! Don't get caught up in sleep-incompatible activities such as eating, watching TV or doing work/study. Your bed is not an office or an entertainment zone. These activities only make it harder to fall asleep. Repeatedly engaging in these kinds of activities confuse your mind, it needs to know that a bed is for sleeping in!

4. Even if you don't have distractions in your bedroom, your bedroom may still not be relaxing you. Go and have a look at your curtains. No, really! Do they actually fit over the windows properly? Are they thick enough to keep out the light? Sleep is a lot easier if your bedroom is dark. If necessary you can buy special blackout material to line your curtains with or you can buy special blackout blinds. Do you have any annoying little lights? You know the ones! Perhaps it's your mobile phone charging? Do what you can to get rid of them. Think about your mattress and your bedding. Are they comfortable and appropriate for the weather?

5. No matter what happens the night before, get up at the same time every day! Remember if you don't sleep well one night, you're much more likely to sleep better the next night as long as you don't engage in low quality, light morning sleep by staying in bed later than planned.

6. No naps! When we nap we only find it harder when it comes time to getting a proper night's sleep. This means no more of those weekend lie-ins, as tempting as they might be! The key is establishing a regular sleep routine. As you settle into regular sleep patterns you'll find yourself being able to set a bedtime for yourself that allows you to get a proper night's sleep every single night!

7. I know it can be hard to do but try and avoid nicotine, caffeine and alcohol within 6 hours of the time you plan to go to bed. Some people like to have an alcoholic "nightcap" to help themselves, but

although alcohol may help you get to sleep, it also tends to cause poor quality sleep and can cause people to wake up again. Exercise before bed is another big no. It may make you feel tired but not within 4 hours of bedtime; the boost of energy that you get from exercising can stop you from sleeping.

The final big no is those big meals late at night. If we eat too much just before going to bed our sleep can be disturbed. That old wives tale about eating cheese just before bed causing bad dreams actually does have a certain amount of truth to it!

In summary....

Don't kid yourself that you can eat, drink and smoke what you like and it won't have an effect on your anxiety. Do you really think that the way you treat your body has absolutely no effect on the way it performs and the way you feel? Your body tries to do everything that you demand of it on a daily basis, but can only do this if it's properly looked after. If you aren't prepared to even consider addressing any potential lifestyle issues then you may as well stop reading this book now!

I can't tell you exactly how much effect your lifestyle has on your anxiety but I can promise you that if you have significant issues in your lifestyle it WILL make your problems worse or maybe even have caused them in the first place! More than that, you are missing the opportunity to make the most of your body and the health and wellbeing that could be yours with just a little bit of effort and focus. Don't just tackle your lifestyle because of your anxiety disorder, do it because it will make you a happier, healthier, fitter, more confident person. People talk about the holistic approach to health. All this means is that you consider everything together and don't, for example, look at anxiety on its own. If you aren't eating a good diet, if you don't exercise and keep your body functioning well, if you introduce things that aren't good for you personally into your body then you can't avoid having some kind of effect on your brain's functioning and therefore on your mental health. Equally if you are feeling down then you have to make a mental effort not to eat that extra chocolate bar or two and go and exercise regardless.

When it comes down to it, you, your mind and your body are in this together. If you want to improve yourself, and I don't mean just your anxiety disorder, there is one person, and one person alone who can do it! You can take advice from us, your doctor and your family and friends but only you can ultimately make the choice about what to do. It's all in your hands and you can do it if you want to and make the choice to.

Step 2 - Understand Anxiety

“Panic is a sudden desertion of us, and a going over to the enemy of our imagination.”

Christian Nevell Bovee

“Somehow our devils are never quite what we expect when we meet them face to face. “

Nelson DeMille

“Worry often gives a small thing a big shadow. “

Swedish Proverb

“That the birds of worry and care fly over your head, this you cannot change, but that they build nests in your hair, this you can prevent. “

Chinese Proverb

“A day of worry is more exhausting than a day of work. “

John Lubbock

In order to resolve your anxiety problems it's important that you can understand why we feel and react the way you do. It's harder to fear something when you know exactly what's happening and why!

Before we start I want you to understand this:

You can and you will beat your anxiety/panic.

No-one else can do it for you.

It will take some hard work but nothing you can't handle.

On the road to recovery there will be good days and bad days. There will be times where you will feel frustrated, angry and even upset.

BUT with these 10 Steps you WILL recover.

Here's something you may never have thought about before.

Anxiety is an addiction! It's a bad habit!

Sounds strange doesn't it?

What's the difference between anxious thoughts and biting your fingernails? Nothing! They are both bad habits that you have been doing for so long they have become second nature. At some point someone bites their fingernails for the first time. Then they do it again, then again and again, until it has become something they do without even being aware they're doing it. Try asking them when they started, or even why they started and do you think they could tell you? Of course not! I'm sure you can't remember when and why you first felt anxious! Anxious thoughts become a habit with a certain way of viewing people, situations, the world around you and even your own body and the way it behaves. This kind of anxious thinking is often something you don't even notice that you're doing. You've become used to the fact that maybe you overthink everything or always think the worst. However the fact that you are reading this says you know you have a problem and are prepared to do something about it. Remember any bad habit can be broken and you can teach yourself to look at things differently.

Feeling anxious is scary. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise. Sometimes you feel like you are losing control or going mad. Panic attacks are REALLY scary! They can be so scary that you think that you are going to die. Let's get one thing straight NO-ONE HAS EVER DIED FROM A PANIC ATTACK. If you've ever watched hospital dramas on TV when did you ever see someone lying in intensive care, all their relatives crying around the bedside and being told "I'm so sorry but it's not good news. Your partner had a panic attack, there's nothing we can do". In fact picture that in your mind right now and see if you can do that without smiling a little!

If you read Chapter 2 you will remember that all the sensations and experiences that come out of anxiety, including panic attacks, are perfectly natural and normal responses. Everyone feels anxiety. If you were incapable of it you would have something wrong with you! Your problem is with inappropriate anxiety. Remember that when we are anxious our body prepares us for "fight or flight". In the absence of an anxiety disorder the options are "fight, flight or be alright", however with anxiety disorders we generally only ever consider the first two; we either want to run away from the situation or beat someone up! If we don't do either then your anxiety continues and your body stays on alert. If we can break the anxiety habit your body will be able to cancel the alarm!

Avoidance

Truthfully, how many times have you allowed your anxiety to determine what you do or don't do? Do you choose to not go somewhere or be around people to avoid those feelings of anxiety? If you have

done so, ask yourself whether or not that has done anything long term to help you get over your anxiety. I can guarantee you the answer will be no; avoiding something is no solution!

Let's imagine you get invited on a night out with a group of friends. You make an excuse and you avoid going because you fear you might embarrass yourself in some way, or that something terrible might happen. You stay at home watching TV, relieved that you were able to get out of going. You have successfully avoided a source of anxiety and can rest easy in front of the TV for the evening. The following week you meet up with someone who was at that night out; they tell you what a brilliant night it was. You now feel angry with yourself that you didn't/couldn't go, you are frustrated, annoyed and feeling sorry for yourself! You know that you missed out on something good!

Avoidance comes at a heavy price; missing out on new experiences, being around people and having fun! That feeling of relief that you were able to avoid doing something is actually missed opportunities. You are letting your anxiety disorder run your life, deciding for you what you can do and where you can go. Your anxious thinking and its physical reactions are in charge! Avoidance becomes another bad habit but with the 10 Steps we are going to help you break that one as well.

Imagine I tell you that I have a really bad case of the flu at the minute. It's not a normal flu though; I am completely healthy unless I go to certain places. As soon as I get there I get a high temperature, all my muscles ache and I feel the need to lie down. Once I leave, the flu disappears. Does that sound strange? I've heard of a 24 hour flu but I've never heard of "Tesco Flu"! How many anxiety sufferers do this every day though? When they're in a comfortable place where they feel safe everything is manageable, they feel fine, however the minute they go into a certain situation (perhaps being around people or going to a certain place), the belief is they have a serious illness. If you think about it, this is actually proof that you aren't seriously ill! Why? Because genuine illness doesn't understand geography, nor is it "part-time" only operating on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays 9:30am – 12:30pm!

Let's think about this another way. What if I told you that it was going to Tesco that caused my flu? Just by my walking in the supermarket door I developed an instant flu that vanished when I walked out! Again that sounds rather strange because a place can't cause a sudden illness just like that! It doesn't sit back and suddenly develop depending on your situation! Genuine illness doesn't vanish when you step back out through the door or when you get back to a place or situation where you feel safe. If I could avoid my illness by not going there, what is that actually saying? There is only one conclusion. Location doesn't cause illness.

Now is the time to accept the truth. We need to stop pushing our anxiety onto people and places and accept that how we feel is coming from within us. How you feel is coming from inside you and from your anxious thought processes and your body's response to them.

Let's think about these points again.

1. Genuine illness doesn't understand geography; it isn't dependent on location.

2. **Genuine illness isn't part time. You are either ill or you aren't. True illness doesn't recognise safe places.**
3. **A location or a person doesn't cause instant illness. Simply being somewhere or around someone doesn't make you ill!**

We have clearly shown that as unpleasant as the symptoms of anxiety can be, they do not mean, and cannot mean, you have a serious illness. That only leaves one possibility; YOU are producing the symptoms yourself!

And let's think about the word "symptom" for a second. The dictionary defines a symptom as:

***"Symptom:** a sign or an indication of disorder or disease, especially when experienced by an individual as a change from normal function, sensation, or appearance."*

But wait a minute! If anxiety is a normal emotion, and we have already established that we can't be genuinely ill, then how can we be having symptoms? So what does that mean? Simply that what happens to you during anxiety is completely false – it's a big fat lie; these "symptoms" are merely unpleasant sensations and feelings inappropriately being produced by your own mind! Of course they feel completely real but they aren't. And when have you ever heard of someone being hospitalized with a diagnosis of "nothing"? You haven't and you won't because hospitals are for illness and you aren't ill! Ever heard of someone ending up in hospital with a diagnosis of "a bad thought" or "an unpleasant feeling"? Sounds ridiculous doesn't it! Your anxiety makes you feel like something bad is always around the corner; sometimes you may feel like you will drop dead or have a heart attack if you go to the wrong place and become overwhelmed with fear. It's all lies!

I'm going to say it again just to make sure the message gets through. As terrifying as your anxiety symptoms may be, they cannot harm you. You are holding back on your enjoyment of life because of inappropriate thoughts and feelings! I can tell you from personal experience that even before my Agoraphobia I was an avoider. I convinced myself that not doing things, not going places and not meeting people was OK. It's not.

Why do you think we behave like this? The possibility of something happening is simply the way life works! On any given day good things and bad things can happen, but for the majority of the population, they have accepted this. Your anxiety has made you turn life into a disease! Do you really think that avoidance really lets you control your life? Do you really want to not experience as much as the world has to offer?

With the 10 Steps we can and we will help you to move forward. It's one thing to understand and accept what we are saying, it's quite another being equipped to move forward from it but the rest of the steps will let you do that!

The Vicious Cycle!

What happens to make us extremely anxious or panicked? This might look familiar.

1. You start with relatively mild feelings of anxiety. Nothing major.



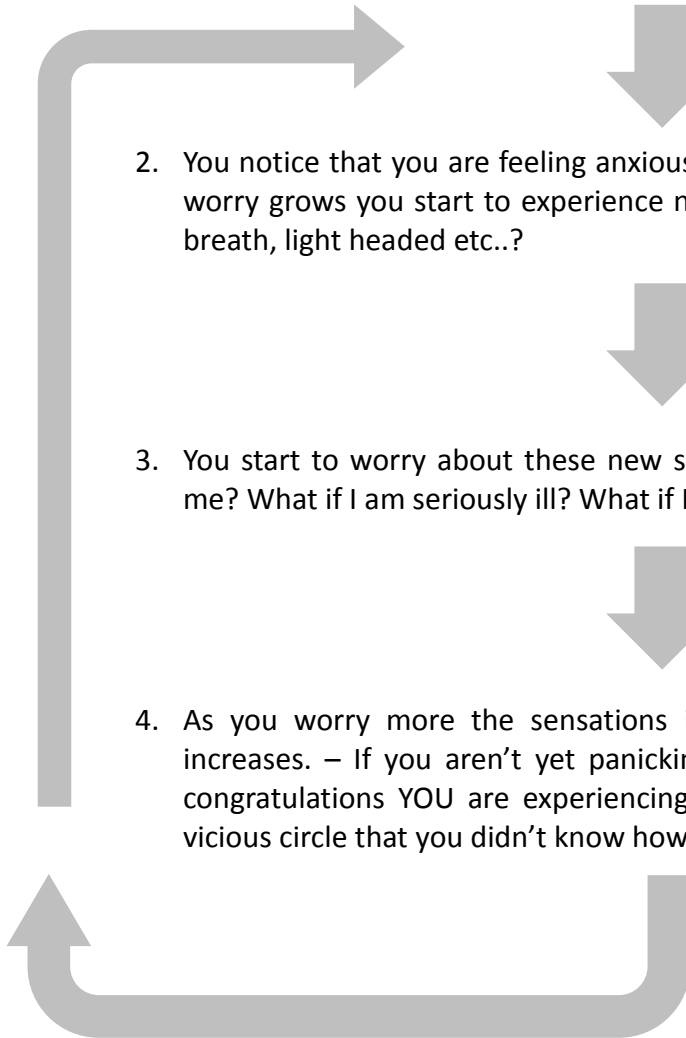
2. You notice that you are feeling anxious and that makes you worry a little more. As your worry grows you start to experience new physical symptoms – perhaps a little short of breath, light headed etc..?



3. You start to worry about these new sensations....what if I have something wrong with me? What if I am seriously ill? What if I have a heart attack?



4. As you worry more the sensations increase. As the sensations increase the worry increases. – If you aren't yet panicking, go back to step 2. If you are panicking now congratulations YOU are experiencing a panic attack simply by being caught up in a vicious circle that you didn't know how to get out of!



With anxiety the initially feeling of anxiety is always small. The problem is that we struggle to ignore it and as we think about it we make it grow and grow. And as it grows we generate more physical sensations. Can you name one example of how just worrying about something can help you to fix it?

So how exactly do we stop this vicious cycle?

- Firstly we ensure that we eliminate other triggers and causes of anxiety or things which make the problem worse (that was Step 1).
- Secondly, with an understanding of anxiety (Step 2), we understand what causes our symptoms (Chapter 2). We understand the effects of any medication (Step 3)
- We don't bottle up how we feel (Step 4).
- We start to retrain our mind to not start worrying about these sensations by giving it new experiences (Step 5, Step 6, Step 7 and Step 8).
- We persist until we get better! (Step 9 and Step 10).

Back to looking at our cycle then, we can see that:

- We never get to point 1 because we have retrained our mind with new experiences.
- If we ever did get to point 1 we wouldn't get to point 2 because we would understand why we are feeling and reacting in a certain way
- If we ever got to point 2 we would understand the physical sensations and so wouldn't worry about them. In any event these sensations would have been reduced because all the factors contributing to or causing them have been addressed.
- In the worst case scenario at step 3 we again are able to understand these feelings and can make a choice not to panic

You should now see why the 10 Steps really works. We aren't just looking to break your anxiety cycle in one place, we are completely destroying it!

So What Do I Have To Do For Step 2?

We have spoken in detail both here and in Chapter 2 about what causes anxiety and why. By now you should realise that the way you react when you are anxious is completely understandable. Before moving on to Step 3, accept that as unpleasant as anxiety symptoms are, they cannot harm you. It's OK at the minute that you don't know how to stop them; we will work on that later, for now just believe that what is happening is perfectly understandable sensations, just in the wrong time and place.

Step 3 – Do You Really Need That Medication?

I'm not saying not to take medication; far from it. What I want you to realise is that medication is **never** a cure for anxiety and panic disorders. At best it will help you with some of the symptoms and sensations you may be experiencing but the underlying cause is still there. The problem with relying on medication alone is that when you stop taking the medication, you're right back to where you were at the start. Add to this the potential problems with the side effects of the medication and quite frankly medication can make things worse. Do not just stop taking your medication if you are on any. Understand though that you won't be on medication for the rest of your life and your recovery will involve you stopping at some point. Knowing that, isn't it best to look at stopping sooner rather than later?

Whilst non-drug "treatments" may not *appear* to work as quickly as drug based treatments, it is important to note that it's the non-drug treatments that produce permanent results. Medication doesn't actually deal with any of the causes of why you are having the anxious thoughts or do anything to actually change how you think.

With medication, it's vital that you speak to your doctor and carefully weigh up both the benefits and the drawbacks. If you decide on medication you mustn't see it as a solution, merely a short term crutch and should be done alongside the 10 Steps. Medication at best is another tool. Unfortunately you should picture that tool as a 20 year old electric drill in poor condition. It might help you cope with your anxiety absolutely fine with no issues. It might help you for a while and stop working. It may also never work and give you an electric shock when you use it! If your anxiety is severe, and is interfering with your ability to function on a day to day basis, medication may (and this is only a may) be appropriate for you. However you must ask yourself whether or not you have genuinely looked at other alternatives which work better and which won't have the potential side effects. The 10 Step Programme can and does work without the need for medication.

Medication does not help you get to the bottom of your underlying issues.

Medication does nothing to help you develop the tools and strategies you need to beat anxiety for good.

The solution for your anxiety comes from within YOU!

If you are taking medication and haven't considered coming off, now is the time to go back to your doctor and have that discussion. I'm not saying that you should be coming off immediately, but as we've said at some point it needs to happen and the longer you stay on medication, the higher the risk of side effects including addiction. In some cases medication can even delay recovery as it can be difficult to distinguish between the symptoms of anxiety and the side effects of the medication. Whatever you do though, don't try and come off any medication you are already taking without your doctor's advice and assistance. That also means that you don't try coming off any faster than your

doctor recommends either, or that you just suddenly stop taking it without getting medical advice at all.

If you speak to any doctor about why they prescribe medication you might be surprised at why they do it. So why do they then?

1. Patients insisting that they want medication and nothing else, believing that it's the only solution
2. Feeling that they need to be doing something for you but feeling helpless due to a lack of immediate alternatives e.g. psychological therapies in that area have a long waiting list (by the way the waiting list where I live for non-urgent cases is 2 years)
3. An unwillingness by the patient to consider looking at other options such as therapy, diet, exercise etc..
4. Not enough time to be able to talk about anything else given the time limitations of an appointment (in some cases as little as 7 minutes)
5. As highly skilled as doctors are they can't be expected to be experts in every field. Some may understand your problems and be able to talk to you about them, others may not.

You will see that not one of these reasons is that your doctor believes it will cure you!

Ask any GP, "Is this medication the solution?" and I can guarantee that every single one of them will say, "No". Remember it was your brain that got you into this position and it is your brain that will get you out of it!

Types of Medication

There are quite a few different types of medication that are prescribed for use with anxiety, each working in a different way. We will look at each of these in turn.

Anti-Anxiety drugs

Commonly referred to as tranquilisers, anti-anxiety drugs work by slowing down the central nervous system. Their relaxing and calming effects have made them very popular and they are the most commonly used medication with anxiety. These types of medication are fast acting and are considered effective especially during a panic attack or a time of high anxiety.

Despite their effectiveness in relieving symptoms, there are some quite severe drawbacks. Because these drugs work by reducing brain activity, many people report a feeling of detachment, drowsiness, "fogginess" and being uncoordinated, and this can interfere with normal day to day activities. The effects are somewhat similar to that of being hung-over. Long term use of these types of drugs are also widely believed to cause feelings of depression as well as generally suppressing your emotions including pleasure. Some people refer to this as feeling "numb". These medications may also be used

on an “as needed” basis rather than taken regularly. In hospital, for example, many patients are given a “pre-med” – a tranquiliser to calm them down before being taken for surgery. For some people these tablets are taken before a specific event that’s making them anxious, for example going to the dentist or flying on an aeroplane. In these cases the benefits probably do outweigh the risks as when you are just taking 1 tablet say every 6 months, however there is always the danger that you like the effect so much you start to increase your dosage. If you ask an alcoholic how they came to be that way, they will all tell you without fail that it was a gradual process of, “Just one more!” and, “I’ll be able to stop if I want to”. You don’t choose an addiction and usually don’t see it coming.

Some of the common side effects experienced are:

- Drowsiness, lack of energy
- Clumsiness, slow reflexes
- Slurred speech
- Confusion and disorientation
- Depression
- Dizziness, lightheadedness
- Impaired thinking and judgment
- Memory loss, forgetfulness
- Nausea, stomach upset
- Blurred or double vision

For some people (and it is accepted that this is rare) taking these medications the effect may be the complete opposite of what would typically be expected; this is called a paradoxical reaction. In these instances the medication can actually increase anxiety, cause irritability and increase aggression.

Anti-Depressants

Although originally developed to deal with depression, it was found that anti-depressants could also be used in patients with anxiety disorders. They work by addressing your general mood. Many doctors prefer prescribing antidepressants because the risk of addiction is substantially smaller. However the one drawback of this type of medication is the typical 4-6 week time-frame before any effect is noticed. For this reason some medical practitioners will prescribe anti-depressants alongside another medication in the short term until the anti-depressants have had enough time to become effective. Unlike the anti-anxiety medications, the anti-depressants are not something you could take just during a panic attack because of their gradual effect.

Side effects include:

- Nausea

- Headaches
- Drowsiness
- Dizziness
- Upset Stomach
- Weight Gain

It should be remembered that some anti-depressants now carry warnings about the increased risk of suicidal thoughts. It is also not unheard of for some patients to experience an increase in anxiety and depression. The best person to talk to about this is your doctor.

Beta-Blockers

Although typically used in treating heart conditions and in high blood pressure, beta-blockers work by controlling some of the physical symptoms of anxiety, such as trembling and sweating. During periods of high anxiety and panic, the “fight or flight” sensation is caused by the hormone noradrenaline (or by its other name norepinephrine). Beta-blockers block the effects of this hormone.

Side effects include:

- Light-headedness
- Sleepiness
- Nausea
- Unusually slow pulse

Anti-Psychotics

Antipsychotic medications were originally developed for the treatment of conditions such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. Over time doctors found that these medications appeared to be useful for use with other conditions of which anxiety disorders are one. Currently there are trials underway looking at their usefulness in these circumstances; their use at the moment is reserved for patients who have failed to respond to other forms of medication. It should be noted, however, that this particular type of medication does have some quite significant side effects.

Side effects include:

- Restlessness
- Muscle spasms
- Eye problems
- Weight gain

- Diabetes
- Pancreatitis

Sleeping Tablets

At this point it's worth mentioning sleeping tablets. Although they aren't used directly in anxiety, many anxiety sufferers end up being prescribed sleeping tablets to help them get a good night's sleep! In England alone, more than 10 million prescriptions for sleeping tablets are given out every year. One of the common types of sleeping tablet used is anti-anxiety medication (see above) due to the fact it causes drowsiness.

It is vital that you remember that sleeping tablets only offer short term relief. There is a great deal of similarity between the use of sleeping tablets and the use of anti-anxiety drugs. Anti-anxiety drugs provide a short term solution that deals with the symptoms of anxiety; sleeping tablets equally do the same for insomnia, dealing with the symptoms and not the cause. Extensive research at Loughborough University's Sleep Research Centre has shown that the best solutions for insomnia are the non-drug treatments, particularly self-help solutions and changing the way we think about sleep. We dealt with describing how to do your own self-help sleep programme back in Step 1.

Ask yourself.....

With the information we have given you on medication you're now in a position to ask yourself some important questions. At the very least you have some key points to take back to your doctor the next time you are there.

- Is medication really the best option?
- Have I considered other options first?
- Am I prepared to put up with any side effects there might be?
- Am I expecting this medication to be a cure (which as we have seen, it isn't)?
- Am I prepared to follow the 10 Steps without any medication?

Ask your doctor.....

- How exactly will the medication help?
- What side effects are common?
- Is there any food or drink I need to avoid?

- Is this drug safe with other medication I may be taking?
- How long do I need to take this medication for?
- Will it be difficult to come off the medication?

I will say it again. Medication doesn't cure anxiety. Granted it may treat some of the symptoms and unpleasant sensations but it doesn't address the way you think. If you see the worst in every situation a drug will never change that. Your thinking remains unchanged with medication alone, the only thing that has changed is how much you feel the effects of that thinking or, in other words, your symptoms! It's a bit like putting a rug over a hole in the carpet. The hole is out of sight but you can still feel it when you walk over it and when you finally take the rug away, the hole will still be there! That's what the 10 Steps are about making changes; looking at your lifestyle, understanding your anxiety, recognising how the way you react influences your anxiety and challenging the way you think!

Again, if you are currently taking medication for your anxiety go back and speak to your doctor right away. Please remember that sudden withdrawal from medication can cause problems and is not recommended at all. You also need to check with your doctor if the medication you are on for your anxiety isn't also being used to help with other problems. For example, you may have been given beta blockers because you also have high blood pressure.

Bring this book with you and talk to your Doctor about the 10 Steps and a managed withdrawal from medication. Don't forget to show them the letter at the back of this book called "Dear Doctor"!

Step 4 – It’s Good To Talk!

There is nothing worse than feeling alone. By alone I mean that you feel like no-one understands you or can help you with your problems. You can be alone in a crowded room. Talking about how you feel is very important, whether that be talking to a medical professional, a friend or family member or even an anxiety helpline. Problems that you keep to yourself, which you go over and over in your mind always seem to get bigger. On the other hand as the saying goes, “A problem shared is a problem halved”; talking about the way you feel brings things out into the open and helps you explore what you could do to resolve them. There’s an argument that talking about what’s making you anxious just makes things worse but I really don’t accept that. The fact is whatever is bothering you is probably going round and round in your mind anyway; talking about it will allow you to explore all the options and help you reach conclusions maybe quicker than you would otherwise have done or even perhaps in a way you haven’t considered.

It’s not just the act of talking that helps; the fact that you are being listened to by someone lets you know that that person cares about you. By the way you certainly aren’t alone; it’s been estimated that at some point in their lives some 10% of people are affected by anxiety.

Talking is widely recognised as a very good form of therapy for people with anxiety disorders – often going under the label “talking therapies”. With the support of a professional psychologist, counsellor or mental health nurse, talking lets you explore the way you think and feel and look at how this may be affecting your behaviour. Having to express how you feel and what you are thinking means that you have to arrange your thoughts and think about how to put them into words. Before saying anything out loud you have to put it all into some kind of order and examine your situation to get yourself into a position to be able to explain it so someone else will understand. When you are forced to talk about what may be going on inside your head, you may start to see things that you couldn’t see before and get a different perspective on things. There’s a big difference between a thought inside your own head, something said when you are feeling anxious and something that you say to someone you trust when you feel comfortable. As important as it is to talk to your friends and family, there may be times where a professional may be of more help, simply because they are emotionally detached from you. A professional won’t have gone through any of your past events with you and will be able to help you look at things more objectively.

Unfortunately we have grown up at a time where talking about our feelings is seen as a sign of weakness. We have all heard of that “stiff upper lip” attitude. We worry that telling someone our deepest darkest thoughts may make them think we are “mad” or “soft”. Let’s get one thing straight – seeking professional help is not a sign of weakness; if anything it’s a sign of strength to be able to stand up and say, “I need help”. It shows that you are strong enough to start taking steps to take back control of your own life and are prepared to do something about it!

There is a common misconception that these “talking therapies” are in some way “New Age” and associated with the more ridiculous aspects of the lives of the rich and pampered in places like Hollywood. Plenty of TV programmes and movies have featured someone with far too much money who talks about their “therapist” and pays them to listen to them moan about random rubbish. This is far from the reality of what a professional therapist does. They are highly trained professionals offering help to you based on sound medical practice and having one should certainly not be considered a self-indulgence. Talking therapies are a lot more common than you think, they’re completely confidential and they really do work.

If you do end up talking to a professional, it is important that you be completely upfront and honest with them. They are there to help you, not to judge you. If you aren’t honest who do you think ends up cheated the most? You! Ultimately you are wasting an opportunity when, if you have gone to a professional, you obviously thought that it was worthwhile and useful. If you are talking to a counsellor (and I’ve been there), it can be an emotional roller coaster at times and can leave you feeling drained and exhausted. By the way if you do want to talk to a professional and you can’t get to someone, or there isn’t someone near you, therapy is also available via telephone, email and webcam sessions.

It’s easy to dismiss talking therapies with the argument, “How good can it be? It’s just talking!”. That argument couldn’t be further from the truth. These talking therapies come in various different types which we discuss later, so it’s important to know what may be available for you. Think about it though...people have different backgrounds and different beliefs, values and ways of life so why shouldn’t there be different kinds of therapies to best suit them? Many therapists have training in more than one kind of therapy and you may benefit from an approach that combines several things together. The most important thing is that you trust your therapist and feel comfortable with them; if you don’t feel like you can open up to them then it simply isn’t going to work. The first therapist that I was offered I rejected and it wasn’t a problem; it wasn’t that they weren’t good at their job but the trust just wasn’t there. Speak to your therapist before you start any therapy sessions and see if you feel comfortable with them. If you aren’t, don’t worry about it, just try again! Remember that if you aren’t relaxed with your therapist you aren’t going to be open with them. Therapy is about examining aspects of yourself, your thoughts and your past that you may have never really looked at yourself, never mind discussed with anyone else.

With all these forms of talking therapies you will only benefit if you are prepared to be open to consider and implement what comes out during the sessions. Talking to someone for 1 hour a week is completely pointless if for the other 167 hours in that week you carry on doing what you were doing before! The person who ultimately makes that choice about whether or not to use what you are told is you! The decision about whether therapy is ultimately effective, whether it will make a change in your life, is totally in your hands. It’s not a problem if you don’t agree with everything your therapist says; there may well be things which you decide you don’t feel comfortable doing. If that’s the case tell your therapist!

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

Despite its complicated sounding title the principle of CBT is simple – look at how you feel and react in certain situations and change it! It entirely revolves around the concept that it isn't actually the life events themselves that are distressing you but the way that you respond to them. Although CBT typically involves working with a CBT therapist, it's also something you can do yourself; in fact if you are reading this book and following the exercises you are already doing it! CBT builds on the fact that it's the way our subconscious reacts to situations that determines our feelings and behaviours, and not external factors (remember classic conditioning from chapter 2?). Because of this fact, by changing the way we react in these situations we're able to change our thoughts, even though the original situation doesn't change. By changing the way we think in certain situations we'll be able to see things differently. Until you challenge the way you feel, nothing will ever change and you'll carry on reacting the way you always have.

CBT won't tell you how you should feel but rather lets you apply your conscious brain and your life experience to thinking through things in a calm and rational way. You can then apply that knowledge the next time something happens and ultimately get that message to your subconscious to not generate an anxious response.

CBT gets a bad reputation on the Internet in places and I've seen quite a few of the "anxiety cure" programmes be very critical. I looked at one site going on about how CBT can't work and could never work but their arguments were so flawed and biased I was left rather taken aback. Quite why they would choose to be so critical of CBT is anyone's guess; the cynic would say that if they endorsed CBT there would be no need for them to sell you their products! After all, if they are trying to sell you their programme, it's not in their interests to tell you how effective something else can be! I am totally confident that if you are seeing a therapist and you take the 10 Steps to show them there won't be a problem – I'm sure some other programmes wouldn't feel that way!

While we are talking about the bad reputation that CBT has sometimes, don't let that put you off. Reading into the detail around many of those bad reports suggests that the problem was a combination of factors. Lack of trust with the practitioner was one case, poor practitioners (one person I read about said that CBT doesn't work because their therapist spent the entire session looking at the clock and yawning all the time!), an unwillingness to cooperate (someone else said that CBT doesn't work because they didn't like what they were being asked to do) and simply failing to following advice given. For people to jump to the conclusion that the whole field of CBT doesn't work on the basis of one bad experience is rather silly. If you walked into a shoe shop and the sales assistant yawned at you and checked their watch while serving you, you would probably walk out and just not go back. You certainly wouldn't decide that shoes are clearly a waste of time and spend the rest of your life in bare feet! Remember that if you go to a therapist, the same as with any kind of treatment that needs you to get involved, and you refuse when asked to play your part, you can't blame CBT if it doesn't work!

Remember the whole point of CBT is to make changes to how you think and help you to break certain cycles. If you refuse to make any changes then obviously nothing is going to happen! It's up to you if you are going to cooperate or not! No therapist has a magic wand they can just wave and change how you think inside your own head and how you choose to live your own life.

Unfortunately it's human nature after a bad experience to label the whole thing as a waste of time and then tell everyone else about it. We have all had friends or family tell us about a restaurant or hotel, for example, they went to and because of one tiny, little problem the whole establishment was ruled a disaster zone and they declare loudly they'll never go back. The simple truth is usually down to one member of staff making a mistake! Don't write off an entire profession or branch of therapy because of a bump in the road.

Here's what objective research has had to say about CBT (don't worry about the "clinical talk" I have underlined the key points:

THE CANADIAN JOURNAL OF PSYCHIATRY CLINICAL PRACTICE

"Evidence is accumulating that CBT may be more effective than medication in preventing relapse. A long term follow-up study of patients who had become panic free with exposure therapy found that 93% remained in remission after 2 years."

THE ROYAL AUSTRALIAN & NEW ZEALAND COLLEGE OF PSYCHIATRISTS

Clinical Practice Guidelines Team for Panic Disorder and Agoraphobia

"Cognitive Behavioural Therapy is the most consistently efficacious treatment for PD, according to three meta-analyses...cognitive Behavioural Therapy showed the strongest ESs in both systematic reviews, as well as the greatest percentage of people who were panic-free at the end of treatment"

THE WORLD FEDERATION OF SOCIETIES OF BIOLOGICAL PSYCHIATRY (WFSBP)

Task force for the Pharmacological Treatment of Anxiety, Obsessive Compulsive and Post Traumatic Stress Disorders.

"Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and other variants of behaviour therapy have been sufficiently investigated in controlled studies in patients with anxiety disorders, OCD and PTSD to support them being recommended either alone or in combination with medicines."

In an article in the Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology 1991, a review was undertaken of 150 different research studies. Results showed that 87% of people with Panic Disorder and Agoraphobia improved, with only 10% of these relapsing. CBT for Panic Disorder without Agoraphobia had an incredible improvement rate of 90% with only a 5% relapse rate.

A study in the Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology also found that the results obtained by CBT are better than with medication:

- 87% of patients remain without attacks at 1 year
- 75-81% at 2 years after completion of brief CBT.

At this point you might be thinking this book was a waste of money if all we are saying is to go get CBT! Well, a study in 2011 called “The effectiveness of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy in primary health care: a review” had this to say:

“CBT has been applied in both clinical and non-clinical environments to treat disorders such as personality conditions and behavioural problems. A systematic review of CBT in depression and anxiety disorders concluded that “CBT delivered in primary care, especially including computer- or Internet-based self-help programs, is potentially more effective than usual care and could be delivered effectively by primary care therapists”

In other words you can enjoy the benefits of CBT through a self-help programme....this one for example! For those of you reading the statistics above and deciding you’re going to be one of the 10% or so where improvement wasn’t seen, remember that this is a 10 step programme not a 1 step programme; we will get you better!

Psychodynamic Therapy

Psychodynamic therapy is probably what most people think of when they hear the word “therapy”; images of lying on the therapist’s couch doing all the talking while the therapist sits quietly giving their client the opportunity to say whatever comes to their mind! The founder of the psychodynamic approach to therapy is probably the most famous psychologist of them all, Sigmund Freud. With CBT we have discussed how it looks at how you feel and react. With psychodynamic therapy it goes a lot deeper into your personality and childhood experiences to look and see how these may be influencing the way you feel. By understanding why you feel the way you do, you are better equipped to change. The thinking is that anxiety problems stem from “faulty” messages from your subconscious that were determined early on in your life and eventually (sometimes many years later) end up in an internal conflict. Where there is often disagreement is in whether or not it is necessary to revisit these experiences in order to move forward. Some would say yes, others would argue that it just causes unnecessary pain and in the short term may make anxiety issues worse as painful memories are exposed.

For what it’s worth, here’s my personal opinion! I personally disagree with some of the principles of psychodynamic therapy but that’s not to say it hasn’t helped a great many people, just that it isn’t for me. For a lot of people opening up old wounds isn’t going to help anything. The important decision is what you choose to do now moving forward in your life, and all we need to learn to let go of things that may have held us back in the past. However, I accept that that is an oversimplified view. There are

people who just aren't able to let go of the past, and are being held back by it, and for those people I have no issue at all with this form of therapy.

The first thing a therapist will do is help you acknowledge and accept you have these "faulty" rules (and the fact you are reading this book suggests you already do) and will then look to help you develop strategies for change. The therapist won't tell you what to do as that is not what they are there for. Their job is to guide you to your own decisions and conclusions to help free you from your past and any unhelpful restrictions it has placed on you.

There are a number of different approaches within psychodynamic therapy but they do all seem to have a number of things in common:

- Our feelings and behaviour are strongly influenced by our subconscious
- Feelings and behaviour as adults are rooted in our childhood experiences
- All behaviour has a cause, often rooted in the subconscious
- Our personalities have three separate parts, one of which is the "Id", made of basic biological drives. Behaviour is decided by two instinctive drives "Thanatos" the aggressive drive & death instinct and "Eros" the sex drive & life instinct, which are part of the Id
- Parts of the subconscious and conscious mind are in conflict
- Our personality is shaped by the drives being changed by conflicts at various times throughout childhood

Psychodynamic therapy is a long term therapy. In fact it's been known to take years to work through everything and at the start it isn't unheard of to be asked to attend perhaps as often as 3 times a week. Having said that short courses of therapy may still be of benefit, particularly where the focus is on a single issue known to be causing a problem. For example, it may be used with relationship counselling.

Integrative Psychotherapy

This form of therapy takes the focus away from just specific problems or challenges you have and looks at the whole person – your mind, body, emotions, relationships and behaviour and tries to help you grow as a person. This form of therapy can be used to look at a wide range of issues or even with people who have no specific issue but feel they want to achieve personal growth.

Like many forms of therapy, the integrative approach traces many of our problems to repetitive behaviours that we have may have developed but which are no longer helpful.

Let's think about someone who was bullied as a child. That person may develop a defence that makes themselves less visible and therefore less of a target when they are around people. What happens to that person if they carry that behaviour into later life and into situations where it isn't helpful? The person would find it difficult to work as part of a team or within a group and may not even understand why. Their past experiences have taught them behaviours to help them survive but in fact these same behaviours are now holding them back. With an Integrative Psychotherapy therapist, the therapist would help you explore the impact of these redundant beliefs on your life now.

Integrative therapy is not about trying to change you but to work through unresolved or redundant issues. Not just that it's also about reducing the defence mechanisms that you might have that hold you back when you're relating to others and maintaining your own health. Simply, Integrative Psychotherapy is all about "bringing out the best in you".

Group Therapy

Group therapy (also referred to as Group Psychotherapy) is really any form of psychotherapy that is done in a group situation. Typically a group session is made up of between 6-10 clients and 1-2 therapists. Because many sufferers of anxiety disorders feel alone and isolated, group therapy immediately helps you to realise that you are not on your own and that other people may have the same experiences as you. It also means that you are surrounded by other people who are moving towards the same goal as you are and who can understand how you feel. When you listen to other people talk about what their anxiety and panic has done to them, you don't feel quite so bad about yourself. It's important though that during a group therapy session you remember that everyone is unique; if someone is talking about how they got worse or how bad their panic attacks were compared to yours, don't think that the same experiences will happen to you! Remember, the fact that you are there wanting to do something about it is a big step towards suggesting that it won't happen. It's important that these sessions are positive experiences and make you feel as if you are moving forward; it isn't a forum for feeling sorry for yourself!

Group therapy is useful if you have had issues relating to others. A group therapy session will be arranged by the therapist in such a way that it is made up of people who will benefit from each other's presence there. The group is designed from the start to offer support and build confidence. It allows the members to express themselves and be given feedback by other people while still in a safe environment.

Person-Centered Therapy

This also known as PCT, Client Centered Therapy, Non-Directive Therapy or Rogerian Therapy (after Carl Rogers who developed it in the 1950's). The principle of this form of therapy is simple; every one of us has an incredible ability to heal ourselves. The core principle is the idea of self which Rogers defined as, "the organised, consistent set of perceptions and beliefs about oneself", or in other words how we see ourselves. This view of ourselves is taken to have a huge influence on how we view both ourselves and the world around us. For example a person who sees themselves as confident would behave in a confident manner and go about their everyday life with that belief.

Person-centered therapy works very well for people who have low self-worth or self-esteem. With therapy, clients are encouraged to let go of the ideas and beliefs they have developed about themselves and explore in depth their true feelings and desires. With this form of therapy clients are

able to move away from living their life the way they feel other people want them to or expect them to, and are able to find and accept their real self. By finding their real self, clients are also able to develop a greater respect and understanding of others.

“Mindfulness”

Mindfulness is a relatively new term you may come across as a form of therapy. Its roots go back to Buddhist teachings with a number of different mindfulness-based therapies having been developed.

Mindfulness is very much about the present; about focusing complete attention on the here and now. With this form of therapy every single thought, feeling and sensation is acknowledged and accepted for what it is.

Being “mindful” (hence the name) is not the same as thinking; mindfulness is a state where you experience the present in a way where you aren’t thinking, judging, criticizing or analysing but simply experiencing. The belief is that for many people we often aren’t truly engaged in the present but rather often function on “auto-pilot”. Have you ever been driving your car on a long, but familiar journey and suddenly realise that you have no memory of miles worth of distance? You were so busy thinking about other things that the journey just didn’t register! Mindfulness means having a complete focus on here and now and nothing else. It also means not thinking about past actions or future ones.

Being “mindful” takes practice to be able to develop, and requires 7 elements to be successful.

1. You are an observer to what is happening to you right now. Nothing is positive or negative, it simply is and you are watching.
2. You are patient. Whatever happens will happen in its own time.
3. You have a “beginner’s mind”; every experience is a new experience that you are doing for the first time.
4. You trust yourself and your ability.
5. You accept that things are happening in the moment as they are supposed to.
6. You completely accept your thoughts, feelings, sensations and beliefs.
7. You do not attach meaning to thoughts and feelings or connect a thought to a feeling. You simply observe.

So how does this work for anxiety disorders? Anxiety disorders are built on the fact that you are unable to control your anxiety. Reducing everything to the present and simply observing can provide a new perspective on situations that previously caused anxiety.

If you want to try being mindful, you can do this yourself. Find somewhere relaxing to sit (or lie down) and concentrate on relaxing your breathing. Once you feel sufficiently relaxed, observe what is happening to you, both with what is around you and what is happening to you directly.

Practicing mindfulness is able to help with recognition of problems with the way you think and allow you to start to respond in new ways, rather than just out of habit. Remember what we said in Step 2 – anxiety is a bad habit!

Summary

This Step is not about telling you to go and get therapy. It would be a bit of a cheat to tell you that the 10 Steps was the answer and then ask you to go find a therapist! You don't need a therapist to work through this programme but that doesn't mean you can't have some extra help. A therapist, no matter how good, will not resolve your anxiety problems for you. Only you can do that. The aim of this Step is to encourage you to talk more to those around you and recognise how important talking can be. If you're offered a therapist, you're now in a better position to understand what that means and what is likely to happen.

Hopefully this overview of the various therapies available will show you that there is a talking therapy to suit everyone, with different approaches to the same situation. Keep an open mind and remember to ask questions before committing to a particular therapy. Ultimately what matters most when selecting a therapy and therapist is that you are completely comfortable and trusting of both as it is going to involve working through deeply personal issues and, if the trust isn't there, it isn't going to work properly!

As British Telecom used to say, "It's good to talk!"

Step 5 – Get Busy

“I keep the telephone of my mind open to peace, harmony, health, love and abundance. Then, whenever doubt, anxiety or fear try to call me, they keep getting a busy signal - and soon they'll forget my number. “

Edith Armstrong

We've all had times where we've been so involved in a particular activity or just so busy that we lost all track of time. As the saying goes, “Time flies when you are having fun”! However, for many people with anxiety problems, if not the vast majority, we have learnt to fit our life around these anxiety problems. Social events are missed, outings are cancelled and more. Maybe even the word “fun” isn't in your life anymore.

I don't need to tell you that you can't, and shouldn't, let anxiety control your life in this way (and no doubt plenty of others will have told you already) but I have yet to meet the person who chose to be in that situation. It's a slow, slippery slide with gradually more and more things being altered and dropped, until your life has been changed so that nothing is left that challenges your anxiety. Even then I'm sure you can still find reasons to be anxious!

Part of getting your anxiety under control means living your life. It's not enough to just exist. If you've ever had an itch you'll know the worst thing you can do is to scratch it. It may feel like it's helping but it just makes it worse. The only way to get rid of it is to ignore it and it'll go away by itself. Anxiety is no different. The more attention we pay it, the worse it becomes. You can't make your anxiety go away by focusing on it or the thing causing it. Can you think of any problem that can be made better by putting your life on hold just so that you can sit around, worrying about it? Nobody feels particularly good about themselves, no matter what issues they may have, if they spend their time going, “Oh, poor me!”. Not only will you not feel good about yourself, but that type of behaviour can make it extremely frustrating for those around you who want to support you in your journey out of anxiety.

Back to what this step is about, getting busy! Getting busy has 3 purposes.

1. When we're busy we have less time to give to our anxiety.
2. With hobbies and interests we're giving our mind new experiences.
3. We get our life back!

We all have things that we need to do on a daily basis that we can't get out of. You know those things like going to work, cooking the dinner, washing the dishes and doing the ironing? The rest of the time from now onwards, you're going to get busy. You're going to do things that you enjoy or perhaps you've always wanted to try but just never got round to. This isn't about things you don't feel capable of doing yet; we'll talk more about that in Step 8!

When we say “get busy” we mean get **really** busy! Find things to do all the time. Sitting around doing nothing or being bored are a big no! By the way watching TV is not an example of being busy unless it’s something you are really enjoy and get drawn in to! If you can do something else at the same time, it doesn’t count.

What you do to fill up your day can be almost anything, as long as it meets a few conditions:

1. You find things you can do regularly
2. You must enjoy doing it!
3. Your chosen activities must take up all of your attention
4. You choose some activities that let you explore your creative side and let you learn new skills

There are plenty of things you can think about to do. What about using your hands and making something? What about going to evening classes and maybe learning a foreign language? Have you ever thought of learning to play a musical instrument? Let’s think about learning the violin as an example. You focus on reading the music, placing your fingers correctly, listening to your own playing to check that the notes are right, judge the timing of the piece you’re playing, move the bow back and forth and maintain your stance. That’s quite a list, isn’t it! Now, where in the midst of all that is there space for anxious thoughts? There isn’t!

Have a think about your hobbies and interests that you have, even if you haven’t enjoyed them much recently. Do they occupy your mind fully? If they don’t (or if you don’t really have any hobbies and interests) then now is the time to start thinking about those things you’ve always wanted to do but have never got round to. Even if the answer is yes, learning a new skill or pursuing a new interest is well worth doing so let’s give your subconscious some new experiences! Do you have any hobbies or interests that you maybe enjoyed years ago but quit for some reason. Perhaps that musical instrument that you quit playing because of lack of commitment when you were a child or that sport you quit because working hours didn’t allow you to play it any more. Have a think if there is something you either regret quitting or wish you hadn’t had to stop. Do the reasons you stopped still apply? If not, why not have a go again!

It can be satisfying to look for something that allows you to see progress or achievement. Whether it is winning a sports match, passing Grades, earning Belts or gaining certificates, this is a positive and solid proof that you are successful in this activity and helps boost your confidence to move past your anxious behaviour.

Hobbies and interests don’t have to be solitary activities. Team sports are an obvious example of something that gets you meeting new people but even activities that seem to be solo sports can be great fun and have you meeting new people. A lot of clubs hold competitions, day trips, nights out and other social events to allow members to get to know each other better and have a good time. If you enjoy reading, how about looking for a Book Club? You’ll be surrounded by like-minded people and have the opportunity to read books you might never have thought of picking. If you are interested in

learning a new craft or skill, why not look for a class in it? If there are few people in your local area with the same interest try looking on the Internet for other enthusiasts. With the sheer size of the World Wide Web you can guarantee you can find people to chat with who have the same interest! Just try to remember that there is life beyond the Internet!

If it's a sport that you want to start playing look for local clubs or associations. If you want to start a physical activity, but have no idea what, try going to your local sports centre and see what activities they are running or have a look at the website of your local council. Many sports offer taster sessions or "beginner days" for people who want to try something new and see what they think! If you try an activity and it doesn't suit you, or if you feel that you didn't feel comfortable in that particular group, don't give up! There is nothing wrong with shopping around for an activity and group that suits you. After all, at the very least, you are going to be investing time and effort into what you do, if not money as well. There is nothing wrong with being picky.

Martial Arts

I'd like to just introduce the topic of Martial Arts for a moment simply because it was something I chose to do (both the authors of the book are Black Belts in Karate!). Like many other people we never contemplated Martial Arts as an adult activity for professional people – we had the idea that we would get hurt, it would teach us to be violent and it was full of testosterone fuelled teenagers looking to pick a fight with everyone!

After choosing Karate for our children to learn basic self defence and develop their fitness, we quickly realised it was not what we thought it was (not even close!) and it quickly became a regular family activity. Some 6 years later we are still taking part, still enjoying it and are now involved in teaching it. Even with interruptions caused by Agoraphobia, our training still continued! Karate has given us fitness, confidence, self-esteem and much more.

If you look at the true meaning of Martials Arts it is easy to see the benefits it offers to the anxious person. Obviously the physical training offers great benefits but true martial arts also has mental training which seeks to develop greater character, a confident mind and a fuller understanding of who you are as a person. It also encourages a person to do their very best in everything that they do.

If you have ever considered this as an option (or even if you haven't!), I would strongly encourage you to give it a go. Look around the different clubs and find one that suits you. As with anything, there are really good clubs and really bad clubs so do your homework first!

Active Relaxation

For the majority of anxiety sufferers the ability to simply switch off at the end of the day simply isn't there. I know I've had plenty of people who didn't have an anxiety disorder get completely confused at the fact that I couldn't just "switch off" and relax at the drop of a hat. Too many thoughts go round and round in your head, thinking about every possible outcome, imagining every conceivable way that

something could go wrong.

Because of this, the concept of relaxation can be difficult – doing nothing in front of the TV may well be far from relaxing, simply because they don't occupy your mind enough and divert your thinking.

Relaxing doesn't mean doing nothing – it's about doing something that is able to divert your attention away from your problems.

Sometimes you need to say NO!

As much as you need to keep busy and enjoy new experiences, you need to remember not to completely overdo things. As you start to see your anxiety resolve, it would be so easy to try and make up for lost time, getting involved in lots of different things! It isn't a race to find as many activities as possible in as short a time as possible! Remember that you are trying to keep yourself busy, not run off your feet. Build up to a level of activity that is practical for you so that you still have time for the mundane but essential parts of life.

For some people one of the things they like to do to stay busy is to get involved in something that helps other people. Of course that is a wonderful use of time and highly commendable! However it is so easily to get absorbed into something like that that we neglect our own needs, finding it difficult to say no! As much as you may want to help others, your number one priority has to be yourself and that means recognising your limitations and having clear boundaries set. There is no point in trying to help other people and managing to run yourself into the ground in the process. There is also no need to become a doormat, you are entitled to say, "Enough!" no matter what guilt trip someone tries on you! A certain degree of selfishness in this is a good thing. You need to make sure you look after yourself, as well as everyone else.

Summary

From this moment on, you aren't going to be stuck for something to do. You're going to make sure your mind is occupied every minute of every day. When you wake up in the morning you get up right away (lying in bed awake isn't keeping busy!) and you fill every waking moment until it's time to go to bed. You're going to explore your creative side, learn new skills and gain new experiences.

Step 6 – Stop Seeking Reassurance!

When we feel anxious we want someone to tell us that everything is going to be fine. Unfortunately looking for that reassurance has 3 basic problems.

1. If the answer isn't what you want to hear, you don't believe the person telling you. Instead it's, "Are you sure it's OK?" and, "What if you've got it wrong?".
2. You only feel reassured for a short amount of time. After that you need reassurance again.
 - Often the people you ask for reassurance aren't able to give it to you.

Health Anxiety

STOP GOING TO YOUR DOCTOR!

Please don't misunderstand me on this one. If you need to go and see your Doctor then you go and see them. What I'm talking about here is revisiting your Doctor for constant reassurance when nothing has changed.

Imagine you go to turn on a light at home and it doesn't work. You check the rest of your house and realise that nothing works. You look outside and you see that none of your neighbours' lights are on either. Obviously there is a power outage in your area. What if instead of just waiting for the electricity to come back on I start to examine my house electrics. Everyone else may have a power outage but what if that's not the case with me? Maybe if I check every socket and light in the house just to see? That's what happens in Health Anxiety. We get a minor sensation that everyone gets, caused perhaps by anxiety, needing a drink, being hungry, staying up late, too much alcohol or some other obvious explanation, but you skip the obvious causes. Instead of waiting for it to go away you examine and re-examine the way you feel, always looking for the problem to see if anything has changed.

People with anxiety disorders can still get ill just like everyone else and if that were to happen you go and see your doctor. Remember that being ill should not be taken to mean you have some sort of fatal disease! Not every symptom requires a doctor! Have you ever thought for a minute how many places sell pain killers? Go with me on this one. You go to buy petrol and the local garage has a section for medicines. You go to your corner shop for a newspaper and you'll often find a little stand with basic medicines. At the supermarket for your weekly shop and probably an entire aisle is medicines! On

every busy street in the country you'll find a pharmacy; the whole shop is medicines! What does that tell you? It tells you that people get symptoms and they don't always need to go to the doctor to do something about them!

I want you to imagine that you accidentally walk into a door at home and bang your nose. It's going to hurt! It's pretty obvious what the cause is, because the symptoms (your nose hurts!) relate to an event. The mistake a lot of people with anxiety make is to decide that their anxiety couldn't possibly cause any symptoms and therefore any symptoms must be the sign of something else. If you have been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder you have to expect that you will experience physical sensations because of what happens to your body (remember Chapter 2 and Step 2). These sensations are completely harmless.

Health anxiety was something I personally have had a big problem with in the past. Every symptom was always taken to be an indication of something serious – when I had a sore throat it was throat cancer; a headache was a brain tumour; a stomach ache was appendicitis and so on. I can laugh about it now but it was very real to me. I was dismissed by people around me and sometimes by the medical professional as being a “hypochondriac”. There is no empathy for health anxiety. That's a pity because to the sufferer it's a genuine problem that causes distress.

What people need to understand is that those afflicted with health anxiety are misinterpreting harmless physical symptoms (including symptoms of anxiety) as signs of imminent serious illness and are genuinely distressed and anxious. They obsess over every minor ailment, symptom and sensation. What someone with a health anxiety doesn't realise though is that if a person without health anxiety were to take a moment to totally focus on how they feel, they would be able to come up with a handful of body sensations that they hadn't particularly mentally registered before. Why not? Non-anxious people notice, and then ignore, the minor sensations that are part of a normal, healthy everyday existence without thinking about it. As we discussed in Step 1, those with anxiety automatically go for the worst case scenario explanation. Non-anxious people briefly examine a physical sensation and then dismiss it, unless it gets worse or doesn't go away in a reasonable timeframe.

Let me ask you a question. Do you expect that you will never have any physical symptoms? Do you have an expectation that being healthy means never getting headaches, sore muscles, coughs and colds and such like?

For many people with health anxiety the big problem is the constant analysis of their body looking for symptoms. This is why health anxiety is a form of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder; it's that obsessive interest in every single little bodily sign that takes over virtually every waking moment. This obsession includes examining their body for marks, lumps and bumps, sores and rashes and may also involve asking friends and family to assist them in the checking process. If a person with health anxiety does get diagnosed with a genuine illness, often that person may take things to the extreme and be fixated on the worst case scenario – looking at every complication that has been experienced by people. When taking medication it is not uncommon to read the side effects leaflet first and to then become convinced that they will experience these side effects. And I don't mean one of the side effects; the

expectation is all of them!

For some people with health anxiety the issue isn't about going to the doctor too much, it's about never going to the doctor! For me, I was convinced that if I went to the doctor they would find something wrong with me and I wasn't prepared to deal with being told that. Going to the doctor may cause some acute short term anxiety but not going to the doctor allows your concerns to eat away at you in the background for days, weeks and even months.

I remember once going to the doctor and having my blood pressure taken. It was part of a routine screening process. Unsurprisingly it was slightly raised (after all I was going to see a doctor, who was going to tell me I had a fatal disease!). I, of course, completely panicked when the doctor asked me to come back the next day and have it done again! Next day I sat outside the waiting room for about 25 minutes and, no surprise, it was raised again! Fortunately it was a different doctor doing it that time who clearly saw how agitated I was and understood the effect of "White Coat Anxiety"! The very act of waiting to see a medical professional can cause such stress to a person that their blood pressure raises, meaning that it isn't an accurate level for them because they are in mid fight or flight response. It was that experience that put me off going back to the doctor for a long time!

Finding Reassurance From Anxiety

It is a very easy trap to fall in to that we keep going on to the Internet looking for "cures" and "treatments" and for reassurance. I have a new saying that applies to some in this situation "If the going gets tough.....stop whatever you were doing and see if you can find an easier way to do it". The Internet has some very good information regarding anxiety; it also has some incorrect information and it even has some information that will make you worse! Some sites are well meaning but they have information that is incomplete. Others are just plain scams.

Remember this; ANYONE can setup a website for free. It doesn't make you an expert. You don't need any training or qualifications in the subject, just an opinion and the technical ability to create a web page or the money to pay someone else to do it for you! Even sites where an "expert" has endorsed the programme, do you really know who that person is? Do they exist? Are their qualifications legitimate? Are they qualified in theories or do they practice? Do they currently actively practice? Where are their qualifications from? An endorsement from "Dr. John Smith, Psychologist" means nothing when their Psychology qualification is from "Fred's Filling Station and University. Free car wash with every degree."! Don't get taken in by the "guaranteed refund" either; saying you give refunds and actually giving refunds are two different things. The one time where I tried out of curiosity to get a refund and see what would happen – guess what, I'm still waiting! If someone claims their programme is proven by scientific studies, which ones? Who carried out these studies and who paid for them? By the way did you know that this book is the only method endorsed by the Worldwide Institute for the Recovery of Anxiety? I probably should tell you that I made that name up this morning and the "Institute" is me! Where are the citations at the bottom of the page that reputable articles often have that allow you to go and read the study yourself? How many people took part in the study? (The more people that take

part, the larger the sample of information and the more likely the conclusions are to be reliable.) If the study was done with five people and was paid for, and undertaken by, the company whose product it is, then they had somewhat of a high incentive to produce the result they were looking for!

The statement “As Seen On TV!” is often seen to show how good something is. This could mean absolutely anything and the ability to pay for an infomercial on some obscure satellite channel that barely anyone watches is no proof of effectiveness. I remember a few years ago watching a consumer affairs programme (I think it was BBC “Watchdog”) where they caught a tradesman who was advertising himself, “As Seen On TV” in his advertising. Whilst it was true that he had been on TV, the issue was that it was when the consumer programme previously exposed him for ripping off his customers! Hardly a ringing endorsement.

Imagine you are in the supermarket about to go in and I come up to you offering to sell you a solid gold watch for £5? I open my coat to show that I have 30 different types of watches. You wouldn’t buy from me because clearly you couldn’t trust me if that’s how I do business. So why are people not skeptical like this when it comes to the Internet? Somehow people seem to believe everything they are told by people they’ve never met!

When you go looking for “cures” and “treatments” you will inevitably find them; there are plenty of people more than happy to sell you the “one step to complete freedom from anxiety” or the “anxiety free in 24 hours”. Some of these programmes cost many hundreds of pounds and contain little more than a handful of pages of material you could have got for free from any basic internet search. Sometimes although the information may be valid, no explanation is offered or advice on how to get there. It would be like me telling you in Step 1 “You need to eat a good diet” but not telling you why, how and what I actually meant. What has always annoyed me is the people who set up particularly flashy websites full of “medical evidence” and testimonials that insist that theirs is the only cure; nothing else works and unless you pay X for their programme you can expect to be stuck with your anxiety forever. These people are playing on the desperation of those with anxiety who just want it gone as soon as possible. The difficulty is that there is no easy instantaneous cure for anxiety and that isn’t something that many people really want to hear. A lot of us nowadays expect everything to happen for us right now. Patience doesn’t exist anymore! Many people expect their doctor to be able to give them a pill or do something that will quickly fix everything. When their doctor can’t do this for their anxiety then plenty of people on the Internet are prepared to come in and say that they can, for the right price of course! Part of dealing with anxiety is accepting that it will take some time and you will have to work at it.

Looking for that instant cure just makes matters worse. Picture that smiling happy face next to an advert with the headline “I had severe anxiety and now I’m completely cured with this herbal remedy – and only \$200”. When you buy that “herbal remedy” and it doesn’t work you start to question yourself – why didn’t it work? It must mean my problem isn’t anxiety, it’s more serious. What is wrong with me? What did I do wrong? The only thing you did wrong is believe the claims and hand over your cash without looking into it in a lot more detail!

Whilst there are strict laws in the UK that stop people running “scams” on the Internet and making

false and unverifiable claims, they rely on the fact that the authorities need to firstly be made aware of these sites in the first place (and many scams operate under a lot of different names) and secondly just because a business claims to be in the UK, it doesn't mean it is. This means that the UK authorities struggle to be able to do anything about it. If the company is UK based it is a lot easier to deal with but, funnily enough, the companies are aware of this! Whilst the Advertising Standards Authority will deal with false advertising by obliging a company to remove incorrect or false claims, this doesn't prevent them from making more, but different, false claims!

Spotting The Scam!

It is completely understandable, and dare I say "normal", that when your life has been taken over by anxiety you reach the point where you will try absolutely anything. It is just too tempting not to buy the first product you see that offers any glimmer of hope.

I'm not going to say that every programme out there is rubbish (although I am biased about the one I believe works the best - this one!). That programme may well help you. It would be very arrogant and wrong of me to say that this is the only programme that ever works and everything else is rubbish although I can think of at least one programme that says exactly that! The wilder the claims, the more chance there is that you won't get the "guaranteed results". It's not only money that you stand to lose; for many the end result is a confidence knock that leaves the person feeling down and more than ever convinced that they will never solve their anxiety problem.

Scams promise quick and easy results. Everyone who uses their product is "cured". The author(s) of the programme no doubt claim some special insight that no-one else has every thought of. None of the information can be verified, none of the statistics proven and none of those they have cured can be contacted. As we have said right from the very start of this book you can and you will conquer your anxiety but your recovery takes a little bit of work.

Those who run scams are often experts but not in what you think; their expertise is in marketing and advertising. A common trick by these scammers is their ability to convince you that doctors and therapists know nothing about your problems. Even if that were true what makes you think that this person does? Make sure your sources of help are from people that truly understand your issues either because they have had the training or because they've been there. And when we say been there, check exactly what that means; is this someone who was slightly worried for a week or two and got over it or is it someone who was genuinely crippled by symptoms of acute anxiety and panic and whose life was significantly affected.

Look on your scam site for a mention of an "affiliate program". With an affiliate programme people offer others an opportunity to sell the product through their own website in exchange for a high commission. The fact that a site has an affiliate programme is not in itself an issue, but rather the fact that anyone can join and promote that product on any site. The way the affiliate programme is

marketed is also a clue - make money quick, no effort required, nothing to lose etc..

Watching out for “rebranding”. To attract as many customers as possible, scammers often offer their products under a number of different names via a variety of websites that they own. Each website perhaps is aimed at a slightly different group, or perhaps the content is exactly the same word for word. Some sites may appear to be review sites set up by a happy customer; look more closely into these and all too often you find that they are operated by the scammer as another way to draw you in.

Be wary of significant errors in grammar and spelling on sites. Of course websites have the odd grammar mistake or spelling mistake but if the headline for the site is “goodly cure for you anxeyty...get muchly better quicker” then walk away! It is not unknown for sites to be essentially a “mail merge” approach. For example the scammer’s anxiety site says “freedom from anxiety. Never be bothered again by your anxiety. Simple cure that you can easily implement”; their anti-smoking site says “freedom from smoking. Never be bothered again by your smoking. Simple cure that you can easily implement”; their diet pill site says “freedom from overeating. Never be bothered again by your overeating. Simple cure that you can easily implement”.

Look at pricing. Scam products sell for a lot more money and typically only offer their material in a digital form. Digital content costs nothing to produce; printed material requires a lot more time and effort which the scammer generally isn’t prepared to put in. That’s not to say that if something is only available in digital form, it’s a scam but it’s certainly something to consider! Special Offers are fine but when that special offer is “today only” think very carefully!

When you cut through the advertising and marketing speak, ask yourself how much actual information there is about the product. Is it clear about what it contains or is it completely vague? And just what exactly are you getting for your money? The term “book” could mean just 5 or 6 pages; little more than a pamphlet. Most of the scam sites are filled with high pressure reasons to buy. Everything is just buy now, buy now, buy now! If a product is as good as the claims being made, why doesn't it have a wider distribution? Why can't you buy it on Amazon for example (you can buy the 10 Steps on Amazon!). Products with a wider distribution attract attention and if you are running a scam that’s the last thing you want to do!

Did I forget to tell you by the way that if you are feeling tired all the time I have a wonderful natural remedy for you called trimethylxanthine. It’s guaranteed to perk you up, has no artificial ingredients and it’s scientifically proven in dozens of studies. You can’t get it on prescription but I can let you have it for £40 a month. Normally I charge £100 so that’s a really good deal! Oh, did I forget to mention that that the chemical name for caffeine? Must have slipped my mind. My claims were accurate but what I’m actually selling you could buy in any supermarket for £2 a month in the form of a jar of coffee! Don’t be fooled by all those complicated, chemical names that are in those expensive wonder herbal remedies. Check them on the Internet to see what they actually are and I think you might be surprised. Often you could probably buy the same thing a lot cheaper in any health food shop.

Have you ever been told never to go food shopping when you're hungry? Why? - because whenever

you're hungry you buy whatever attracts you at that moment. I've done it myself. I go around the shop starving and when I get home realise I have bought lots of chocolate, crisps and cakes! It's always better to write a list when you aren't hungry and then use that list. Effective food shopping needs to be done in an organised manner and not on impulse. Exactly the same rules applies to anxiety products. The last thing you need to be doing is shopping for anxiety products in the middle of acute anxiety! Challenge everything, look around and be careful.

Of course I am bound to tell you that you don't need to be buying any more programmes; I genuinely believe that. You have this book and that is all you need, but you may be tempted to look at other things and I can't stop you from doing that! Just be aware and be careful, anxiety products can be a lucrative money making industry.

Looking Up Symptoms

NEVER look up individual anxiety symptoms on the Internet. Trust me, I've been there and it certainly isn't reassuring! Every symptom associated with anxiety can also be found linked to other medical conditions – it's the combination of the symptoms that bring about a diagnosis. Reading up and educating yourself on medical conditions doesn't mean you rule them out; it just means that your brain has something else to consider next time you engage in catastrophic thinking.

Imagine my car breaks down and I search the Internet for "car won't start". The first result I get is about a faulty battery. The second is about a faulty starter motor. The third is for a faulty ignition switch. What I didn't mention was the fact that about 100 miles ago the car beeped to say low fuel and I never got around to putting petrol in it! What does this tell us? Simply that without putting a symptom in context we aren't going to be getting the right information!

Modern media loves to run stories about how someone went to their doctor, were told they had a common cold until, three weeks later, their leg fell off! I might be being silly, but you get what I mean. Articles like this undermine your confidence in your doctor and have you believe that you need to be researching everything yourself because you can't trust them! The fact is that yes, doctors do make mistakes but they are very rare – that's what makes them so newsworthy. You cannot keep second guessing your doctor on every single decision. Granted you may want to get a second opinion; doctors have their own specialist areas of interest and can't be expected to be experts at everything but where do you stop – if you go to a 3rd doctor and they tell you the same thing, are they making a mistake as well? Are the test results wrong? And if you get tests coming back negative, were they wrong? What would it take to satisfy you?

I'm sure that you have at some time in your life scratched yourself on something. Let's imagine a small scratch; so small it didn't draw blood, it just left a tiny red mark. Did you panic about this? Did you keep checking it every minute for days and days? Did you rush to the hospital or your doctor several times to

have it checked because you needed that reassurance? Did you stay at home and avoid going out because of it? Of course you didn't and you know why? You knew what caused it, you knew from experience it would go away and you knew it was no big deal! In fact it was so minor that the majority of the time you completely forgot you had it; the only attention it probably got was a couple of swear words at the time! Well ask yourself why don't you feel the same about anxiety? You know what causes it now, you know from experience that it goes away and you know from Step 2 that it's no big deal!

Summary

The 10 Steps is the solution. That's not me bragging, it's a fact. It is the solution because it gives you the information you need to find that solution inside you. Everything is based on sound medical advice, research and straight forward common sense. At times it may not tell you what you want to hear but please stick with it – don't jump to something else because of a catchy slogan aimed at attracting people at their most vulnerable. The next time you feel the need for reassurance come back to this book; it's your reassurance that you are not ill, you aren't losing your mind and you WILL recover.

There are plenty of programmes out there that tell you that you don't need your doctor, or "medicine doesn't understand" or "it's so advanced your doctor wouldn't get it". I'll bet these programmes don't want you speaking to your doctor – your doctor will tell you it's a load of rubbish and to run as far as you can in the opposite direction! The best guarantee I can give you for this book is this....go discuss it with your doctor! I WANT you to! I've written a letter for you to show your doctor that's at the back of this book!

Step 7 - Challenge Negative Thoughts

"If I had my life to live over, I would perhaps have more actual troubles but I'd have fewer imaginary ones."

Don Herold

"Let us be of good cheer, remembering that the misfortunes hardest to bear are those which will never happen. "

James Russell Lowell

"The greatest mistake you can make in life is to be continually fearing you will make one."

Elbert Hubbard, The Note Book, 1927

"Worrying is like a rocking chair, it gives you something to do, but it gets you nowhere. "

Glenn Turner

I'd like you to have a look around the room you're in at the moment for 30 seconds. I want you to look at all the red things there are in the room and count them. Do it right now – don't read any further!

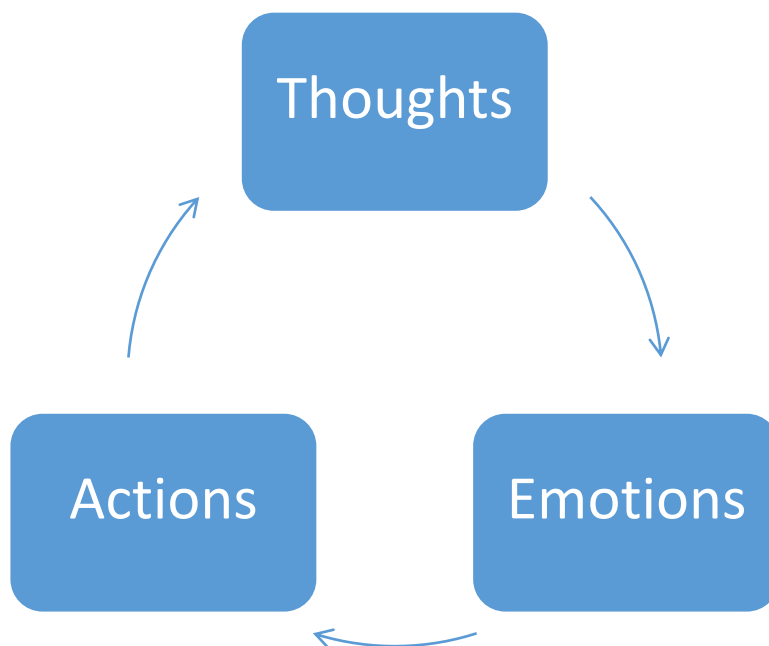
Now, close your eyes and say out loud how many blue things you saw. Yes, that's right, blue things! Now that you've opened your eyes again look around and count how many blue things there are! More than you actually said, aren't there? It's a surprisingly difficult exercise but it proves one important point; we see what we are looking for. If you are always looking for negative things in every situation that's what you'll see. A positive attitude in life is vital, not just for those with anxiety disorders but for everyone. If our mind expects happiness, health and success then that's what it will find. A positive attitude helps give you confidence and a confident attitude helps you to be positive!

Stay with me on this one! I know that you can't just flick a switch and change the way you think instantly and I don't expect you to. We've talked before about how an anxious person always goes straight for the worst case scenario, a problem known as catastrophisation. Catastrophisation is an irrational series of thoughts which lead straight to the worse possible interpretation of events. It may start with reasonable logical thoughts, but very quickly thoughts jump to the worst possible

interpretation. Some of you may remember the story of “Henny Penny” from your old school days. Henny Penny was hit on the head by an acorn and became convinced that this meant the sky was falling! She ends up running around panicking, convinced that disaster is imminent! A more logical response would stop long before reaching the worst possible conclusion but this way of thinking seems perfectly sensible to the anxious person making it. When someone with anxiety issues attaches themselves to a problem it often becomes an obsession. This makes it difficult to move past the problem and, even with reassurance, thoughts continue to return to the worst case scenario.

Think about a time when you have had an itch or other minor discomfort, such as sitting on a hard plastic chair, but were in no position to do anything about. Did you sit there and concentrate on the fact that the back of your legs were going numb? Of course not! Instead you do your best to ignore it, think about something else and stop longing for the moment when you can get up and move around! When distraction is achieved, the discomfort fades from your thoughts. This is a normal, healthy thought process.

Anyone for TEA?



Our thoughts form part of a cycle called the TEA cycle.

Our anxious thoughts (T) contribute to feelings of anxiety – an emotion (E) which in turn causes us to behave differently by altering our actions (A). This vicious cycle just goes on and on; the thoughts, the

emotions and the actions all just reinforce each other.

Be Positive!

No doubt as an anxiety sufferer there will have been times someone will have told you to “be positive”. What does that mean in reality?

The anxiety sufferer spends many hours focusing on purely negative things. Remember it's the combination of both the positive and negative that develop character. Going back and analysing everything in detail doesn't change anything; it merely keeps your thoughts in the past and focused on things you can't change. Your thoughts are simply that – just thoughts. They aren't real and they don't necessarily represent what may or may not happen. They're what you choose to believe in. You might find it hard to accept now but you can control your thoughts, perhaps a lot more than you think.

I need you to make a decision right now. I want you to decide that you are going to be happy. It doesn't matter if you don't believe it's possible or don't know how, just make the decision. Do it right now! What many people don't seem to understand is that people who are happy are happy because of the way they look at life and have chosen to be that way. An anxious, depressed, unhappy person is, in part, the way they are because they allow their thoughts to direct them in the wrong direction. When you begin to change the way you think, you'll start to feel better about yourself. Most anxious people all suffer from one major problem; overthinking. What if this happens? What if that happens? Our life ultimately becomes controlled by our negative thoughts and our decisions are based on our catastrophic thinking.

A wise person once said this; “Happiness is learning to appreciate what you have rather than wishing for what you don't”. I've always loved that saying. You don't become happy when you get a better job, a bigger house, a new car because when you get those things your focus will move higher. When you get that Porsche you've always wanted, you'll want a Ferrari. When you get the Ferrari, you'll want a Bugatti. Where does it stop? You become happy when you look around at what you do have and learn to appreciate it.

When you start to change the way you think, the way you feel will soon follow. When I turn on a light, what happens to the darkness? It disappears because in the presence of light, it cannot exist. Unhappiness is the same thing; it cannot exist in the presence of positive thoughts; our thoughts create our emotions and our feelings.

I want you to start from right now doing 2 things.

1. When you find yourself thinking negatively ask yourself, “Is there any benefit to my thinking about this at all?”. If the answer is no, then go and get busy and distract yourself!
2. If there is something you need to think about I want you to make a conscious effort to ask yourself, “What's the BEST that could happen?” and to make a list of these things as well. If you have to overthink, overthink at both ends!

For people who have been thinking negatively or overthinking, perhaps for years, the idea that you can change your thinking may seem strange. After all you can't change the way you think overnight; you can't suddenly be happy, but you can choose to give yourself a mental telling off every time you find yourself thinking negative thoughts and pull yourself back to thinking more positively!

Thoughts grow with attention; if you chose to focus on negative thoughts these will grow and grow. On the other hand if you change your focus to new, positive thoughts they too will grow. It will become easier to focus on the positive and you will have fewer instances of negative thoughts. Eventually by constantly forcing ourselves to think positively our brain will get the message and will change our default way of thinking from negative to positive.

We should mention here about how important it is that we think logical thoughts rather than illogical thoughts. Whilst illogical thoughts tend to be negative which we talked about previously, that is not necessarily the case. So what is an illogical thought? An illogical thought is a thought that simply doesn't make sense about a situation; it's the scenario that couldn't possibly happen or is just so obscure that it just isn't worth thinking about! During a panic attack, or the run up to a panic attack it's the illogical, "What if?" style thinking that turns what started as anxiety into a full blown panic..."What if I faint?", "What if I go insane?", "What if...?". When you're asking yourself, "Am I thinking positively?", also ask yourself "Am I thinking logically?". Here's one to try if you find yourself panicking...."What if I ignore these symptoms, they go away, I get on with things and go on to have a really good day?".

Thinking During a Panic Attack

Perhaps the most extreme form of negative thinking occurs during a Panic or Anxiety attack.

EXERCISE (FOR THOSE WHO EXPERIENCE PANIC ATTACKS)

If you can, do this exercise with a friend or family member who knows you well.

I'd like you to get yourself a piece of paper and at the top write down the words, "Panic Attacks".

Next I'd like you to write down a list of all the things you worry about happening during a panic attack. Fainting, having a heart attack, losing control?

Now against each of these items I want you to think about all the times you have ever had a panic attack and write against it either "happened" or "never happened".

If you did write "happened" against anything, think about whether it actually caused you long term harm or was it simply extremely unpleasant and is now past. Against these items write down either "harmless" or "harmed me".

I can now tell you with absolute certainty that probably every single line in your list says "never happened". For the odd item that may say "happened" I can guarantee that in that instance, it says "harmless". Not one single person doing this exercise has ever written "harmed me" against anything.

Why? Because **no-one has ever died or been harmed by a panic attack**. No-one has ever suddenly dropped dead or gone insane, no matter how intense their feelings were, how likely they thought it was that it would happen and how unpleasant it all felt.

When you experience a panic attack the WORST that can happen is what is already happening; it's the feelings of intense fear and the symptoms associated with that.

Imagine if you were standing against a wall and someone was to throw bricks at you. Obviously you'd be terrified since bricks are heavy and potentially very dangerous. You would avoid the bricks as best you could because by not doing so you could get seriously injured or worse. At the very least if they hit you, it's going to hurt! What if you found out that all the bricks were actually novelty bath sponges shaped like bricks? As soon as you knew that, you would stop avoiding them because you would now KNOW that no matter what was thrown at you, you couldn't get hurt. Being hit by one suddenly is no

longer a problem. The “brick” is no longer capable of hurting you so there is no need to avoid it. If you think a panic attack as being like the brick you’re wrong – it’s the sponge and that’s how you need to think about it! It may look and feel like it has the capacity to harm you but I promise you that it doesn’t. Keep telling yourself a panic attack doesn’t have the ability to hurt you! What gives a panic attack its power over you is simply the way you view it!

Detach yourself from those feelings of panic as best you can. Having a panic attack isn’t a bad thing; it is an inconvenience that is happening to you right now, that will soon pass. You are patient; tell yourself, “I can wait; it has happened before, it’s completely harmless and I know it will go away as it has done every single time before!”. You accept your thoughts and feelings are just inappropriate responses to a perceived danger that isn’t there and your symptoms are simply your body’s response to this false perception.

You Are Who/What You Associate With!

If I were to go on a strict diet, but surrounded myself with cream cakes and chocolate, I would find it very difficult to stick to my diet. Why? Because I’m not avoiding those things which helped to create my problem in the first place!

It’s exactly the same thing when it comes to negative thinking. If we’re trying to get out of the habit of thinking negatively and always seeing the worst in every situation, what would happen if the people around us were behaving in that way? You know those kinds of people, the ones who always have something to moan about no matter what, who are never happy and who are convinced that life is treating them badly. If they are sitting in a group you can practically see the dark cloud hovering over them! These type of people are often called “emotional vampires”; they drain the positivity from every situation and turn what should be happy times into miserable times.

So what’s the solution? Easy – you surround yourself with positive people! You know the ones – the ones who always seem to be able to find good in everything; the people who seem to be always happy no matter what, who can see the positive and remain upbeat even when things aren’t going so well. Positive thinking isn’t about pretending that life doesn’t have ups and downs, it’s all about how you view them!

It’s not just people that you need to think about. Think about what you watch on TV, what you read about in newspapers and what you see on the Internet. By definition these things are there because they are newsworthy; they are different, they aren’t “normal”. A lot of these stories are deliberately sensationalised to create the maximum emotional impact on you. Nobody talks about how someone else went to the shops, bought a pint of milk, they then went home, the end. What would be the point in telling people about that, it’s not interesting! When you watch that programme on TV that is “based on a true story”, you would be shocked in some cases just how loosely based they actually are sometimes! I can think of one “true story” where a character pulled out a gun and shot someone dead; the family of the person sued because the truth was it simply never happened; what did happen was that a warning shot was fired into the air! When we read and watch all these things, we absorb the

negativity from them, sometimes taking on new worries from them, the, “What if this happens to me?” thoughts. If all we do is to read/watch depressing news stories, what will that do to help us? If you like to watch TV, I want you to make sure you watch at least one thing every day that is either inspirational or funny; something that touches your emotions in a positive way. It doesn't matter if you aren't in the mood or even if what normally makes you laugh doesn't today. Watch it anyway! If we choose to associate ourselves with positive things what will that do for our overall outlook on life, our mood and our emotions?

Suicidal Thoughts

I feel it important that we talk about a very sensitive but important issue. That issue is one of suicide. For some, anxiety has got to such a stage where the sufferer feels that their life has ended and they will never again experience any quality of life again. I can tell you from experience that when my Agoraphobia was at its worst I was convinced at times I would never leave the house every again; that I would never go to a supermarket, take my children places or go out for a meal.

It's a sad fact that every year thousands of people choose to take their own lives. These people all share the same thoughts – “I can't take it anymore”, “No one cares about me anyway”, “I give up”. Perhaps you have thought the same. Perhaps you have thought that there is little point in carrying on with a life filled with such worry and anxiety.

For some people thoughts of suicide are a daily occurrence, whether that is planning in your head how you would do it or cursing yourself because you wished you had the "strength" to do it.

I need you to understand this. You are not a weak person. If anything you're a strong person to have gone through what you have with your anxiety disorder. By thinking of suicide I want you to accept that having these thoughts doesn't make you a bad person. You may feel that you just don't have enough strength to carry on. You may feel that life just isn't worth it and you're tired of fighting against the daily struggles.

Suicide is not a solution. It doesn't relieve you of the problems that you are desperate to get rid of; it simply transfers the pain to your friends and family. They're the ones left picking up the pieces and dealing with their own guilt afterwards. Many, many people have had suicidal thoughts even if it's just for a brief moment. Thinking about something and acting on it are two completely different things. Think about the cost of suicide. It may seem to bring peace, but since your life will have ended how will you appreciate that peace? You're not only taking away the negative feeling of pain, but you are also taking away the positive feeling of relief from pain. Whatever relief you think you may feel is never going to be felt. Why? Because dead people don't feel.

No matter how bad you feel at times that doesn't mean you have to act on it. Take time to think about what those feelings mean, and whether it's in your best interests to act upon them, even when all that you're feeling is so much pain. We aren't talking about a lifetime of pain even though it may feel that way. If you think long and hard I am sure you can remember a time where life was pretty good. Feelings of suicide are temporary. Imagine if my brand new car had a muddy footprint in it and I decided to have it crushed and scrapped for that reason. When we decide to actually take our own life that's what we're doing. We're taking all our potential, our hope and dreams, our talents, our future achievements, our

creativity and destroying it for a temporary feeling.

So just what can you do? To be thinking these things you clearly feel that there is little point in carrying on. You feel that the only way out is to end your life. Let me tell you now there is another way out - end the pain, not your life. Maybe you feel that nothing will work for you - but ask yourself is suicide going to work? I need you to trust me and the 10 Steps but first I want you to tell someone where you are at; talk to your doctor, your local hospital or phone for an ambulance. If you're in the UK phone the Samaritans. Tell someone professional. I promise that you are not wasting anyone's time.

So can I give you a reason to carry on? Think about how many things you have yet to do. Places to visit. People to meet. Friends to make. People who will appreciate and accept you. And think about the fact that you WILL be free from anxiety and its' unpleasant sensations. If you are honest with yourself I know you will find that although there may be a part of you that wants to end it all, there is also a part of you that hopes and feels like just maybe there is a reason to at least try and reduce the pain. Just because you feel the pain doesn't mean you have to act on it today. Consider that the pain you are feeling will become less intense as you work through these steps. Over time the pain you feel will fade away into a distant memory and life will take its place.

The choice is whether you end your life and never feel anything again. No relief from the pain. No possible joy in the future. No happiness. No love. No friendship. No family. Nothing. Or you can give the 10 Steps a chance to prove to you that you will not just resolve your anxiety issues but will help you to get back the life you deserve and perhaps have forgotten about.

Step 8 – Get The Message To Your Subconscious!

Think about when you first learnt to drive (if you haven't yet, substitute in riding a bicycle!). At the start, you had to think carefully about getting the feel of the clutch, you struggled with choosing the right gear and no doubt stalled a few times, you probably forgot to indicate a few times and I'm sure got told off for forgetting to look in the mirror when you moved off. As you gained more and more experience, these things became second nature to the point where (hopefully) you didn't have to think about them at all – they just happened. Nowadays you just get into the car and you drive without a second thought. You weren't born being able to drive; it was a learnt behaviour.

Anxiety is exactly the same. None of us were born with anxiety or anxiety disorders; we've taught ourselves to be that way. It's a behaviour that has resulted from the way we think and experiences that we have had. It's the way we have learnt to behave.

So what is the subconscious? My dictionary defines the subconscious as, "...the part of the mind of which one is not fully aware but which influences one's actions and feelings". If you think about it, it's really quite a remarkable process. As we learn through experience, our subconscious mind is able to make our decisions on what to do without needing conscious thought. A lot of this learning is done during childhood.

There are two problems that can happen with this process.

- A negative experience has influenced our subconscious so we react badly in certain situations even when we don't want to. For example, you got bitten by a dog as a child and now every time you see a dog, you avoid it.
- We have learned to react in a certain way to a situation but that reaction is no longer appropriate. In the past our behaviour made us feel safe but it is now restrictive. We used the example before of a person who was bullied at school and who perhaps learnt to fade into the background. What will that behaviour mean in a future career?

The Daily Telegraph ran a piece in 2008 looking at ridiculous laws from around the world. Some of my favourites were:

- In Vermont, women must obtain written permission from their husbands to wear false teeth
- In Milan, it is a legal requirement to smile at all times, except for funerals or hospital visits
- In the city of York it is legal to murder a Scotsman within the ancient city walls, but only if he is carrying a bow and arrow
- In Ohio, it's illegal to get a fish drunk
- It's illegal to enter the Houses of Parliament in a suit of armour
- Mince pies cannot be eaten in England on Christmas Day
- Taxi drivers are required to ask all passengers if they have smallpox or bubonic plague

So why am I telling you these? Well, these laws were at one time created for valid reasons; we look at

them now and we laugh, but at the time they served a genuine and legitimate purpose. No-one in York goes around looking for Scotsmen to shoot anymore, or at least I hope not! These laws however still exist because no one has got around to removing them. Has your subconscious done the same thing? Do you still have strange rules that were created perhaps as long as decades ago that, upon reflection, are ridiculous and serve no purpose whatsoever?

When we fear something every day, it's not a conscious decision where we think, "Shall I feel fear here? Yes, I think I should!". Our past experiences tell us how we should feel and react without us having to think about it. Our conscious mind can tell us that a fear is irrational, that we are being ridiculous but unless we can stop our subconscious from deciding for us that we should be afraid, then the problem continues. This is often the cause of a great deal of frustration because we sense that struggle between the conscious and subconscious. We feel fear but we don't want to.

So how do we change the way we feel?

Our inappropriate anxiety and panic were created by experience. The only way to get rid of these inappropriate feelings is the same way – by experience. You can't reason with your subconscious mind; trying to do so only leads to anger and frustration.

Imagine I wanted to learn to play the piano. I buy a piano and put it in my living room. I look at it every day. For two hours a day I read articles on music and listen to professional musicians playing on CD. I become an expert in music theory and my understanding of practical techniques is excellent. I am expert at how a piano should sound. I tell myself that I can be that good one day. Surprise, surprise several years later I still can't play the piano. Why? Because although I have tried to convince myself I know how, I have only ever learnt the theory. I can only truly start to learn when I actually open the lid on the piano and physically put my fingers on the keys. It is only then can I learn from experience.

The number one fundamental mistake sufferers of anxiety disorders make is in attempting to use the rational, conscious mind to control the subconscious. IT CAN'T BE DONE. Believe me I have tried; in fact most sufferers have tried and not one has ever been successfully able to control their subconscious mind. What you can control is how much attention you pay to your subconscious and we talk about this elsewhere. If you find you're trying to convince yourself that you can get better without applying new experiences, then you're kidding yourself and you need to stop it immediately. Your subconscious has to learn by doing the practical, by experiencing that there is nothing to fear. This won't happen unless you get out there and have those experiences!

Although your subconscious plays a huge part in the way you respond and react, you still have a certain degree of control as to how much you listen to it. At times of high anxiety it may feel like you have no control at all but as you start to take control you'll find that you can even stop yourself from having a panic attack or that you can control your responses. Some people have a tremendous ability to act, despite messages from their subconscious telling them not to do something, they are able to get on with things and ignore feelings of intense fear. For other people the feeling is that they simply can't. I

can tell you that, at the start, I was a slave to my subconscious; when my subconscious told me to be afraid to do something, then I simply didn't do it! As time progressed there was the occasional time where I found that I could go against my subconscious and push on regardless. Eventually my subconscious stopped objecting because it had decided that in fact what it previously thought was a cause for anxiety or panic wasn't!

At this point we need to look at the best way forward for you and we have two paths that you can take.

Obviously you have things that cause you anxiety.

Has your anxiety stopped you from doing things? For example do you avoid going places or being around people? If the answer is no then you can skip ahead a few pages to the section called "Just Do It!".

If the answer is yes, the question is now whether or not you are still capable of doing those things. If you can still do these things but you choose not to because of your anxiety then again skip to the section "Just Do It!". On the other hand if there are things you simply cannot do because they cause you so much anxiety and panic you just can't face doing them, keep reading as we're going to look at Graded Exposure.

It may be that both paths are relevant to you. For example you might have a social anxiety where we use one path and an exercise phobia where we look at the other.

If you start down the "Just Do It!" path and you find that you struggle and don't feel able to carry on then don't worry! Change path and look at Graded Exposure.

I can't do certain things anymore no matter how much I want to. The anxiety is too much.



Go to the "Graded Exposure" section.

There are things I don't do because I don't like to do them but I could if I absolutely had to.



Go to the "Just Do It" section.

Graded Exposure

We're going to use a very effective and powerful technique called Graded Exposure (it's also called Exposure Therapy, Situational Exposure or Desensitisation Therapy) to get your life back for you! You might not believe me now but I promise you that it's very effective and it really does work. It certainly worked for me, as it has done for many others.

So what's graded exposure about?

We've already spoken about how the way we feel and react is determined by past experiences. When we have negative experiences this affects how we feel in the future. Our experiences may have caused the problems but it's also how we can fix them! I don't want you to worry though; this isn't about causing you more anxiety and giving you panic attacks, it's simply about proving to yourself that the inappropriate anxiety is built on a false belief. With my Agoraphobia I had "learnt" that going out the house was something to be afraid of but that was a big fat lie! Think about what we're going to do as being like the way you felt when you first learnt to drive. You were nervous, not very confident and a little worried but at the same time excited about what it would mean for you in the future. Maybe you enjoyed your driving lessons, maybe you didn't, but you focused on the end result – that piece of paper that says you can drive! Have a think for a minute or two about what it's going to mean to you when you get back to doing those things again you've stopped doing because of anxiety, without so much as a second thought.

Before we start I'd like to make sure that you've got realistic expectations about what you will have to do. You'll need to persistently work at this virtually every day. When you start with, "I can't be bothered today, I'll do it tomorrow" then you'll struggle to see results. You'll have good days and bad days but that's to be expected. Some days you feel happy with your progress, on others you almost feel like giving up because you feel like you aren't getting there fast enough. There is no instant cure. Have you ever heard of anyone becoming a professional violin player the day after picking up a violin for the first time? It doesn't work like that.

Truthfully I can say that when I committed to graded exposure I never missed a single day and never went backwards. However that's not to say that I didn't need a very patient wife who supported me when I let the situation get me down, or where I felt angry and frustrated and wanted to give up. We argued, we wound each other up but we got through it.

The Grand Plan!

EXERCISE

Setting goals is the first step in turning the invisible into the visible.

I'd like you to write down a list of all the things you'd like to be able to do but feel like you can't. Think about those things perhaps that you used to do but no longer can, no matter how simple or strange they may seem. Think as well about what you want to be able to do in the future, perhaps things that you have seen other people enjoy.

For the Agoraphobia sufferer it may be that it is to get back to the supermarket again, to be able to go to one of your children's school plays or perhaps to be able to go to a social event.

For the Social Anxiety Disorder sufferer it may be to be able to go out for a meal in a busy restaurant with a group of people.

I'm sure you get what I mean!

Step 1

To guide you through how it works I'm going to share with you my own goals that I set myself.

- Go to the town centre of Wrexham (5 miles away)
- Get back to teaching Martial Arts
- Get back to going to shops again instead of having to buy online all the time
- To start enjoying recreational activities again eg archery

To most people these goals would seem trivial. After all it's not like I've set the goal to climb Mount Everest. It's not about what other people think though, it's about YOU. Be honest with yourself and think about what your anxiety has taken away from you. Do you prefer home shopping because it's more convenient or in truth is it because your anxiety is preventing you from doing anything else? Take time to really think it through and perhaps, if you can, have someone you trust help you.

Step 2

Now that we've got our list of goals, we're going to break each of our goals down further into smaller goals. Think about all the individual steps that you can take towards that big goal or what you can achieve along the way.

Let's take a look at the first goal on my list which had me getting into the town centre of Wrexham.

STARTING POINT: I can get outside the house.
STEP 1: Go past the corner shop and along the main road out of the village (0.5 miles)
STEP 2: Go into Gresford (2 miles away)
STEP 3: Go to Acton (3.5 miles away)
GOAL: To get into the centre of Wrexham (5 miles away)

Step 3

Now that we have our list of smaller goals we're going to break down each of these into manageable daily chunks. For some people you may feel comfortable with quite large steps, for others they're very small. Don't worry if your progress is slow at the start – mine certainly was, but as time went past it really sped up a lot. The process could take just a few days or it could take several months. That's OK! It takes however long it takes.

Each step should be challenging enough that you feel a sense of accomplishment and achievement when you complete it. Equally a step should not be so difficult that failing to achieve it becomes demoralising. At the end of each step the anxiety you feel should be manageable; pushing yourself so hard that you panic isn't productive. Anxiety issues aside, it's important you build up your confidence that you can, and will be, free of your anxiety/panic disorder. Remember we're working on convincing our subconscious that there is no threat and no need for fight or flight.

Let's start with my first goal from Step 2 that has me going along the main road and heading out of the village.

DAY 1 Drive to halfway down the street and wait for a few minutes.
DAY 2 Drive past the end up the street to the corner shop
DAY 3 Go in to the corner shop and buy something
DAY 4 Drive past the corner shop to the chemist shop on the main road
DAY 5 GOAL!

I can remember the day I first made it to the corner shop and went in to buy something. I threw the money across the counter and ran out the shop because I was convinced something was going to happen! By the way, nothing did!

Sometimes I found that one of my daily targets was a little harder than I expected it to be. I still completed it but when it came to the next day I didn't feel ready to go any further. When that happened I simply repeated everything the next day. The main thing was I didn't go backwards. There were also other occasions where I reached my daily goal and thought "That wasn't so bad!". When that happens there is nothing to stop you going further than expected!

If you can, try and set a purpose behind each of your goals. When you set a purpose your mind is

focused on achieving it and less focused on your anxiety. It's not always possible to have a clear purpose but try when you can. Think about going into shops, visiting family members, doing activities and other things.

Getting Started!

Before you start into graded exposure, understand that nothing is going to happen to you. It's no accident that graded exposure is Step 7 of 10; we're now able to build on our knowledge of anxiety; how it works, the symptoms and sensations it causes. We're helped by our knowledge about the way we breathe, the food we eat and other aspects of our lifestyle choices. I hope that at this point in the book you now know that you can and will be helped, and that you believe it is going to all change – after all it's the truth! There is no point in doing something if you don't know why you're doing it and don't believe in it!

Medication *may* be used by people doing graded exposure. If you can do without it then please try your hardest to do so; if not, then short term medication alongside this type of therapy can work to get you started. However you must remember that it's the graded exposure that's the cure – the medication will only help with some of the symptoms while you're progressing towards your daily goal. The medication doesn't remove the underlying anxious thoughts. It's better that you go a shorter distance without medication than for a longer distance with it. Relying on medication can risk having you end up with the belief, "I won't be able to do this without the tablets". If that happens the only progress you've made is to be able to act when under the influence of the medication.

Every time you're about to start on one of your steps towards your goal I'd like you to do the following:

- Have something to eat and drink so that you aren't dehydrated or hungry. No alcohol or caffeine please! Fruit is a perfect light and healthy snack.
- Think about, or even talk to someone, about what you think may happen and how likely that really is.
- Don't anticipate! It's very easy to expect that you are going to panic before you start – I know I did! As much as possible try and avoid thinking like that and give it a proper chance. You might just surprise yourself.

Once you've started there's another couple of important things for you to remember:

- Make sure you breathe properly – don't hold your breath or shallow breathe.
- Try as much as possible to relax! I know it isn't that simple; that's why I say try, but do your best.
- If you feel like you are struggling with a step, rather than give up right away see if a "time out" would help. Can you remove yourself from the situation for a few minutes to concentrate on relaxing and breathing and then pick up where you left off? Perhaps pulling over to the side of the road and parking up or walking out of that crowded room for a breath of fresh air?
- Think quality over quantity! Whenever you get somewhere it's not just not about how long you're there for or how far you are from home. With social anxiety, for example, think about getting in amongst people rather than hiding in a corner for half an hour even if that lasts less

time! With Agoraphobia think about going into a shop and buying something instead of just turning the car round and coming straight back!

What's The Worst That Can Happen?

The biggest fear when you start to push against your anxiety is that when you go into the situation, you're going to panic. I expected it every day for the first few weeks but I never actually did! If you feel yourself getting to that point however (and I REALLY don't expect that you will) use the breathing exercise from Step 1. Focus on slow, deep breaths and keep telling yourself, "I am here, I am doing this and nothing bad is going to happen". Your first instinct is probably going to be to leave the situation and it may be that's the only thing you feel you can do. However if you feel like you can, try and calm yourself down and keep at it. And of course irrespective of what happened the day before, you can't allow that one setback to stop you moving forward with your graded exposure.

How Should I Feel?

Whenever I started getting back out of course I experienced some anxiety. I also had anxiety when I didn't go out! My anxiety was never so much that I had a panic attack and it was all perfectly manageable.

I noticed two things happened:

- The further I got, the longer it was before I started to experience the anxiety. For example on the first week I was feeling anxious when I left the driveway. A couple of weeks later I still got the same feelings of anxiety but only when I was a mile or so down the road!
- The longer I stayed in a situation, the easier it got! When I went to the supermarket I was very anxious at the start; 15 minutes later and I was actually quite comfortable!

Adapting The Technique!

I've used my own situation as an example for you when talking about graded exposure and I'm sure you can see how it applies to someone with Agoraphobia or social anxiety. What about other forms of anxiety?

With Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (with compulsive behaviour) the idea would be to look to reducing the number of times something was repeated or perhaps how long something was done for. So, with compulsive hand washing 20 times a day for 10 minutes at a time we can reduce both the frequency and the time taken.

With Generalised Anxiety Disorder the steps would involve tackling daily issues that perhaps you avoided because of anxiety. This may mean balancing your household accounts for example.

With Health Anxiety we may look to reduce the number of times we visit the doctor, the number of times we look up symptoms or conditions on the internet or we look to stop actively monitoring our

health by checking our own pulse, temperature or blood pressure.

With PTSD we would be looking at elements of the original trauma and revisiting these. If the PTSD was the result of a car accident that would mean returning to the scene of the accident, driving in the same weather and traffic conditions and at the same time of day.

With an exercise phobia the aim would be to commit to longer and longer sessions with perhaps higher and higher intensity. This could mean starting with a brisk 2 minute walk and working up to a 30 minute jog!

Sticking Points

I'd like to share with you one of the problems that I had. I followed all the steps above, created my plan and set myself daily goals. Every day I went out, getting further and further from home and started getting back into shops and doing errands. Unfortunately I couldn't go on a Dual Carriageway despite the fact I could travel to the same place without using the Dual Carriageway even though the journey took twice as long! I felt, as ridiculous as it sounds, that on a Dual Carriageway I was trapped and we couldn't just suddenly turn the car to come home the way we could when we were driving through a residential area. It felt like an "all or nothing"; we couldn't change direction or stop anywhere – we were committed to staying on that road until the exit. So what did I do? I carried on with my plan and kept doing more and more things, not stressing about this limitation. Guess what? One day it happened. I turned to my wife who was driving at the time and I said I wanted to go home via the Dual Carriageway. The moment I said it she slammed her foot to the floor and got us on as fast as she could; apparently she wanted to make sure I didn't have a chance to change my mind! Something inside my head simply said, "You're ready". When I finally did it there was absolutely no anxiety at all. Don't let one little sticking point hold you back. In the short term work around it if you have to and keep moving forward. Putting yourself under pressure certainly won't help you get there any quicker. Focus on what you can do not, what you feel you can't.

For people with Agoraphobia I'd like to mention quickly a useful tool that I used. You may have heard of Google Streetview; it's a project on the Internet where Google have been photographing millions and millions of streets worldwide and placing them from free on the Internet! This means that you can look/drive/walk down a street as if you were actually there all by just sitting in front of your computer! So how does this help? Well, I could sit in front of the computer and essentially walk/drive where I was going that day before I even left the house. I could run through the journey in my head, picture the shops that I would be passing, the landmarks along the way and, at the start, places to turn to come home. I knew what to expect, I knew where traffic lights were. I knew where I could go when I got there! It took any mystery out of it and let me rehearse it in my head!

Divert Your Mind During Daily Graded Exposure

When my Agoraphobia was starting to get better and I was feeling happier starting to go places, I found that if I was constantly watching the road I could work myself into an Anxiety attack. As the passenger there was nothing really for me to do other than to think about the fact that I was getting further from home. In some situations (depending on the nature of your exposure steps) you can help to divert your

mind during your exposure.

In my case it was jigsaws! Not the traditional variety but an electronic jigsaw done on an iPad. Every step began with choosing a 288 piece jigsaw and, whilst en route, I would sit there and do my jigsaw. Once we got to our destination I would get out the car and do whatever I went there to do. Then on the journey back I would finish my jigsaw! There are some who would argue this point with me that you need to “face up” to where you are and specifically focus on the fact that you are on the road travelling. For that argument I would say that my brain was more than aware of where I was; I am simply choosing to minimise how much of my brain I was allowing to focus on where exactly I was! The more I did this, the more I found that I was looking up anyway at where we were on the journey and it wasn't bothering me at all.

There are plenty of other things that you can do as well – perhaps listen to your favourite music and sing along? Just remember to be safe! Playing computer games whilst driving or listening to music on headphones whilst running across roads is dangerous!

Just Do It!

If you're at this section then that means you've got to the stage where your anxiety has not limited your life to the extent that you feel unable to do things anymore (although you may choose not to), but where there are certain situations that give you anxiety. Perhaps you feel like it's getting worse?

It's perfectly simple what we are going to do – we are going to do those things that cause you anxiety! And we are going to do them every day if possible, if not at the very least several times a week. Why you may ask, would you want to do that? Easy! Because by doing so we're going to get the message through to our subconscious that there is nothing to be anxious about!

I want you to write out a list of everything you can think of that's a problem for you. Let's take as an example a social anxiety, where the issue is being around groups of people.

Against each of these problem areas I want you to write down all the possible different ways you can think of to address these areas. Think of all the different approaches you could take; going to many different places, going out at a variety of different times of day. With our social anxiety example this could be going out for a meal, going to a club, going to the local museum etc.. Now that you have your list I want you to put dates against each of these! And you are going to do them!

I'd like you to imagine that you and I are playing a game together. It's a really easy game that involves me tossing a coin in the air; if it comes up heads you pay me a pound/dollar, if it's tails I pay you a pound/dollar.

- Round 1! On the first toss it comes up heads –unlucky!
- On the second toss it comes up heads again – more money for me. Very unlucky!
- On the third toss it comes up heads yet again. That's tomorrow's lunch paid for. How unlucky are you?
- On the fourth toss, heads again. Are you getting suspicious yet? Doesn't seem right 4 times in a row.
- Fifth, sixth and seventh toss all heads. At that point I can guarantee you won't want to be playing the game anymore!

So why won't you play? Well, initially you thought you may get some money from me so you were happy to play. As we played the first few rounds you still thought you could get some money or just get your money back. Eventually there came a point where your experience told you that it wasn't going to happen so you should stop. Your belief that you could win was challenged, you reassessed the situation and you stopped playing!

Apply this to your subconscious mind and to your feelings of inappropriate anxiety. First time you do something you feel anxious but nothing happens. Second time you still feel anxious but nothing happens. Third time same thing. At some point though your experiences will tell you that what you thought might happen hasn't and therefore probably won't. Your subconscious, through these experiences, decides that perhaps there wasn't anything to worry about after all! In simple terms your

subconscious doesn't want to play the anxiety game anymore!

“Flooding”

One of the things that crops up reasonably frequently is the idea that to get rid of panic attacks and acute anxiety you have to deliberately force yourself to endure them; to experience your fears at their absolute worst. Psychologists refer to this method as “flooding”; the idea being to make you face your fears at their worst and therefore realise that the sensations of anxiety are harmless. We talked above about the “Just Do It” approach where you are able to push your own boundaries and take a step because you feel you can; flooding doesn’t care whether you feel you can or can’t, you are “thrown in at the deep end”! In the early stages of trying to resolve my own issues, the idea that I was going to have to endure that level of anxiety was too much for me and I felt that if that was the case I would prefer to just stay in! After all my Agoraphobia developed as a way of avoiding that kind of feeling!

To demonstrate the technique, a psychiatrist by the name of Joseph Wolpe did an experiment in 1973. He took a young girl who had a fear of cars and drove her around for many hours. At first she was completely hysterical but she eventually calmed down and realised that the fear was irrational.

The experience of flooding is, if I need to say it, extremely traumatic. Imagine you had a phobia of spiders – would you let dozens of spiders crawl all over you? Do I believe that it works? Yes – for some people, and if you’re prepared to give it a go I can assure you that it won’t harm you or make things worse. If you have Agoraphobia the idea would be that you get put in the back of a car (child locked to stop you running away!) and you’re driven further and further away from home and to different places. And you stay away until your subconscious realises that the fear was irrational, the anxiety inappropriate and the expected catastrophe doesn’t happen!

I have no problem at all with the method itself. What I do have a problem with is the people who market this as their one step solution to resolving your anxiety and panic issues and say that nothing else ever works. As I said, for me, if I believed that the only way to solve my anxiety was to endure that kind of traumatic experience I can assure you I think I would probably have been stuck with my Agoraphobia for a long time! Call it a lack of willpower or whatever, but I just didn’t feel capable of doing it. Some might argue with me that the reason I wasn’t willing to do this was simply because I wasn’t desperate enough to want to recover; nonsense! The reality is that all of us by default try and avoid stressful situations wherever we can.

If you have a fear of catching or contracting a particular illness do you need to have that illness to address that fear? Of course not. So why do you need to create severe anxiety to help you resolve it? This is why “flooding” is not one of the 10 Steps. Not because I don’t believe it works, because it can and it does, but the thought for some people is enough to cause a lot of additional anxiety and they may never be able to mentally prepare themselves enough to do it. Obviously flooding is far quicker than graded exposure if you go out right now and do it, but if you keep delaying and delaying the day for doing it, when you could have already been comfortably starting to do things again then I’m not sure it is necessarily any quicker!

Safety Behaviours

In the past I'm sure you've avoided certain situations or people because of your anxiety. This is called an avoidance behaviour. It could also be that although you haven't avoided the situation, you've done everything you can to make it as manageable as possible. For example you may only go somewhere if someone is with you or perhaps you will only go at certain times of the day. This kind of behaviour is known as safety behaviour. You're not avoiding the situation but you are "playing it safe".

Safety behaviours are strategies that you use to help you cope with a situation that you think might be difficult or make you anxious. Although you might feel like having these safety behaviours is helpful it really isn't. One of my safety behaviours was to make sure that every time we went into a shop we always reversed into a parking space so that we could leave quicker! By doing that what was I actually saying? I'm essentially saying, "I believe I can do this, I'm going to do this...but just in case I can't, let's make sure I can leave quickly!". What message does this give your subconscious? On one hand you're addressing your anxiety and showing your subconscious that there's nothing to be anxious about, but on the other hand you're consciously choosing to alter the situation as if there is!

I'm not going to lecture you for having safety behaviours at the start. I certainly did and I think it's almost natural that, as we begin to do things again, we try and adapt the situation or stack the odds in our favour. Clearly it was better for me that I got out the house rather than staying at home and if that meant planning a quick exit then so be it! What's important is that you can recognise these behaviours and ensure that you doing something about them. The aim of this book is to help you get rid of your inappropriate anxiety. If we got you from not being able to leave the house to being able to get out but only when there was no traffic, never for longer than an hour and never on your own then you haven't fully resolved your anxiety issues. Whether you are following the "Just Do It" or the graded exposure route, make sure your plan includes things like different times of the day, busier crowds of people and being on your own as well as with someone. No-one expects that you can eliminate safety behaviours overnight (although maybe you can). Just make sure you're aware of any limitations you are placing on yourself, understand why they might be confusing your subconscious and make sure you do something about it!

For some people their anxiety is entirely based around safety behaviours. You may not have let your anxiety stop you from doing anything, but perhaps you have to do everything your own way and with your own set of rules. The strategies we have talked about before still applies; we work on eliminating each one of these behaviours and learn to engage more and more with the situation.

Step 9 – Remember, Yesterday Is In The Past

“Today is the tomorrow we worried about yesterday. “

Author Unknown

“Worry never robs tomorrow of its sorrow, it only saps today of its joy.”

Leo Buscaglia

“No man ever sank under the burden of the day. It is when tomorrow's burden is added to the burden of today that the weight is more than a man can bear.”

George MacDonald

Don't make the mistake of thinking that when you start to address your anxiety problems every day is going to be a good day. I wish that was the case but unfortunately it isn't. Everyone, and I mean everyone, has good days and bad days regardless of whether or not they have anxiety problems. As you work through this book you'll find that some days you'll feel really positive and like you're moving in the right direction, other days you might feel like giving up. It's completely normal to feel like this. I found that over time the bad days got less and less and the time between them got longer.

It's not what's happening to you now or what has happened in your past that determines who you become. Rather, it's your decisions about what to focus on, what things mean to you, and what you're going to do about them that will determine your ultimate destiny.

Antony Robbins

Remember, you didn't develop an anxiety disorder overnight – you can't expect to be cured overnight!

Depression

Many, many sufferers of anxiety disorders suffer from depression and I'd like to talk about this in a bit

more detail. When people talk about being depressed there are two very different types of depression. One is a genuine mental illness, the other isn't. Although both often feel the same, their causes are very different, as are the solutions.

Situational Depression

Situational depression is absolutely normal! Everyone experiences it! Situational depression is our mind's way of saying, "I'm not happy about this situation". Half the country have, "Monday morning blues" – when our mind tells us it doesn't really like the thought of another week of work!

When we have put our lives on hold because of anxiety and panic issues, of course the situation is getting you down! It doesn't mean you're depressed in the true clinical sense, it simply means your brain would like you to change the situation; something you probably already knew! As we make progress through these 10 Steps accept that, as you start to get your life back again, the situational depression will lift.

Clinical Depression

Clinical depression is a completely different matter. It's believed to be related to a deficiency of serotonin in the brain, the chemical responsible for our mood. If you feel depressed all the time and lack the will to do anything, go and speak to your doctor. Clinical depression is outside the scope of this book and needs help and input from your doctor.

That Little Voice...

Whenever I was getting over my Agoraphobia and starting to get out to places again, I got to a point where although I wasn't getting any symptoms of anxiety, I was still getting that little voice in my head reminding me of the times where I had been. The problem was that instead of my anxiety holding me back, it had now become a confidence issue. My confidence had taken a knock and I needed to get it back. How did I do that? I challenged those negative thoughts and I kept doing it!

Putting yesterday in the past means we turn our back on the negative experiences and struggles we've felt before. Remember, even one second ago is still in the past so stop thinking about it and concentrate on a better future! Moving away from your anxiety/panic disorder also means embracing a new way of thinking that will help you in life.

Goals are a means to an end, not the ultimate purpose of our lives. They are simply a tool to concentrate our focus and move us in a direction. The only reason we really pursue goals is to cause ourselves to expand and grow. Achieving goals by themselves will never make us happy in the long term; it's who you become, as you overcome the obstacles necessary to achieve your goals, that can give you the deepest and most long-lasting sense of fulfillment.

EXERCISE

Let's take some time now to take an honest look at how we see ourselves. I don't want to see you resolve your anxiety issues only to be held back by confidence issues or other limiting beliefs. If I asked you to describe yourself would you do so in terms of what you can't do or what you can do? Would you say "My name is x and I have an anxiety disorder. I can't go out places. I'm no good with people. I'm not a very sensitive person."?

I want you to create a list of how you see yourself. Be honest – write down everything you can think of. Think about all the areas of your life – personal, work, social. It's not just about what you can't do, it's also about what you can do and what you are good at! You might write down "Good at organising people", "Good timekeeper" and "Bad with large groups".

Against each one of the negative/critical points I want you to answer these questions:

- How do I really know this is a problem area?
- Who told me this or have I just decided for myself?
- Can I improve or test myself in this area?
- Am I holding myself back in life by believing this of myself?

For each of the positive points I want you to ask yourself:

- Do I do enough to make use of this skill or quality that I have?
- How can I develop this further to help myself and others?

Once your inappropriate anxiety is gone and you have the life back that you deserve, you need to be thinking about growing and developing as a person. Personal growth is often held back by self-imposed personal beliefs about ourselves like "I can't do this" or "I'm no good at that". In order to grow you MUST find and let go of these limiting beliefs and try out new things! Too many people hold on to the beliefs that had held about themselves from when they were younger or from when they were having problems and use that to direct their life moving forward.

For a person with anxiety your negative experiences may still dictate to you what you can and can't do; recovery from your anxiety doesn't just mean freedom from inappropriate anxiety, it also means not holding on to the anxious experiences as if they were a blueprint for the future. If you are writing off something because you can't do it, take a moment to think. Why can't you do it? Does that reason still hold true? Are you sure? Would it hurt to try again and find out?

Let's imagine my car keeps overheating. I can get about 20 miles and then it overheats, so I have to stop and not go any further. I go and get it fixed. Now, every time I go out I decide that it's best not go further than 20 miles just in case it happens again. I may have fixed the original problem but I am still being held back by it, this time by the belief that I cannot or should not go too far "just in case".

Are you doing (or have you done) this with your anxiety? Is what is holding you back a self-imposed belief that you can't or shouldn't do something? From experience I certainly know that there comes a point where it isn't the symptoms of anxiety or the anxious feelings that cause the problem anymore, it's that nagging, "What if?" feeling in the back of your mind; that worry that the anxiety might strike again.

I remember speaking to a physiotherapist friend about a problem known as "kinesiophobia". A big word that just means that someone has a fear of movement following an injury. What happens is that a patient would be so worried about over-exerting themselves or exacerbating an injury that they would restrict their movement. Over time and with treatment the injury would heal but the patient would still have that fear of movement. From a physical point of view the injury was healed – the patient was essentially cured but that one tiny thing that they allowed to hold themselves back was that "What if?". They lacked the confidence to use their body the way they did before the injury and to move on. You need to get the confidence to build your life back up to where it was pre-anxiety and to exercise the freedom from anxiety that you now have.

Eureka?

With some people getting rid of their inappropriate anxiety there's an expectation that they'll reach a sudden, "Eureka!" moment where the anxiety is gone and everything is back to "normal". If we have a tooth causing us severe pain and go to the dentist, we're able to get the pain issue resolved in probably less than 30 minutes. The cause is obvious, the solution is obvious and more importantly the solution is fast. With anxiety, especially where it has persisted for many years, or where your journey to sort out the issues took a little bit of time, some people fail to notice the change as things resolve. There's no neon sign that appears above your head saying, "Anxiety resolved. You may now begin your life again!". It's very easy to just focus on the negative aspects of what you can't do. When I was going through my graded exposure for my Agoraphobia, I remember getting to shops a couple of miles away but struggling to stay there longer than a couple of minutes. At times I felt a bit down because of this but the real issue was that my focus was on how far I felt I had to go and not how far I had come. Do I think negatively, "I still have a long way to go" or do I think positively (and truthfully), "Look how far I have come from the time where I couldn't even get in to the corner shop"? Don't fall into the trap of having that "all or nothing" attitude – "If I can't do everything right now there's no point doing anything"! Rome wasn't built in a day as the saying goes. Always focus on how far you've come and not how far you believe you still need to go. Celebrate every goal you reach and don't beat yourself up over how far away you think your next goal might be.

I remember hearing a joke once that went something like this:

Patient: Will I be able to play the piano when my broken arm heals?

Doctor: Yes

Patient: Really? That's amazing because I couldn't play before I broke my arm!

OK, I didn't say it was particularly funny! So what's my point? Are you holding yourself to certain expectations about your recovery that are unreasonable? If you were looking to lose several stone in weight would you expect it to drop off overnight? Do you expect to wake up one morning and never feel anxiety ever again? What are your expectations when you start to work through these anxiety issues? Do you expect that you'll be able to run a marathon the day after being housebound? Could you do this before your anxiety? If you couldn't do this before your anxiety, don't expect to be doing it immediately afterwards!

Many programmes that look to help you with anxiety fail to address this very important point.

EXERCISE

I'd like you to write down the answers to the following questions:

What am I expecting to happen as I address my anxiety issues? Are these reasonable expectations?

How will I change my behaviour and attitudes to move away from the memories of the past?

What do I define as a successful outcome from this book?

Remember the past is gone. It doesn't determine your future unless you choose to let it.

Step 10 – Give Yourself Time And Be Patient!

“As a rule, what is out of sight disturbs men's minds more seriously than what they see.”

Julius Caesar

“I have learned to live each day as it comes, and not to borrow trouble by dreading tomorrow. It is the dark menace of the future that makes cowards of us. “

Dorothy Day

“It is not the cares of today, but the cares of tomorrow, that weigh a man down.”

George MacDonald

“I am an old man and have known a great many troubles, but most of them never happened.”

Mark Twain

I've said it before and I'll say it again. You didn't develop your anxiety/panic disorder overnight and you can't expect to be completely cured overnight. That's not to say that for some people they aren't able, through a short programme of graded exposure, to be back and doing what they used to do in a very short space of time; for others it takes longer. The simple fact is that there's no such thing as a “normal recovery time”. Everyone is different and it takes however long it takes; there is no right or wrong time period. That said you don't need to wait to be fully recovered before you can start to get your life back again. As you regain control, enjoy the experiences you can do once again and live life to the full!

My Karate instructor, Kyoshi John Lynn, told me the story about someone who had been training in Karate for about two years. On one particular class the student was corrected on a basic detail that he'd been getting wrong all along. The student objected somewhat to this correction and asked, “Why didn't you tell me that before?”. The reply was simple, “I've been telling you that for the past two years. Its only now you're ready to listen!”. Are you ready to listen to what this book is telling you about your anxiety? Are you ready to do whatever you need to do and see it through?

Once you start getting your life back again, focus on moving forward no matter how small the steps are. Progress is progress! Setting a goal to buy a pint of milk from your corner shop may sound ridiculous to

some, but for a sufferer of severe Agoraphobia who hasn't left the house for 5 years this is a wonderful goal to reach and a cause for celebration.

The pace at which you progress won't always be the same. For me, some days I could only push myself to get a few metres further, on others it was quite a considerable distance. At the start I can remember looking at my early list of goals for getting out the house and thinking that at the rate of progress I had set for myself it would take me several years to get back into the town centre of Wrexham! For a brief moment I thought about giving up – what was the point if it was going to take that long? In the end it took me 12 weeks to get those 5 miles and I had to be keep at it every single day. I consider that to have been a lot slower than it needed to be! Once my plan was well under way I was often able to go a bit further than I had originally intended. So what happened when I pushed my anxiety disorder to let me back into the big wide world? What about all the things my thoughts had me fearing was going to happen? Absolutely nothing happened! The reality was that the perception in my mind of what might happen was far, far worse than what actually did happen!

Some days I would get really annoyed and frustrated with myself. Why can't I do this? Why am I going so slowly? Why do I still feel like this? Why can't I just be normal like everyone else? Every single person I've ever spoken to with an anxiety disorder has felt like this. It's completely normal and understandable, but it's important that when you do feel like that you don't beat yourself up over it. It's so easy to create an argument between your conscious and subconscious, but as we have said before your subconscious will only learn through experience, not by being argued with! Get frustrated with yourself all you like but the reality is that it will make no difference because your subconscious won't listen to you! Imagine talking to a book to get it to change what is written in it – sounds ridiculous when it's put like that doesn't it!

One of the biggest fears that I had when I developed Agoraphobia was that I would end up housebound for the rest of my life like those people with Agoraphobia I had seen on TV. I would read stories about people trapped in their own home for over 20 years and was terrified that this would happen to me. However there was one important consideration that meant that wouldn't happen; I was ready to change and I was doing something about it! And so are you by the fact that you are reading this book! It's sad to think that there are people who have ended up trapped in one room of their house for several decades due to anxiety and Agoraphobia. This happens for several reasons:

- They don't understand why they feel the way they do
- There's a lack of support or understanding from those around them, sometimes even from their own doctor
- They believe that they are actually physically ill and are therefore unable to change things
- There have incorrect and damaging assumptions, for example they're waiting for the medication to cure them
- Regrettably for some people, they just don't want to change. They've let their anxiety disorder define their life. Hard as it may be to believe, it does happen. No one can persuade someone that they have the power to change their situation themselves. You can offer help and guidance but, as you now know, recovery has to come from the person themselves.

EXERCISE

Here's an exercise I'd like you to try every day at least once, if not more, to help you relax. If you can perhaps you can have someone read these steps to you when you're getting started.

Find yourself a quiet, warm place where you won't be disturbed. Choose a comfortable position such lying on your bed or sitting in a comfortable chair. Make yourself as comfortable as you can and close your eyes. If you want, have some relaxing music playing in the background. Focus on your breathing for a few minutes. Think about breathing slowly and deeply.

Now we're ready to begin and we're going to start thinking about our body.

As you breathe in, clench your left hand to make a fist as hard as you can. Feel your whole arm tense up. When it's time to, breathe out and relax the muscles. Feel the difference between a tense muscle and a relaxed muscle. Do this 3 times and then repeat for your right hand.

Bend your left elbow and squeeze as tight as you can as you breathe in. Then, like we did before, relax as you breathe out. Do this 3 times and repeat for your right elbow.

Push your neck back as hard as you can comfortably do; hold for a few seconds then relax. Do the same thing forwards, pushing your chin into your chest. Next, move your head over to the left, feeling the muscles tighten on the opposite side, hold for a few second and then relax. Repeat this for the other site.

Squeeze the muscles in your face (as if you are squinting). Hold for a few seconds and then relax. Raise your eyebrows next, feeling the muscles in your face stretch and hold. Next clench your teeth together for a few seconds and then relax.

Moving to your chest, take in a big deep breath and feel your whole chest expand. Hold for a few seconds and then slowly breathe out. Do this 3 times.

Going down to your stomach now, squeeze your stomach muscles as tight as you can. Hold for a few seconds and relax. Do this 3 times.

Little bit lower this time; I'd like you to clench your buttocks tightly for a few seconds and then relax. Again, we are going to do this 3 times.

Going down to your legs, pull your toes and ankles upwards towards your head as hard as you can and then relax. Then, do the opposite, pushing your toes and ankles as far away as you can, holding for a few seconds and then relax. Do this 3 times.

As you do this exercise, focus on the difference between tense and relaxed muscles. As you continue to practice this exercise, you'll start to recognise what a tense muscle feels like and what a relaxed muscle feels like and be better able to control your muscle tension.

5

Where To Turn

“There are people who are always anticipating trouble, and in this way they manage to enjoy many sorrows that never really happen to them. “

Josh Billings

“Love looks forward, hate looks back, anxiety has eyes all over its head. “

Mignon McLaughlin, The Neurotic's Notebook, 1960

“Worry is interest paid on trouble before it comes due.”

William Ralph Inge

It's very unfortunate that we live in an age where we don't talk about mental and psychological illnesses or anxiety disorders. Where people do talk about these things, they tend to be viewed by those around them as being a sign of weakness. If someone has a physical illness there's usually plenty of sympathy. On the other hand if the problem is mental or psychological, you will often hear that person referred to as a “basket case”, “nutter”, “lunatic”, “weirdo”, “got a screw loose”, “mental”, “freak”, “retard”, “div”, “needs a strait jacket”; believe me I've heard them all. The most ridiculous example of ignorance I have ever personally experienced was from a former employer of mine who, upon finding out about my anxiety problems, decided he would now need to pay someone to come in and audit all the work that I had done to date. This was despite the fact that up to that point he'd been perfectly happy with it. It's no surprise then that anxiety sufferers seem to think that they daren't talk about their problems and must keep them secret at all costs! I hope that by this point in the book you have realised that you aren't going crazy or losing your mind. Your problem is merely down to a bad habit possibly combined with a lack of understanding and maybe poor lifestyle choices. If you ever want to annoy someone who is talking down to you for having anxiety issues, tell them about a study in New York by Dr. Jeremy Coplan who showed a link between anxiety disorders and a high IQ. On average, people with anxiety disorders are more intelligent!

We've talked before about the Internet (as you may have guessed I have a big issue with much of the information about anxiety on it!) and the vast array of “instant cures” and “one step solutions” that cost a lot of money and can make problems worse. A lot of these programmes feed on telling you what

you want to hear; that anxiety is quick and easy to get rid of if you just use their simple solution. As much as I would love that to be true for everyone, that just isn't the case. Granted for some people it can be quite quick, but there are no hard and fast rules. I'm sure you've heard the saying before that "doing something is better than doing nothing", well that isn't always the case. It needs to be the right something.

It isn't only the Internet you need to look out for when looking for help. There are plenty of people offering counselling and therapy that simply aren't qualified to be doing so, and there's nothing illegal as long as they don't claim qualifications or affiliations that they haven't got. Recent years have also seen the evolution of the "life coach"; some are extremely good at what they do, others not so. I know of one "life coach" who saw this as a business opportunity after failing badly in his other pursuits and being at the verge of bankruptcy. He now spends his days teaching others on how to be successful in both their personal and professional life! If you were getting someone to work on your gas heating at home then you would check that they were suitably qualified because you understand how dangerous gas can be to the untrained person. Isn't your mental health worth taking a little time out to first check out the person who is going to help you work through your anxiety?

In using this book, I would ask that you not be following multiple programmes at once. I am however a realist and I know that there will be people doing just that. Remember that this could just confuse you if you end up trying to follow conflicting advice. There are plenty of people, including those discussed in Step 4, who you can choose to turn to while you are following the 10 Steps. These various therapies work alongside what we do within the 10 Steps and may help and support you. Don't be afraid to go out and get yourself any additional help you need or would like. While the decision you make to fix your anxiety is all yours, there's nothing wrong with getting an extra helping hand.

Massage Therapy

There's nothing more relaxing than a proper massage especially to the back and shoulders, where most of the muscular tension due to the fight or flight process is carried. In fact, having a massage is a worthwhile exercise simply to show you how tense you will almost certainly have become. Nothing beats the fantastic feeling after the tension is gone! A state of anxiety automatically means that muscles tense up and this can lead to tension headaches, can decrease the efficient functioning of the immune system and restrict ease of movement. The lymphatic system was discussed in the section on Exercise but massage can be another way to assist its function.

Massage has been proven to have specific stress relieving properties, to reduce situational depression and to provide relief from existing back pain. It's believed to do this by the release of serotonin and endorphins, lowering of cortisol levels, temporarily slowing down heart rate and lowering blood pressure.

A reputable Massage Therapist will do a pre-treatment assessment to decide on what muscle areas they'll specifically focus on and may well give you some postural advice and recommend some simple

exercises. Massage Therapy is one of the “Holistic Therapies” which is a very fancy way of saying that they treat you as a whole person, not just a set of muscles. They may discuss diet with you, water consumption and may give you some general basic health advice.

For some strange reason massage is dismissed by many in some countries as having no therapeutic value. This is certainly the case in the UK. This is due in no small part to the fact that the whole profession is currently poorly regulated and training requirements are frequently non-existent. For some trainers offering Massage Therapy their courses can be as little as one or two days long! Look for a professional massage therapist – one who has done a proper NVQ level 3 certificate or diploma (UK only) in Swedish Body Massage or Indian Head Massage and you will be pleasantly surprised at what you find.

Hypnotherapy

When many people think of hypnosis, images of hypnotists making people think they are chickens on stage come to mind! I’m not for one minute telling you that you should go and see a hypnotherapist but I am saying that hypnotherapy is, when delivered appropriately by a professional, a very effective tool in helping you address anxiety issues. If you were to use hypnotherapy it certainly wouldn’t conflict at all with the 10 Steps.

So how does it work? Being hypnotised is a natural state where the mind is calm and the imagination is absorbed in the focus of the hypnosis. Modern psychology calls hypnosis “a state of increased suggestibility”. In this state the conscious mind and subconscious mind are focused, making you open to suggestions - responding directly and positively to suggestions given.

Don’t underestimate this state; it may be simple, but it’s extraordinarily powerful, and with proper direction it is really one that can help you start to change the way you think. Take this book with you if you’re going to a hypnotherapist and tell them you’d like help working through it.

Telephone Helplines

One of the organisations that I turned to on more than one occasion was Anxiety UK. Their telephone helpline service let me talk/complain/sound off on more than one occasion to people who had previously had problems themselves with their anxiety but had got through it. Other organisations also exist that are able to deal with plenty of other issues. The charity MIND in the UK also offers a fantastic information line that can talk to you about not just anxiety but also about depression. Both of these services are free.

As well as using helpline services to deal specifically with anxiety issues, such services can be invaluable in helping you address external factors that you find to be a source of anxiety. If you are having problems with your children’s schooling for example and this is causing you anxiety, there are helplines offering help in dealing with education matters. If you have financial issues you can talk to someone about what you can do and discuss options.

Using telephone helplines allows you to talk to people who understand your problem and will help to

give you more insight and maybe consider options that you may never have thought about. The less you have to worry about the easier it is to cope with life! There's nothing wrong with going looking for expert advice on something you know nothing about. That's why helplines are there!

Counsellors

All of us carry around emotional baggage from things that have happened to us in the past. Some people find it easy to move on and shrug off these past challenges; for others the pain is still there bubbling under the surface. These issues can sometimes go back decades and can still be influencing your behaviour now, even without you realizing it. Think hard about whether or not you would benefit from getting these things out in the open and learning to deal with them. It isn't healthy or natural to keep things bottled up inside. Everyone needs to have an emotional release and there is nothing wrong with going to a counsellor to find yours. They won't tell you what to do but they will provide a non-judgmental, listening ear. They will restrict themselves to commenting on what you say and guiding you towards understanding your feelings and behaviour and to make any changes that you then feel you should.

Personal Trainer

If you don't know where to start with an exercise programme, or you have trouble with motivating yourself, perhaps you could see about hiring a Personal Trainer! People associate Personal Trainers with someone trying to get a rock hard six pack but the truth is that they offer far more than that. A good Personal Trainer will create your own personalised programme of exercise and give you diet and general lifestyle advice to help you achieve your personal goals. They'll start at the level of fitness and experience that you are at now and build on it from there, without overdoing it. They'll introduce you to new exercises and make sure that you perform them correctly, avoiding any possible risk of injury and getting the maximum possible benefits. Perhaps you know what physical results you are trying to achieve with your exercise routine but aren't sure what you need to do? Or maybe you want to get yourself into an exercise habit that you will maintain long term? That is what a Personal Trainer can do for you!

A Personal Trainer will be alongside you, encouraging you to keep going, reminding you of why you're doing it. Your exercise sessions will be pre-arranged appointments and it's always a motivation to try your best and stick to your commitment for that session when someone else is standing beside you! They'll help you set goals that are realistic, keep an objective track of your progress and keep introducing you to new exercises so that you don't get bored!

Once again, when you're hiring a Personal Trainer don't be afraid to shop around. Check what qualifications they have and make sure you get on well with them. Make sure that they're properly qualified and registered with a professional body, insured and are able to show references. Don't be embarrassed to ask for proof of all of these; it's your body after all! If they have a problem with you asking, then you already have your answer!

6

For Relatives

Strength doesn't come from what you can do. It comes from overcoming the thing you once thought you couldn't.

Rikki Rogers

For those fortunate enough to have supportive friends and family, their help and support is important to help you get through your anxiety and panic problems.

You must remember though that, although you may have the most wonderfully supportive family, they may not understand what you are going through and may find it difficult to be able to help. It's not that they don't want to, they just don't know how. For people who find it easy to relax and seldom feel stressed, the notion that people could be completely debilitated by anxiety may seem completely bizarre to them. Unfortunately this lack of understanding may go as far as to result in complete disbelief or ridicule. The problem about anxiety is that there is nothing to see externally. There is no plaster cast, no visible injury or test result that supports there being a problem.

To the partners, friends and family members who are seeing things first-hand, please don't judge. You may not understand what is going on (at times the sufferer doesn't understand either!) but accept that what they are going through is very, very real. I can assure you that the sufferer wants to get better but may feel trapped and desperate; help and support them as much as you can. Putting pressure on someone to get better at a quicker pace doesn't help anyone; just be there to talk to them, to listen, be patient and understanding and learn what you can about the subject.

For Partners

Almost every couple sees their fair share of challenges. When one of those challenges however is a panic or anxiety disorder, this brings a new set of problems all of its own!

A recent study looking at sufferers of generalised anxiety disorder who were in a relationship found that these people were significantly less likely to consider themselves in a healthy relationship. It was also noted that these same sufferers were twice as likely to have at least one relationship problem and three times more likely to have issues with intimacy.

Having an anxiety disorder is, of course, extremely distressing for the sufferer but it can also be difficult for their partners. Partners often end up taking on a lot more than their share of household tasks,

parenting and other responsibilities.

For example:

The sufferer may

- avoid normal household responsibilities
- be unable to get or keep a job
- avoid social events with friends and family
- feel sad, angry, scared and depressed

The partner may

- take on more responsibility around the house
- become the sole breadwinner
- stay isolated with their partner while they avoid social events
- pick up on feelings from their partner and adopt them themselves (sad, angry or depressed)
- find themselves at the receiving end of the sufferer's anger

Don't underestimate these challenges; they're not insignificant issues to have to deal with. Just remember people with anxiety disorders can and do recover and go on to have normal lives, successful careers and busy schedules. That recovery can be found in this book! If you haven't read the whole book, I would encourage you to do so! It'll help you to know what your partner is working through and roughly what to expect. We discuss later on in this chapter what specifically you can do to help out with each individual step.

As a partner supporting someone through this, there is a lot you can do to help.

- Learn as much as you can about the anxiety disorder, making sure that if you use the Internet you stick to reputable sites and organisations, not the ones that claim to be able to wave an anti-anxiety magic wand (for a fee).
- Don't always try and logically make sense of it all because at times it just won't! One of the issues we personally went through for a while was an inability to drive around a roundabout. We could get up to the roundabout and then spent a couple of minutes doing a three point turn in the road just in front of it, but we couldn't spend the 30 seconds it would take just simply going that extra few yards around it!
- Acknowledge that if you have never had a panic attack yourself then you don't know what it feels like. Accept that it is an incredibly scary experience.
- Offer support and encouragement at all times. Remember, praise progress rather than criticise anxious behaviour. It doesn't matter how small the progress is, the point is that it is still a step in a right direction and it's still a success!
- Remember that the sufferer can't help the fact that they show irrational fear, avoid situations or adopt rituals. They don't want these issues either but it isn't that easy to stop. These behaviour patterns developed over a long time and won't just suddenly disappear.
- Judge progress on the basis of your partner's own progress and not any preconceived ideas and

expectations, or based on other people's progress. There is no set time scale for recovery.

- Help your partner set and reach their goals.
- Talk to your partner about what their needs are and then actually listen to what they have to say.
- Understand that the road to recovery will take hard work by your partner and patience by you. At times it will be frustrating and emotional and it may seem like it's moving very slowly. Just hold on and keep in mind that it is improving and look at how much progress has already been made.
- Help your partner adhere to their agreed plans to move forward. It may be difficult at times for them to do, but I can assure you they will feel a great deal of satisfaction when they move forward and disappointment if they don't.

In some cases mental health professionals are increasingly recommending therapy sessions that involve the partner. After all the partner is just as much a victim of this condition as the sufferer. That said the partner will also find themselves partly taking on the role of therapist. A professional may only see the sufferer for a couple of hours a week; a partner is there the rest of the time! The partner is the one who reminds the sufferer of the things that the therapist has said until they are ready to hear it! Just don't say, "I told you so!" when they come to you with a major realisation they've just had that's something you've been saying to them for weeks!

It's very easy for you to find that your whole life is tied up in your partner's disorder and as a result you forget to look after your own needs. Enjoy your own interests and hobbies as an escape from the stresses of your daily life. Keep up relationships with your friends and family and if you need to, talk to them! You may not be able to go out as much as you'd like but still make time for yourself, to give yourself small treats and do whatever little things that make you feel good! Just because your partner is the one with the problem that doesn't mean you shouldn't go and see their doctor yourself to talk things through.

Supporting Each Individual Step

Step 1. For step 1 where we look at lifestyle, can you help your partner with their lifestyle choices? Whether or not you have an anxiety disorder, a healthy diet is an important thing to have at any time. If you do the cooking, think about the meals you make. Ask yourself, "Am I adding too much salt?", "Is there enough fruit and vegetables in our diet?" etc.

If you do the shopping, think about what you are buying. Think about the quality of the ingredients and how much processing there is in them. Are you eating too much processed food?

What about those cups of tea and coffee you make? How many a day are you making and could you perhaps substitute some of them for something else such as water or fruit juice? Could you both benefit from drinking a bit less caffeine?

When it comes to posture, if you see your partner in a bad posture position, gently remind them!

When it's time for exercise – why not do it together? It's good for the health of both of you!

If both you and your partner smoke, why don't you both look at stopping together? You can support each other and look at doing an anti-smoking programme together.

If you think that your own lifestyle could be improved, why not take this opportunity to do something about it?

Step 2. For step 2 when we look at understanding anxiety, read it and make sure that you understand it as well. Understanding will not just make you feel a lot better about what you're having to deal with but when you understand it, you can then remind your partner why they are feeling the way they do and give them some encouragement. Anxious thoughts become a habit and I'm sure you've had some habits in the past that you had to break. Wasn't very easy, was it? It takes time, persistence and effort. At times of acute anxiety and panic your partner isn't necessarily thinking calmly and rationally about what is happening to them so it's up to you to remind them! You can be the calm voice of reason, reminding them of what they already know at a point where they really need to hear it.

Step 3. In step 3 we look at the whole area of medication. You can discuss this with your partner. Whatever you do make sure that they don't go against the wishes of their doctor. Of course medication is not a solution to anxiety and at some point does need to be stopped, but that needs to be done properly, perhaps by reducing a dosage over time. Go with your partner to the doctor and talk to them about it together.

Step 4. In step 4 we look at the importance of talking, either with a professional or with friends and family. There is no more important relationship than the one between the two of you! You're the one that spends the most time with them and you're the one they trust. Talk to them. You can't just ignore an anxiety disorder and hope that it just goes away by itself – it won't. Don't take it personally if they want to talk to a professional therapist. It can be a lot easier to talk to someone who is outside the situation, has an objective viewpoint and has professionally dealt with people with anxiety issues before.

Step 5. If you ever find your partner sitting around feeling sorry for themselves, bored or with nothing to do, you need to help them find something! The last thing they need to have is time to think about their own situation. Is there anything perhaps you could do together or that you need done? Perhaps some decorating at home? What about your garden? Is there anything you could remind your partner about that they used to do but quit because of their anxiety? Are there any activities that you used to do together that you don't do anymore and could maybe take up again? What about new activities that you both always said that you would try someday?

Step 6. There is often a fine line between encouragement and reassurance. Let's take an example of a health anxiety where your partner asks you to take their pulse for them. Encouragement would be to say to them "You know that there is nothing wrong with you and you know you shouldn't be thinking like this. Let's you find something we can do right now and you can stop thinking about it!". Reassurance would have you checking their pulse and telling them there was nothing to worry about or explaining that their sore muscle is nothing to worry about and is perfectly normal. Remember when

you encourage them you remind them that they don't need that constant reassurance.

Step 7. With Step 7 we address the importance of challenging negative thoughts. Part of this means ensuring that your partner isn't being surrounded by negativity. That includes you! If your partner says "I'm feeling anxious right now" then the last thing you want to be saying is, "So you should, there is a lot to be anxious about"! Don't just think about what you're saying but also how it may be interpreted; it's not necessarily what you say but the way you say that could be misunderstood. Any negativity on the part of your partner needs to be challenged by them, but you need to be the failsafe in case they forget! Tell them when they are behaving negatively, help them see things in a more positive way.

Step 8 is the big one! Within this step there are two directions that can be taken.

The first is graded exposure; your partner breaks down their issues into goals and then into manageable steps. It's up to you to help them keep to this plan! Encourage them to follow it and remind them why they are doing it. Be patient and supportive.

The other path involves simply getting back and doing things again, no matter how uncomfortable they may be. If they are still doable then they need to be done; at different times, different places, perhaps with different people. That may mean going out to social events several times a week, going to the pub, going to a restaurant.

Step 9 really applies to both of you! It doesn't matter what has happened before, it's in the past. Remember your partner is getting over an anxiety disorder that affected how they thought, reacted and without doubt it will have given their confidence a knock. They'll have been angry and frustrated at times, often because they didn't understand what was happening to them. That's all over with now and you both need to agree to move on. Think about this new phase of your life together and what new experiences you're going to enjoy together. The future lies ahead of you both now, your partner is taking control of their anxious thoughts and changing their life, freeing you both from the effects of their anxiety.

Step 10 also applies to both of you! There's no set recovery time or rule that can be followed. Recovery takes however long it takes and at times there's no question that it will be frustrating. Perhaps there are things you want to do that you can't because of your partner and it's only natural for you to be annoyed. You aren't annoyed at them but rather with their anxiety disorder. Perhaps you feel that your partner puts too much pressure on you and doesn't seem to really do anything for themselves? It's very easy to focus on how far you feel you still have to go and forget perhaps how far you have come. As the old saying goes, "a journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step". When you get frustrated, just take a moment to think of all that has been achieved so far, not how far you have to go. Remember that communication is key and whenever there is anger and frustration you need to sit down and talk about it.

It cannot be emphasised enough how important a role you play in the recovery process. Your help and support are a vital part of it.

Young Children

When you have children around don't assume they won't pick up on what is happening. Children are very sensitive to what is going on around them. They aren't oblivious to atmosphere, they know when something is wrong, especially when it's something longer term like an anxiety or panic disorder!

Probably the first instinct would be to make sure that you keep everything from your children; as we all know your children don't need to know your every problem. You naturally want to protect your children but they need to be told something. Kids aren't stupid and without explanation and clarification they may pick up on what is happening and even blame themselves. If no one gives children any facts, when they have nothing to work with, they will resort to making things up.

You could see these anxiety problems as an opportunity to talk to your children about psychological and mental illness. It's no bad thing to sit children down and explain things to them in a simple way that they can understand. Just remember to make the explanation appropriate for their age. If you have several children of different ages you may wish to give them all a very basic explanation and then separately give a more detailed one to your older children.

7

Conclusion

No matter how many times you may have tried before to sort out your anxiety and panic problems, this time you will succeed. As you've now seen, your anxiety needs to be tackled on a number of different levels in order for you to truly get back the life you want and deserve. It is achievable and you can do it! For many sufferers the steps they've taken in the past are either incorrect, because they were based on poor information, or they've only looked at one tiny aspect of anxiety. By following the 10 Steps outlined in this book, you'll be bringing together lots of different areas in a structured way, addressing not just what causes your anxiety and panic but what makes it worse and what keeps it going. This is a whole body, whole mind and whole life long term solution. Treat the 10 Steps as the whole approach that it is designed to be. Some programmes are designed to paper over the anxiety cracks, the 10 Steps is designed to deal with your anxiety permanently.

I cannot stress enough the importance of following all 10 Steps. There may be bits and pieces that don't apply to you – for example if you aren't on any medication at the minute and aren't considering it then you don't need to worry about Step 3. If you don't smoke you don't need to worry about the smoking section in Step 1. If it doesn't apply to you that's fine but that doesn't mean you can ignore things that you don't like or you find inconvenient. Picking out bits and pieces and leaving chunks out is a waste of your time. If you aren't prepared to take on board and think about what we're saying to you, you need to ask yourself how much you really want to address your anxiety issues. I don't want to get emails from people telling me they tried 3 of the steps and concluded that this programme doesn't work! You don't complain to the manufacturer that your car can't achieve its top speed if you choose to only drive it backwards! If you don't follow all Ten Steps then you aren't giving this programme the chance to work so there is only one place that the buck for that particular failure stops! We said at the start that it may not be easy at times but your goal is within your reach if you're open to what's being said. There is nothing radical anywhere in this book; it's all sound medical practice, just gathered into one place.

Consider carefully each of the 10 Steps in turn, taking notes if needed. Discuss them with your partner or your family or your friends. They're part of your life and I'm sure will have already noticed the change that anxiety has caused in you even if they didn't understand what was happening. They can support you by providing encouragement, creating opportunities for you to become active again and by being your own personal team of supporters.

If you've ever given up smoking then you'll know that once you've given up you can never restart. Being a non-smoker becomes your new way of life. The 10 Steps is exactly the same. It's a new way of life and that means you can't just follow the programme for a few months, get your life back, decide you're

“cured” and then go back to all your old ways again. Our goal is to help you create a lifestyle where your body and mind are given the best chance possible to function as efficiently as they can. This makes you a happier, healthier person who can deal with anything that life throws at them!

Remember we are here for you. Everyone that buys the 10 Steps has free email support to answer any questions or help you with any problems. Just send your email to support@10steps.org.uk.

Many of the programmes I’ve come across love to say that “you can be free from anxiety”. Remembering that anxiety is a normal emotion, I’m not going to say that. What I will say is that you’ll no longer be bothered by anxiety, you’ll accept it for what it is and in time you may learn that anxiety is your friend!

Wishing you every success as you embark on this journey to your brighter future!

Daily Checklist

Am I eating a good, balanced diet?

Am I drinking plenty of water?

Am I making sure I don't drink too much caffeine?

Am I remembering to think about my posture? How about when I'm sitting, standing or lying down?

Have I done any exercise today?

Have I thought about cutting down/giving up on smoking?

Have I made sure I don't have too much alcohol?

Did I get a good night's sleep last night?

Do I understand why I feel the way I do so that I am less worried by it?

Am I doing anything to reduce/eliminate any medication I may not need (in consultation with my doctor)?

Have I spoken to anyone today about the way I feel? Do I need or want to?

Have I kept myself busy today?

Have I done things that needed and got my entire focus and stopped me thinking about my anxiety?

Have I done anything today to help me relax?

Have I tried my hardest to not be constantly looking for reassurance?

Am I thinking positively?

Have I challenged any negative thoughts I may have had?

Have I made sure I didn't associate myself with negative people?

Have I challenged my anxiety today (graded exposure/just do it)?

Did I remember to concentrate on today and not keep thinking about what may have happened in the past?

Am I being patient and not putting myself under unnecessary pressure? Do I need to remind myself of how far I've already come?

My Story

I have deliberately kept my own personal story out of the main part of the book. I know some of you will be interested in hearing my own experiences, others of you I know won't want to read about someone else's problems!

I can remember having anxiety issues back when I was just 15 years old (that's about 23 years ago). They weren't particularly bad, but at the time I know, with hindsight, that I had a tendency to overthink everything. School for me wasn't a particularly happy time and I never really enjoyed the whole education experience with all its extra-curricular activities. I grew up near to Belfast during the Troubles although at the time I was far enough removed for them not to be a problem.

At the age of 17 one particular experience that sticks out is being assaulted coming out of a church in East Belfast. A group of lads approached me (and the girl that was with me) as we were waiting for a bus, pushed me to the ground and kicked me in the face. I wasn't seriously injured but I did break my nose, thanks to a foot in the face, and was rather shaken up by the experience. After that I never did get the bus back from that church again. With hindsight this was one of the first times I can think of where I allowed one negative and traumatic experience to significantly influence my future behaviour.

When I was 18 I moved into a flat on my own. I was never happy living on my own, especially with the fact that I was very close to a pub and at closing time people would walk past and bang the window. Being on my own and having someone bang the window, I was convinced I was going to be attacked in my bed! At the time I wasn't employed so I had a lot of time to myself, although I did start studying Mathematics with the Open University. It was during that time that I first experienced more personally the realities of the Troubles in Northern Ireland when the town that I was living in was bombed and I found myself walking through the immediate aftermath of a bomb blast.

At 19 I met the woman I was to eventually marry (Alison), and for a few years we went through the whole dating thing. After my assault several years before my anxiety was such that at times she had to walk me home safely! I moved house several times to various rented rooms and bedsits and worked for a while doing research work at the local university whilst at the same time doing studies with the Open University. Then, at 21, Alison and I got our first house together. The house was in Belfast itself and in an area not considered to be one of the best; it was not unheard of to hear the odd gunshot lying in bed at night! It was a small terrace house with barely enough room to swing a cat in!

The year we moved in together was probably one of the worst years of my life and was the start of what I would consider my major anxiety issues. To start with Alison was going through a bad time at school and had A-Levels coming up (when we started living together she was still at school) and was diagnosed at the time with depression. I was still studying away! In the summer of that year I had a bad

accident and I broke my back mountain climbing. It took me a long time to recover not to mention almost 8 weeks in hospital.

Alison became pregnant and the following year (1997) our son Cameron was born. I knew that I needed to start thinking about providing for my family properly, so I went and got myself a decent job as an IT Consultant. At first everything was fine, but I struggled to cope with the pressures of the job, financial difficulties, university studies and a new baby in the house. They were a good group of people to work with on the whole but it was a hard job and after about a couple of years I had reached my limit. On more than one occasion I ended up at the doctor with various symptoms. I can remember one particular occasion convinced I couldn't breathe properly however unfortunately at that time I had a doctor who was somewhat of an over-prescriber and he just gave me anti-depressants and tranquilisers. I took the tablets, but they did very little for me – I was so worried about the side effects of them all the time! Eventually it all came to a crisis point and after working 6 and sometimes 7 days a week, I came home from work one day and remember nothing until that evening when I was sectioned under the Mental Health Act and placed in the local Psychiatric hospital. Being placed in that environment didn't improve things at all and depending on which professional I spoke to, I got a different diagnosis every time. At that time I knew nothing much about anxiety or what it was and it felt like I was losing my mind.

I got out of the hospital, went back in again then got out again! Alison became pregnant again and I changed jobs. The new job paid more money but there was more responsibility. Unfortunately with this job there was also a lot of commuting back and forward from Northern Ireland to England (in fact my first day on the new job was in England!). All the time during Alison's pregnancy I was back and forward to the point where I nearly missed the birth; I came back on the Friday after being away for the week and we had our second child on the Saturday.

As a result of all the commuting back and forward to England, I was offered the opportunity to move there permanently as part of a brand new company. This was Christmas 1999. Alison and I discussed the offer and felt that with the considerable increase in salary, the opportunities offered by the new company and the chance to raise our children away from the situation in Northern Ireland it would be a good move for us. The one big drawback was leaving behind all our friends and family. Our New Year was spent surrounded by boxes and we saw in the new Millennium fast asleep in bed after a hard day of packing!

17 January 2000 was our big fresh start! We left Northern Ireland with our 2 children and moved over to Widnes. For a while we moved around, moving to 2 different houses in West Kirby and then back to Widnes again. I worked hard, and we had a better quality of life than we had in Belfast but I struggled with anxiety issues and again was hospitalised to a psychiatric unit on a couple of occasions. The local GP's weren't brilliant and didn't understand the problems much. I didn't particularly understand my problems either and was convinced that I was losing my mind.

Our 3rd (and final!) child, Bethany, was born in 2001. It was difficult without friends and family about

and both Alison and I struggled. We were caught up in some very difficult situations through no fault of our own and the anxiety levels were generally very high for both of us. We found out that our 2nd child Emma was severely mentally handicapped and as time passed she missed more and more of her developmental milestones. At the time we got involved in a local church which we believed would be a source of support for us, but we ended up getting very badly hurt by them and the way we feel they treated us. People struggled to deal with our disabled child and some tried to get involved; I can remember one lovely but misguided lady praying and fasting that the demons that caused her disability would be “cast out”. There were also those who believed that our disabled child shouldn’t be mixing with other so-called “normal” children, telling us “this group isn’t for children like Emma it’s for children like Bethany”. Now, at the age of 13, she is still wearing nappies and is yet to speak but is generally happy and healthy.

Between 2000 and 2005 life carried on. Work was hard but I developed my skills and ended up as Technical Director of an Internet company. As with many Internet businesses the money ran out in the end and although I was able to continue doing bits and pieces of other work I ultimately finished out of work and unemployed. I looked around at what other jobs and opportunities were available in the local area but there was nothing about for someone with the level of qualifications and experience that I had. I very quickly came to the realisation that it probably wouldn’t matter how much money I had, the anxiety issues were very deeply embedded within me. I had often told myself over the years that, “I wouldn’t need to worry if I had more money” or, “I wouldn’t need to worry if we lived in a nicer area”, but it was clear that no matter what my circumstances were I would always find something to worry about!

In 2005 I started down the road of self-employment, developing IT products. If I could develop products for other people why couldn’t I do so for myself? I went into partnership with someone I had met professionally several years before who had also been somewhat stung with an Internet business running out of money! Products in hand we looked into funding to get the business off the ground and felt that North Wales was the place to go. Alison and I went on holiday with the kids to Prestatyn at that point and, after returning from holiday there on the Friday, we were getting ready to sign contracts to move there less than a week later!

Moving to Prestatyn at the start was the best thing we ever did. We made good friends there (that I am still friends with – you know who you are J&D!) and really felt part of the community. Self-employment plodded along for a couple of years; we got some funding and set up offices in St. Asaph but ultimately we ran out of money. Back to unemployment again!

Whilst living in Prestatyn I met two people who had a big impact on our lives (and still do). Those people are John and Lynne Lynn. John Lynn was the Master Instructor of a wonderful Martial Arts School in Rhyl that got me fit, gave me some good friends and gave me confidence and self-esteem that I realised I didn’t have.

It was during my latter time in Prestatyn that I had my first problem with feeling trapped in my own

home. Alison and I were falsely accused by a “professional” of child neglect and really struggled to get through the situation. Wild accusations appeared from nowhere and we were constantly being treated as guilty until proven innocent. After a particularly bad meeting where we felt ganged up on and intimidated, I had a Panic Attack and became convinced I was going to either faint, go insane or worse. After that I refused to leave the house for several months; I felt incapable of going anywhere. Eventually I realised enough was enough and I made a decision to get back out again. I started to go for walks every day, getting further and further each day. From there we started going out in the car and I gradually got back into things. It was difficult for a while getting back into a normal routine and a lot of little things kept reminding me of the experience; for a long time I struggled to be in rooms with strong florescent lighting. Was this Agoraphobia? – I’m not entirely sure if it was or whether it was PTSD or even depression since I didn’t have the inclination to go out. I know that my confidence was certainly nonexistent and it took quite a while to get it back again. Eventually, the truth came out and the accuser ended up having to resign after a long period of suspension for his actions in this matter.

Whilst living in Prestatyn, I got back into product development again and got involved with a businessman contact I had met. I was fortunate that my work was done at home and everything was passed back and forward by email. I was back employed again, working from home with the odd trip down to the office in Wrexham. The business grew very quickly and I worked hard as Technical Director, continuing to develop the technology and run the IT infrastructure. Ultimately there came a point that it was felt that the business was ready to grow to the next level and significant funding needed to be brought in. One of the sticking points was the fact that the funders felt that the person in charge of product development and IT really needed to be in the office on a daily basis, particularly as additional IT staff were being brought in. I was asked to move house to be nearer the office which we promptly did and ended up in Wrexham. The move to Wrexham was at the tail end of the problems of Prestatyn and interestingly it was all the stresses of moving house that really helped; I just didn’t have the time to think about myself because of how much we had to do! Initially I was still affected by the earlier problems of Prestatyn and at the start every time I went into the office Alison either had to sit in the office with me or wait out in the car park, sometimes for hours, until I had finished work. We worked at this and were able to move to Alison being at local shops, then to further shops and eventually to Alison being able to go home. Ultimately the move to Wrexham helped in no small way to leave behind the sour taste we had from what had gone on in Prestatyn.

When we moved to Wrexham we left behind John Lynn’s Black Belt Academy in Rhyl. Truth be told with the way we felt about what had happened it was one of the few places we actually missed! Alison and I had been helping out in Rhyl at the Karate school for several years as Assistant Instructors and after moving to Wrexham were given the opportunity to start our own branch of John Lynn’s Black Belt Academy. It was a wonderful opportunity and we jumped at the chance. We didn’t do it to make money – we’ve never had a penny out of it, but we did it because we knew how much good it did for our own children and wanted to help others.

For a while life was good in Wrexham. We enjoyed working with children teaching Karate. I was back to working in an office every day and although I had anxiety issues at the start, I settled in a routine and

enjoyed it; even days where I didn't have to go into the office, I went in regardless! Everything fell apart abruptly when it turned out that things with the company weren't what they had appeared and it was forced to close at very short notice. This caused a great deal of uncertainty and worry and to say this was a source of stress would be an understatement, especially as other people turned to me, expecting me to magically know all the answers! Attempts were made to resurrect the company and do something with it; in the end only three staff were employed out of the original complement of thirty or so. I was one of these. The new office didn't remain in Wrexham and ended up sixty miles away as part of the restructuring. I found it extremely difficult going to the new office, and on a couple of occasions we got fifty nine miles out of sixty into our journey and I just had to come home; I simply couldn't face going in and my stress level was through the roof. The day business re-launched the three remaining employees went out for a business lunch; I spent the whole time pacing outside, having had a panic attack sitting at the table. The earlier issues from Wrexham returned at such a level that even when we did reach the office, Alison always had to wait close by, getting to the point where I became extremely anxious if I left the office and she wasn't there waiting for me in the car. I needed to feel like I could "escape" whenever I needed to, and found that more and more I was feeling trapped.

At this time we found out that the house we were renting would not have its lease renewed (the owner's son needed somewhere to live!) and so we were forced to move house at very short notice. Overnight we went from being happy and settled where we were living to having to find somewhere new to live, pack everything up and move house again. We moved to Rossett some three weeks later. We took the view that if we were going to have to move we should do it sooner rather than later and minimise the amount of upheaval. The Rossett move was a difficult one, probably because of the suddenness of the whole thing and how happy we were in the old house but we settled in quickly. Rossett is a lovely little village just outside Wrexham, with a great sense of community and history. Although I was able to do some contract work for a number of months, it was difficult and caused me a lot of stress-related problems. Things got to the point that I simply couldn't continue with work and I ended up unemployed (again!). I started to experience reasonably regular panic attacks and simply could not have held down a full time job.

After moving house to Rossett anxiety was a big issue virtually constantly. In hindsight it's obvious now that a lot of things we did were accommodating my anxiety problems but we simply didn't notice at the time. We can now both look back and see how things were building up and the number of concessions that had to be made if we were to go somewhere. Although I was still getting places, I was certainly using a lot of safety behaviours, although at the time I didn't know what a safety behaviour was! Even if we had noticed this deterioration, I doubt we would have considered these small steps that serious. Christmas in Rossett came about and with no job, everything winding down and not a lot to do and I ending up spending the whole time being incredibly stressed and focusing on my anxiety issues.

After Christmas I was feeling very anxious and panicky a lot of the time. Crisis point came in January when I had a really bad panic attack. Virtually overnight I became so terrified of it happening again that I couldn't go out anywhere. Every time I tried to go out I would panic. I couldn't even get to the corner shop just thirty seconds drive away and life went on hold. All the routine things that most people take

for granted just couldn't happen anymore; no more going grocery shopping, no more taking the kids places, no more routine medical appointments.

My life that I had had now disappeared overnight. No job. No activities. Nothing to do. The anxiety just got worse. The lovely little village just outside Wrexham, within easy reach of many amenities, suddenly felt so very isolated and removed from everything. On occasion we were able to get out the house in the car, however whenever this did happen I was unable to get out the car and we ended up driving round in circles less than half a mile from home. I remember at one point we spent over an hour driving around the same junction while I tried to get the courage up to go on the dual carriageway into Wrexham.

I spent a lot of time on the Internet looking up anxiety information, seeing all the cures that are offered out there and using the ones I thought would work. I spent money on CD's, DVD's etc.. Nothing worked, and if truth be told, it made things worse. I believed that if a "free from anxiety in one easy step" programme didn't work then there must be something wrong with me. I was so confused by constantly being told that the conventional methods never worked, that modern psychology was all nonsense and a cure lay in these "unique" solutions. When available I used the support services (either telephone or email support) from these programmes but the standard reply when I had a problem was always that if it wasn't working for me then I wasn't following their programme correctly and it was my fault. The one that appeared to be working for a couple of months and had me starting to get out the house wasn't sustainable and didn't result in any recovery at all; at best it helped me to understand my anxiety a lot better but its guided steps to recovery were difficult and impractical. Some of the materials even contradicted what other parts of the programme said, leaving me even more confused! Time and time again I noticed that a lot of the material I was reading never really explained how to do things; instead they seemed to just throw out blanket statements that raised more questions than they answered, expecting me to take their statements on faith.

After months of false starts, and having had more than my fill of Internet rubbish, I started my own research in earnest. I researched and researched everything I could. I went back to the times when my anxiety was at its worst and I looked at what my lifestyle was like then; was I active, what was I eating, what was I drinking? I believed that people could and did get their life back from anxiety so I was determined to cut through all the nonsense and get to the truth of what the solution was. And I did. When I had worked out what I was looking for, I was finding that time and time again the solutions I came across were working consistently and having permanent results which they then did for me! I looked carefully at all areas of my life, especially diet, and was able to reduce my BMI from "Overweight" to "Normal"; not by dieting but simply by changing my lifestyle to a healthier one. I looked at exercise and types of exercise and I bought myself an exercise bike, a stepper and an elliptical trainer and started exercising regularly!

And over time by following the 10 Steps I have now given you I got back out there! I got into the centre of Wrexham again. I got back to the supermarket. I stopped having to get home delivery for every weekly food shop. I got back to teaching Karate. I started to enjoy going places and life got back on

track again. I truly believe the end result of my experience is a solution to anxiety that really, really works!

Why did I write this book? I didn't write this book because I thought I could make money – I'm not expecting to. I wrote this book because I have lost many years of my life to anxiety; in nights out that I didn't do, in events I didn't go to, in places that I didn't visit. Those years are only wasted if nothing good comes from them; if I can use my experiences and my research to give other people their lives back then I consider that it was worthwhile.

Dear Doctor....

The next time you go to see your doctor, take this book with you and show them these pages. Your doctor won't have time to read the entire book but this will let them know what you are doing and what this programme is about.

Dear Doctor,

Your patient has bought a copy of this self-help book because they have an anxiety or panic disorder. They've been encouraged to come and talk to you about it. We realise that you'll be understandably cautious about information a patient has acquired themselves via the Internet and we feel it important to reassure you about what this programme is about.

This book will help your patient help themselves and, with your support and reassurance, we believe they'll be able to resolve their anxiety and panic issues. Please let them know that everything here is sound advice and they should not be concerned about what we are encouraging them to do.

In step 1 of the programme we discuss the role of diet in anxiety. We look at the importance of eating a balanced diet as well as issues associated with dehydration, excessive caffeine, alcohol and food additives. We go on to look at the importance of good posture and regular exercise. If your patient is a smoker, they've been asked to come and talk to you about giving up. We've told them that nicotine is a stimulant. The importance of physical activity and exercise is discussed; if appropriate could you also please let your patient know what exercises they can or can't do and any restrictions there may be for them.

In step 2 we explain what anxiety is. When your patient understands their anxiety in more detail they will learn to fear it less. We talk about adrenaline, noradrenaline and cortisol, what they do and what happens during anxiety. We help demystify the whole process.

In step 3 we talk about medication. Your patient knows that anxiety medication is at best only a short term tool on the road to recovery and in itself is not a long term solution or a cure. They've been asked to discuss their medication with you but have been told not to stop taking it/them unless they have spoken to you first for your guidance.

In step 4 we talk about the importance of talking; either to a professional such as a Counsellor or CBT Therapist or just friends and family about the way they feel. We fully endorse the efficacy of CBT, either by a guided self-help programme such as this or by face to face counselling. We also look at other forms of psychological therapies and discuss how each of them works.

Step 5 goes on to discuss the importance of occupying the mind. We believe your patient needs to spend as little time as possible thinking about their problems and as much time as they can enjoying hobbies and interests, learning new skills and gaining new experiences.

Step 6 of the programme asks your patient to stop constantly seeking reassurance, if that's an issue to them. We talk about health anxieties and about why they shouldn't be coming to see you too often if nothing has changed.

In step 7 we look at the importance of positive thinking and challenging negative thinking. We discuss catastrophisation, constantly believing the worst, and look at alternative ways of thinking about things.

In step 8 we look at the need to get back out and doing things – either just by making that conscious decision or by using graded exposure. If graded exposure is needed, your patient is helped to set targets and then further break those targets into manageable daily goals.

In the penultimate step we talk about the importance of not constantly thinking about the problems of the past caused by their anxiety and look only to the future. We look at the expectations that your patient has; what to them constitutes an “anxiety cure”?

We finish by reassuring your patient that there is no “normal recovery time”. Their recovery will take however long it takes and not to rush it. The important thing is that they keep moving forward.

Please encourage your patient as they work through this programme.

If you would like to receive a full copy of this book, we offer an electronic copy to all medical practitioners at no charge. If interested, or if you have any questions, please email us at info@10steps.org.uk.

Thank You.

INDEX

3

3 types of fear14

7

7 types of anxiety disorder18

A

addiction..... 48, 55, 60, 62
additives38
adrenaline..... 7, 8, 11, 41, 45, 138
agoraphobia..... 2, 18, 20, 22, 57, 69, 77, 99, 103, 107, 112
alcohol 31, 101, 138
amygdala 5, 7, 11
anti-anxiety drugs61
antidepressants62
anti-psychotics63
anxiety disorder18, 23, 34, 53, 77, 109, 111, 115, 123
autonomic nervous system 7, 40
avoidance..... 55, 56
avoiders3

B

back118
balanced diet 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 36, 138
bed nucleus of the stria terminalis6
beta-blockers63
blood pressure..... 22, 63, 81
body mass Index33
brain 5, 6, 11, 12, 49, 53, 61, 68, 85, 90, 104, 107, 110
breathing 25, 40, 41

C

caffeine28, 29
calcium..... 29, 32, 38
carbohydrates32
catastrophisation26, 139
catastrophization87
CBT.....68
central nervous system61

chest symptoms	11
children	126
chocolate	10, 31, 33, 53, 92
cholesterol	32, 34, 45
classic conditioning	5
clinical depression	110
clumsiness	10, 62
cognitive behavioural therapy	23, 68, 69, 70
conditioned response	5
confronters	3
confusion	27
conscious	6, 68, 89, 96, 115, 119, 139
constant pulse checking.....	22
constipation	9
copper.....	38
cortex.....	6
cortisol.....	6, 8, 9, 11, 45, 118, 138
counsellor	23, 66, 67
counsellors.....	120

D

dairy products.....	32
dehydration	26, 27, 28, 138
depersonalisation	12, 13
depression	46, 61, 62, 63, 70, 110, 131
derealisation	12, 13
desensitisation therapy	98
detached.....	14
diarrhea	9
diet	25, 26, 34
digestion	4, 27
disassociated	14
doctor.....	3, 23, 24, 48, 50, 53, 60, 61, 64, 65, 81, 85, 86, 110, 132, 138
dopamine.....	45
drink.....	26, 27, 28, 53, 64, 101

E

emotion	1, 2, 12, 19, 22, 57, 128
emotional symptoms.....	11
exercise.....	25, 27, 28, 34, 42, 43, 45, 46, 50, 51, 53, 61, 87, 91, 118, 123, 136, 138
exposure therapy.....	98
external fear	14

F

faint	10, 27, 28, 90, 134
fatigue.....	10
fats.....	32
fear	2, 11, 12, 14, 41

fight or flight	1, 63
fish	32, 34
flooding.....	107
food	4, 29, 32, 38, 64, 101, 138
food additives	36
fruit and vegetables	32

G

general bodily symptoms.....	10
generalised anxiety disorder.....	2, 18, 19, 22
GnIH.....	9
GnRH.....	9
goals	110
gonadotropin releasing hormone	9
gonadotropin-inhibiting hormone.....	9
Google Streetview	103
graded exposure	98, 103
group therapy	72

H

headaches.....	11, 19, 29, 43, 63
health anxiety	2, 22, 79, 80
healthy weight	33, 45
heart	7, 11, 34, 46, 57, 58, 63, 91
heartburn.....	9
hippocampus	7, 8
hyperventilate.....	28
hyperventilation	40
hypnotherapy	23, 119
hypothalamus	6

I

illogical thoughts.....	90
immune system	9, 37, 45, 118
indigestion	9
insomnia	35, 51, 64
integrative psychotherapy	71
internal fear	14
isometric tension	7, 8
ivan pavlov.....	4

J

jaw pain	11
joseph wolpe	107

K

kinesiophobia112

L

life coach.....118
limiting beliefs15, 111
locus ceruleus6
logical thoughts90
lump in the throat.....11

M

magnesium38
martial arts77, 99, 133
massage118
massage therapy.....118, 119
meat32
medication59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 69, 70, 101, 127, 138
meditation41, 49
mentally ill16, 22
milk32
mindfulness41, 73
minerals32, 33, 36, 37, 38
mood62, 93, 110
mood swings.....12
muscle twitching.....11
muscles7, 11, 56
muscular symptoms.....10

N

nausea13, 19, 62, 63
neck10, 11, 19, 43
negative thoughts.....87
nicotine47
night panic16
noradrenaline7, 8, 11, 37, 45, 63, 138
norepinephrine.....7, 63
numbness10

O

obsessive compulsive disorder2, 18, 21
OCD.....18
omega-3 fatty acids32
overly sensitive10
overweight.....33

oxygen40

P

panic attack . 20, 27, 40, 58, 61, 62, 90, 91, 92, 96, 102, 134, 135
panic disorder 18, 20, 69
parasympathetic nervous system9
partners121
personal trainer120
person-centered therapy72
PNS9
post-traumatic stress disorder 18, 21
posture 25, 43
potassium35
protein32
psychodynamic therapy70
psychologist66
PTSD.....18

R

random panic.....15
relaxation.....77

S

safety behaviours.....108
salt38, 123
saturated fat 32, 34
sensations..... 10, 28, 31, 40, 41, 57, 58, 59, 60, 65, 101, 107
sensory symptoms12
serotonin45
sex drive.....10
shallow breaths40
short of breath..... 11, 58
shoulders19, 118
situational depression110
situational exposure98
situational panic15
sleep 13, 25, 49, 50, 51, 64
sleep symptoms13
sleeping tablets.....64
smoking 25, 47, 48
SNS.....7
social anxiety 2, 99
social phobia 18, 19
specific phobias20
stimulant..... 28, 29, 138
stimulation panic16
stimulus control therapy.....50
stomach acid.....9

stomach symptoms.....	13
subconscious	68, 70, 76, 96, 105, 115, 119
subconscious fear	15
sugar	10, 31, 33
suicidal thoughts.....	93
sympathetic nervous system	7
symptoms.....	6, 10, 13, 18, 19, 25, 26, 27, 28, 35, 46, 57, 58, 60, 61, 63, 64, 65, 85, 91, 96, 101, 112, 132

T

talking therapies	46, 66, 67
TEA cycle.....	88
telephone helplines	119
temperature checking.....	22
temporo-mandibular joint	8
thalamus.....	6
TMJ	8
tranquiliser	38, 61, 62

U

underweight	33
unsaturated fats.....	32
urine	29

V

vitamin B1.....	37
vitamin B12.....	32, 37
vitamin B3.....	37
vitamin B5.....	37
vitamin B6.....	37
vitamin B9.....	37
vitamin C.....	37
vitamin E	38
vitamins	32

W

water	27, 29, 31
weight.....	32, 33

Y

yoga	41
------------	----

Z

zinc.....38