

How to **RELIEVE ANXIETY** During stressful times



The Road Map out of Anxiety



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Welcome

We are living through some challenging and stressful times and most, if not all of us will be experiencing a level of anxiety and stress in some form or another due to the global Coronavirus pandemic. Although, It's not just the pandemic that's creating anxiety in our lives, as we will have lived and continue to live through many stressful times that predate Covid and could still be creating challenges. Our world continues to experience uncertainty and us humans do not respond well to the unknown. Wearing face coverings, exercising a heightened state of vigilance, changes in work environments, redundancy, family, relationship, financial stress will be having a significant impact on many people's lives. This is just a few examples of how we might be experiencing anxiety during stressful times.

Anxiety can manifest in many ways and can have a significant impact on daily life. For those who have a history of anxiety related disorders, the Covid pandemic and subsequent environmental changes will, no doubt have exacerbated symptoms, particularly for those who experience health anxiety. If anxiety is having an impact on your quality of life and you are looking for support and advice, this eBooklet is for you.

My intention is to provide you with a comprehensive understanding of what causes of the unpleasant symptoms of anxiety, how these symptoms can accumulate and, if left untreated, can have a long term, debilitating effect on your life and the lives of those who care about you.



I have helped hundreds of people reduce and resolve anxiety and enjoy the freedom this brings to their lives. I hope that you find benefit from this eBooklet as I unfold the 'Road Map out of Anxiety'.

Defining Anxiety & Stress



The Oxford dictionary definition of Anxiety is '*a feeling of worry, nervousness or unease about something with an uncertain outcome*'. If you are in possession of this eBooklet, you will likely be able to relate to this definition.

Anxiety is a normal part of life so it can be difficult to recognise when it's becoming a problem. Everyone experiences anxiety at one time or another, it's the body's natural response to stress. The difference

between stress and anxiety is that stress is a response to a threat in a situation and anxiety is a reaction to that stress.

Most of us know what it's like to feel stressed, anxious or worried and often these unpleasant feelings are in response to a crisis, a difficult event or situation. This type of anxiety will usually disappear as quickly as it came when the reason that caused the stress has been resolved. But for those who experience symptoms of anxiety on a regular basis, there doesn't always have to be a crisis, difficult event or situation. The symptoms can be intense and exhausting, physically and emotionally. There are many different types of anxiety and the following are the most common types; Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD), Health Anxiety, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Phobias, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Did you know that anxiety and excitement have the same physiological response? They are born out of a heightened state of arousal that's triggered by the Sympathetic Nervous System (our "fight, flight, freeze" response). When we are anxious or excited, our heartrate increases, stomach churns and the stress hormone, cortisol surges through our bloodstream to get us out of what the primitive, emotional part of our brain perceives to be a life-threatening situation.

The only difference is that excitement is a positive emotion and anxiety is a negative one. The elevated fight, flight response can also be referred to as an 'adrenaline rush'.

I use an example of the nervous anxiety and excitement while standing in the queue for the rollercoaster ride at a theme park, as the train whirrs to a halt. The thrill seekers among us will know the feeling; stomach churning, toe curling 'anxious excitement' as we climb on and the safety bar comes down. At what point would any of those riders have been able to differentiate between where the anxiety became excitement, or the excitement became anxiety? They wouldn't have been able to, as both have exactly the same physiological response. The answer, in fact, lies within our mindset. The emotional response and interpretation of the rollercoaster ride, for example, will dictate whether the experience was one of high excitement or high anxiety for each individual. If the experience caused 'white knuckle' anxiety, then it's likely that a belief will have been formed that rollercoaster rides are petrifying and the experience wouldn't be repeated. It's the same in our daily lives too, each of us will respond to life situations and events dependent on our personal experience and belief system in each of these environments. Particularly those that had triggered anxiety in the past.

Of course, there are many environments where anxiety will be a valid response to a life experience, e.g., a trip to the dentist, undergoing a medical procedure, attending a job interview or making an important financial decision. We would expect this type of anxiety to subside soon after the situation or event has resolved and in most cases it does, but there are other environments where anxiety can tighten its grip:

Stress at work, university, school	Chronic or serious illness
Personal relationships	Legal or illegal drugs
Covid Pandemic - Coronanxiety	Excessive alcohol consumption
Childhood trauma	Smoking
Overwhelm	Excess Caffeine intake
Financial stress	Disrupted sleep
Home stress	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

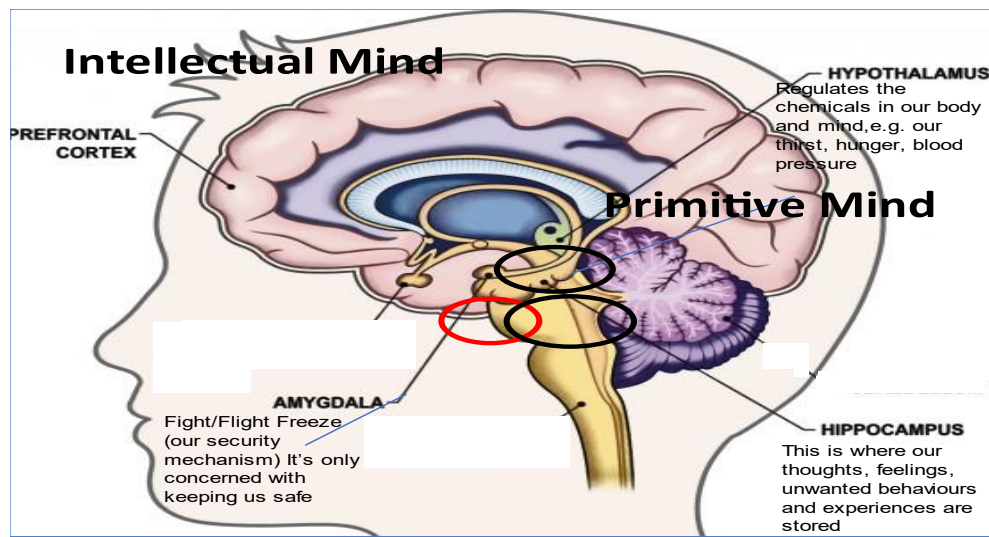
Anxiety will feel different for everyone, although there are certain symptoms that you might relate to if you are experiencing acute or chronic anxiety:

<i>Are you overthinking or over worrying about the past, the present or the future?</i>	<i>Do you experience palpitations?</i>
<i>Do you struggle to get to sleep or have broken sleep?</i>	<i>Does Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) prevent you from relaxing when away from home?</i>
<i>Do you regularly feel angry, frustrated, irritable?</i>	<i>Are you always tense, restless?</i>
<i>Are mood swings causing issues for you?</i>	<i>Do you feel scared for no apparent reason?</i>
	<i>Do you find it difficult to focus/concentrate?</i>

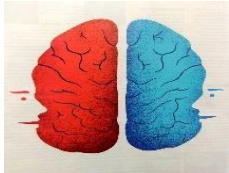
As a sufferer of chronic anxiety and panic attacks in my younger years, and at certain times in my adult life, I know how debilitating it can be and the impact it can have on daily life. I distinctly recall how my confidence was significantly affected and how it prevented me from socialising with friends and enjoying life as a young person should.

At some point in our lives each one of us will experience anxiety at some level. However, when it starts to interfere with our health, our happiness and freedom of choice it's time to address the underlying cause, so that we can better manage the unwanted feelings that anxiety can bring to our lives.

The Fight –Flight–Freeze Response



Although we have one brain, **we have 'two minds'**. The **intellectual mind** and the **primitive mind**. Have you ever found yourself saying 'I'm in two minds about that' or 'a part of me wants to do it but the other part doesn't'? That will be your two minds having an internal debate!



The **intellectual mind** is the rational, logical part of our brain, known as the pre-frontal cortex. When we operate from this part of our brain, we get things right; we can think, act and interact in a positive and rational way and we are able to make good decisions and choices.

The other part of our brain, the **primitive mind**, is known as the limbic system and this is where we're likely to respond to life events in an emotional way, thinking, feeling, acting and reacting in a negative, irrational way. The central and most influential part of the primitive mind is the Amygdala, known as the 'fight, flight, freeze' part of the brain. It's associated with two other primitive parts of the brain, the Hippocampus, that stores our emotional life experiences and behavioural patterns in our subconscious 'archive filing system' and the Hypothalamus that regulates the chemicals in our body and mind as well as our body temperature, sleep, hunger and thirst.

Understanding the Fight-Flight-Freeze Response. When we experience anxiety, anger, stress or fear our body releases the stress hormone, cortisol, which activates the fight, flight, freeze response. An example of this response is when, for example, we have a fear of spiders and come face to face with one. The fight/flight/freeze response is triggered and we will likely panic, scream and run away as fast as we can. This is known as an irrational fear or phobia and will have been formed at some point in our life where a 'faulty pattern match' will have been established and filed away in the Hippocampus, so that any time there's exposure to a spider, the Amygdala will perceive this as a real threat and the fight, flight, freeze response activated. If our primitive mind perceives a threat around, either real or imagined, the Amygdala will promptly send an electrical impulse (a message) via the hypothalamus to the adrenal glands to release cortisol and adrenaline into our bloodstream, preparing us to either run away from that threat, to fight our way out or to freeze with fear. Cortisol and adrenaline heighten our senses, raising our vigilance to what's happening around us, causing our heart to race and blood being pumped to where it's needed, enabling us to flee from potential harm. The Amygdala is our safety mechanism or metaphorical 'smoke alarm' and is activated in times of threat or danger to ensure that we are kept safe.

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This would have been vital in the days of our primal ancestors when they had to hunt and gather in the wilderness where wild animals and wild tribesmen were lurking around, but it's not entirely necessary when we have to go into a crowded place or drive along a motorway to reach a planned destination. The 'Amygdala' can't tell the difference between imagination and reality. All it has to go on are the thoughts in our head and the physiological response in our body, i.e., negative thoughts, heart thumping, pulse racing, stomach churning; all of which activate the Fight, Flight, Freeze response, but where's the wild animal or wild tribesman? I use the examples of going in to a crowded place or driving along a motorway as an example of common triggers for anxiety but, realistically should going into a crowded place or driving along a motorway be a genuine cause to feel anxious and fearful? The obvious answer should be 'No' but for many people who have an established fear of crowded places or driving along a motorway, it would be a definite 'Yes'.

If you have an anxiety disorder you might avoid certain situations because you are worried that it will trigger unpleasant feelings at the thought of going in to a crowded place. Unfortunately, the more we resist going to environments that cause us to feel anxious, the more we will reinforce and establish that unwanted behaviour. At times, just thinking about the 'stressor' can evoke feelings of anxiety, so triggering the fight/flight/fear response. This repeated emotional behaviour will have formed a template/habit that will have been 'filed away' in the primitive, subconscious mind as a 'genuine' threat. Although it's not an 'actual' threat, it's a faulty pattern match, an irrational fear that can equally cause the same stress and anxiety as if it were an actual threat. When we don't feel able to go in to crowded spaces or drive along a motorway it restricts our freedom to enjoy the way we want to live. We might be missing out on other opportunities and happiness too, because of the unhelpful anxiety/fear templates that are set down in the subconscious mind.

Anxiety becomes a mental health problem when it starts to affect our daily life. Regardless of when the symptoms began, we can experience feelings of anxiety, stress, worry or fear regularly, always anticipating something going wrong. It might be that, like me, you were an anxious child who grew into an anxious adult, or maybe you developed anxiety in later life due to a traumatic or unpleasant experience. Those who have a fear of spiders will have, at some point in their life witnessed someone becoming fearful /hysterical at the sight of the spider and this experience will have 'seeded' a fear in the subconscious mind, creating a belief that a spider is a threat so each time a spider makes an appearance, the fear response will alert the Amygdala to step in and get them away from the eight-legged furry fiend as quickly as possible. This is just one example of a faulty pattern match being filed away in the subconscious mind and forming a negative belief.

Anxiety can be difficult to live with. It can feel exhausting and can take its toll on our physical and mental health. Anxiety is a reaction to stressful events and situations in life that can be fearful and tense. Did you know that every negative emotion can be converted into anxiety? When we feel stressed, anxious, bound to be feeling negative. We can negatively worry about things that have happened and quickly get caught up in a vicious cycle because the more we feel stressed, anxious, angry or worried, the more negatively and the more these unpleasant emotions will accumulate in the primitive, emotional part of our brain, which I refer to as our



cause us to feel worried, thought we have is angry or worried we are about the future or we are in the past, causing a cycle because, the more we will be thinking accumulate in the primitive,

The more anxiety, worry and fear that's stored in our stress bucket, the more we will operate from the emotional, irrational part of our brain (primitive mind) and the more we will be encouraged to think, feel and act in a negative way.

You can find out how full your stress bucket is and how anxiety is impacting your life by taking the Anxiety Test below, writing down your rating on a notepad or paper. This test will provide you with an indication of whether you are experiencing the most common symptoms of an anxiety disorder and whether your anxiety is mild, moderate or severe. However, this test cannot replace a medical assessment, and neither should it be used to self-diagnose. For each assessment in the questionnaire, consider how often you feel that way and the impact it has on your everyday living experience.

Anxiety Test					
	Very Often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Feeling tense, nervous or unable to relax					
Catastrophic thinking; fearing the worst. Having a sense of dread for what the future holds					
Lack of appetite					
Loss of interest in things you used to enjoy					
Excessive worrying without a valid reason					
Mood swings, e.g., low mood, anger, irritability, intolerance, frustration					
Avoiding social events, crowds etc					
Difficulty getting to sleep and/or staying asleep					
Difficulty concentrating and/or making decisions					
Experiencing panic attacks					
Physical symptoms, increased heart rate, Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) headaches, nausea, dry mouth					
	Severe		Moderate	Mild	

**If you have identified that your anxiety level is in the 'severe' category you may consider seeking support from your General Practitioner to consider any potential medical cause and to discuss either a short or long-term plan to relieve the symptoms. Medication can help to reduce acute and chronic anxiety, improve and regulate sleep which, as you will find out below, plays an important role in the management of anxiety and stress. Many people rely on sleep or anti-anxiety medication to find relief from the unpleasant symptoms of anxiety and, although medication may cause unpleasant side effects, at times they can be beneficial in the short term. *It's important to schedule regular GP reviews to adjust or reduce the medication prescription as you start to feel better.

How can you improve your results to effectively reduce anxiety without unpleasant side effects?

Reducing the contents of our 'stress bucket' is a very good place to start so let me explain how we do this.



We empty our stress bucket when we are asleep and in dreaming state. The dreaming state is referred to as Rapid Eye Movement, abbreviated to REM sleep. We all know how it feels when someone upsets us; we can become frustrated, hurt and/or angry and that negative emotion will filter in to our stress bucket and, each time we relive that negative experience by thinking about it or talking about it to family and friends, we will be adding even more negative emotion into the stress bucket. At night, during REM sleep, we will re-run that negative experience in either clear or metaphorical dreaming state, flushing it out from the emotional, primitive part of our brain (our stress bucket) to the rational, logical part of our brain so that, when we awake in the morning we may not have forgotten about that upsetting experience but we will be thinking more rationally about it and wondering, '*why do I let it/them get to me so much?*'.

A healthy amount of sleep (between 7 to 9 hours per night) is vital for us to function at our best. Children and teenagers need even more, ranging between 8 to 12 hours and, despite the notion that our need for sleep decreases with age, most older people, aged 65 and over still need between 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night. It's important for us to understand and appreciate why sleep is essential, particularly as Rapid Eye Movement (REM) is restricted to 20% of our sleep pattern and so, for us to keep our 'stress bucket' at a low, healthy level, we need to encourage a healthy amount of sleep so that we can optimise REM sleep and effectively reduce or empty our stress bucket. We will know when our stress bucket is full as, during REM sleep our mind will be working extra hard to flush the overload of emotional stress from the primitive brain to the rational brain and our minds will wake us up. I'm sure we can all recall a time, particularly during the pandemic, when we've experienced increased anxiety, stress and worry and have either not been able to get to sleep or have woken in the night and not been able to get back to sleep. If our stress bucket has been full for a significant amount of time we might experience an episode of sleepless nights which can, if not addressed, establish a poor sleep habit, leading to chronic sleep deprivation. When our sleep is broken, we will be missing out on REM sleep and stress bucket emptying will be compromised, hence our stress continuing to accumulate and creating a vicious cycle.



How did our primitive ancestors manage to sleep in the wilderness knowing that there were wild animals and wild tribesmen posing a real threat outside their tribal walls? We will all be familiar with that sense of security when we feel supported by family, friends, work colleagues, it was just the same for primitive man. They knew that they were much safer being part of a tribe than being alone as that feeling of being supported allowed them to cope much better when exposed to fear. They felt safer, braver and more motivated to hunt and gather, which not only fed the tribe but also brought other rewards such as positive relationships and a strong sense of connection. Neuroscientists later studied the behaviour of the primitive man and established that the rewards they experienced from being part of a tribe were as a result of a chemical reaction in their brains. This chemical reaction caused various neurotransmitters to act as a stimulus for the mentally healthy behaviour they enjoyed and the neurotransmitter that was the most significant and still is to this day is serotonin. When we produce a constant flow of serotonin, we are able to cope much better, feel more resilient, happier and motivated to think, act and interact in a positive way.

For us to generate the same positive neurotransmitters that encouraged the healthy coping mechanisms of our primal ancestors, we have to **think positively, interact positively** and **be active positively** because when we engage in these healthy behaviours, we can enjoy all the benefits of the naturally occurring 'antidepressant', in the form of Serotonin, Dopamine and Oxytocin.

In my next eBooklet 'The 3P Model' based on the positive neurotransmitters referred to above, I will explain more about how we can engage with and benefit from operating within these mentally healthy parameters so that we can encourage the release of serotonin (our coping mechanism) dopamine (our reward hormone) and oxytocin (our 'comfort blanket' or 'hug' hormone) without having to rely on medications that can cause unpleasant side effects.

The 3P Model eBooklet will open the metaphorical door to mindset change, providing you with an insight into the workings of the brain. By gaining knowledge and understanding of the role these vital neurotransmitters play in reducing and eliminating anxiety and stress you can construct and access an improved way of thinking, interacting and being active in a positive way. This will encourage a healthy mind and body that will in turn keep the stress bucket at a healthy level, enabling you to enjoy a happier, healthier, more balanced way of living.



In the meantime, here is your '**Road Map out of Anxiety**' offering you effective ways of reducing and resolving the unpleasant symptoms that anxiety brings, particularly during stressful times. Think of it as remapping your anxious brain, providing you with information, advice and tips that will navigate you on your journey out of anxiety, offering you a more relaxed and calm way of living.

Sleep



"A ruffled mind makes a restless pillow" ~ Charlotte Bronte

As I explained above, getting adequate sleep is essential to our physical and emotional wellbeing as it reduces our 'stress bucket' to healthy levels and there are many other factors to sleep too.

Very few of us will have considered sleep as being a 'treatment' to cure many ills but it is in fact just that. If there was a ***prescription** for this 'cure all' I'm sure we would be queuing up for it. Sleep dispenses a multitude of health benefits every 24 hours, strengthening our immune system being just one of those many benefits.

We will all know what it feels like to be sleep deprived. We can become irritable, anxious, stressed and may feel the need to take a daytime nap. Sleep deprivation is a common problem in our society and for too many, a decent night's sleep has become a distant memory. Insomnia is debilitating and has the potential to cause a decline in overall mental and physical health.

The anxiety and stress associated with the Covid pandemic, as well as the major disruption to our lives may have had a significant impact on our sleep and, given that sleep is where we release the stress of the day, it can accumulate and exacerbate feelings of anxiety and stress 😞

Getting between 7-9 hours of sleep each night is the recommended guideline and so how can we achieve a healthy, regular and restorative sleep? There are so many ways to encourage a better night's sleep and, during these strange times that we are living in we will do well to check in with and seek to improve our sleep health, so here are just a few tips to help you encourage and benefit from a good night's sleep.

- Going to bed at the same time and setting the alarm for the same wake time is a great start as our circadian rhythm, our body clock gets used to a set routine.
- Avoid big meals, caffeine and alcohol at least two hours before sleep.
- Switch off the TV half an hour before bedtime. Try to avoid watching the late news as this can encourage anxiety and stress.
- A warm bath before bed will help your body reach a temperature ideal for rest; keeping your bedroom cool is beneficial too.
- Hugging your partner, child/children or stroking your pet before bed releases oxytocin, the cuddle hormone, which has a calming influence and, if none of the above are available, you can use the therapeutic touch of the 'Havening' technique by simply crossing your arms over your chest and placing your hands on each shoulder. Gently stroke your arms in a downward motion to your elbows and repeat for a few minutes. While doing this, you can choose to repeat a simple affirmation, e.g., 'I am calm and relaxed' while stroking your arms. Engaging with

this reassuring 'self-hugging' exercise boosts serotonin, dopamine and oxytocin in your brain, helping you to relax and significantly reducing anxiety and tension.

- Before you go to your bedroom write a 'To Do' list for the next day as this can export the mental list from your mind on to paper and so reducing mind clutter, this provides reassurance that you have all your chores and tasks logged and so can let them go as you drift off to sleep.
- Reading a book at bedtime is distracting and sleep inducing in equal measure. ***tip** Place your favourite book on your pillow in the morning to act as a prompt for you to pick it up again at bedtime.
- Just before you close your eyes for sleep, consider a few things that you have been grateful for that day, feel the benefit that this brings to you and how it can offer you pleasant thoughts and feelings as you drift off to sleep.
- Avoid using electronic devices at bedtime for social purpose; you can however use your device to listen to a relaxing guided meditation just prior to sleep as this has multiple benefits to encourage a healthy and restorative sleep, although it is best to move the device far enough away from temptation's reach but close enough to hear it!

***prescription** - this does not refer to medication

Exercise

Physical exercise is important for good mental health. Exercise can reduce many of the symptoms of anxiety and stress



such as tension, panic, irritability and anger. For people with anxiety, panic disorder and other anxiety related conditions, exercise can be a really positive way of releasing a build-up of tension, reducing feelings of frustration, fear and worry. Exercising can lift our mood and improve our confidence and self-esteem.

When we engage in exercise, we release the neurotransmitters, endorphins, serotonin and dopamine. Dopamine is our reward hormone and many of us will be able to relate to how good it feels after exercising. When we produce a sufficient supply of these healthy hormones, we are better able to cope with life's challenges and feel motivated to engage in healthy thoughts, behaviours and activities.

A regular exercise programme can also help ease physical symptoms of other common symptoms of anxiety, e.g., tension headaches, Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)

It might be that going to the gym isn't practical or accessible, whether that's due to cost, accessibility, disability or perhaps being compromised due to the Covid pandemic. There are many other ways to exercise that can be equally as beneficial as walking on a treadmill or pushing weights. Walking in nature is nourishing on a physical and emotional level and can encourage positive thoughts and feelings. There is nature all around us, whether we live in city or the countryside and free of charge.

Exercise videos are so convenient and there are many different exercise workouts accessible on YouTube. If you have a DVD player then you can use an exercise DVD. An exercise bike, hand weights and a hula hoop are all very convenient to use at home for a daily workout.

Gardening is one of the best ways of exercise as it reaps much reward after mowing the lawn, clearing the weeds away



or planting new seeds and has the additional bonus of releasing the happy hormones, serotonin and dopamine. Sitting back with a cuppa and admiring your work is so rewarding and will have contributed to your physical wellbeing too.

Chewing gum



Who would ever have thought that chewing on a piece of gum could help release nervous energy, reduce tension, anxiety and fear by reducing the stress hormone, cortisol. Most of us know that when we are experiencing anxiety, we can get a dry mouth and so, by chewing gum (masticatory stimulation) it causes the salivary glands to produce more fluid.

One of the first things to switch off when our fight/flight/freeze response is activated is salivation as we would not be thinking of eating if we were being chased by a wild animal! If you find yourself feeling anxious or stressed, chewing gum initiates salivation and sends a message to the Amygdala that all is well and, in turn, any symptoms of anxiety, stress or fear are significantly reduced, and you are likely to feel calm and regain control.

****nb.** excessive gum chewing can create fatigue in the jaw muscles, causing painful spasms in the jaw and neck, potentially resulting in migraine headaches.

Name the anxiety



A helpful way of reducing anxiety is to keep a notebook and write down any troubling thoughts. This is called 'journaling' our feelings and experiences. It can be helpful to recall and write down times when you have felt anxious and/or worried about something that you thought was going to happen but didn't. Describe in some detail how that experience made you feel, physically and emotionally.

Consider whether this response was valid at that time and, if not, imagine and make a note of how you would like to respond to that situation if it occurred again and all the benefits of responding in this way.

You can recall other episodes where you've experienced an unpleasant situation and your feelings of anxiety and/or worry were valid, e.g., having a tooth extraction or attending a job interview. Write about how you 'got through' that situation, when the anxiety started to reduce and how you felt because of that. While you are writing about this you will be reflecting on that experience as opposed to being in it which should allow you to see it from a different perspective, e.g., a more rational viewpoint.

By considering and writing down your thoughts and experiences you will be operating from the left prefrontal cortex; the logical, rational part of the brain and, since anxiety is an emotion that's located in the right hemisphere of your brain (the irrational, emotional, primitive part) you will be interrupting your usual pattern of behaviour and instead thinking more logically and rationally. Each time you engage in this exercise you will be training your brain to 'reframe' your unwanted anxious thoughts, feelings, and experiences.

The 7/11 Breathing Technique

When we experience anxiety, our body starts taking in oxygen in preparation for running away from a perceived threat, activating our sympathetic nervous system, the fight/flight/freeze response.

Breathing deeply and slowly activates our parasympathetic nervous system (the opposite of the sympathetic nervous system) which calms our body down, slowing the heartrate, reducing anxiety and the unpleasant symptoms associated with it.

The 7/11 breathing technique, where the out breath is longer than the in breath, can quickly lower emotional arousal and encourage our mind and body to settle down and relax.

We can use this breathing technique below anytime, anywhere, either standing or sitting down and it's so discreet that no one would notice:

Breathe deeply in through your nose to the count of 7 (pause)
Breathe out slowly with your mouth slightly open to the count of 11 (pause)
-- repeat--

If you find it difficult to lengthen your breath to the count of 7 or 11 then you can reduce the count to breathing in for 5 and out for 7 or whatever suits you, just as long as the out breath is longer than the in breath.

Continue in this way for between 3-5 minutes or longer if you choose and enjoy the calming effect it can have on you mentally and physically. Counting numbers will offer an added benefit as it will act as a great distraction technique to take your mind off any current concerns.

Face the fear and do it anyway!



If you want to convince the Amygdala, your fear response, that a situation or environment is dangerous or life threatening, you must avoid it or run away as soon as you are faced with it. I use the example of a fear that I established when driving on the motorway and how, every time I had a planned journey that meant driving on the motorway I would start to feel panicky, experience a dry mouth and rapid breathing. These symptoms will have alerted the Amygdala that my current environment posed a threat and I would need to get away quickly to ensure my safety. The origin of my fear of motorway driving was created when the driver of a Heavy Goods Vehicle moved abruptly into the central lane of the motorway directly in front of me, causing me to brake quickly, exacerbated by their tyres distributing a heavy spray of water across my windscreen and obscuring my view. I felt utter panic, particularly as I had my then toddler son in the back of the car. I left the motorway at the next junction and didn't calm down for a considerable amount of time. It was a scary experience, however, as time when on I felt as though I'd put it behind me as it hadn't impacted my confidence when driving in my usual environment.

It wasn't until I was on my way to see a friend that involved driving on the motorway that I felt an uncomfortable stirring of anxiety as I approached the junction to join the motorway. On a conscious level I hadn't given a thought to the previous stressful event. How could I have known that, due to this event, a fear template had been established, forming a belief

that driving on the motorway is dangerous, which explained the anxiety I had felt as I approached the junction to join the motorway, also prompting me to recall the unpleasant memories of my previous motorway experience, both of which convinced me that taking the scenic route was a much better idea. Little did I know that, by making the decision to avoid the motorway and take the scenic route, I had created a six year fear and avoidance of motorway driving!

Had I stayed on the motorway at the time of the original stressful event and allowed my fear to subside (which it would have) the negative belief wouldn't have been established and the fear that triggered this anxiety, preventing me from accessing the motorway wouldn't exist. It's the same for all of us, in whatever environment we feel anxious in, whether that's driving on a motorway, going in to crowded places, getting on an aeroplane, attending a dental appointment etc. Something would have created that fear at some point, whether on a conscious or subconscious level. If we could focus on and think from the rational, logical part of the brain in the examples given above, considering all the benefits of being in and enjoying these environments, the fear response would switch off.

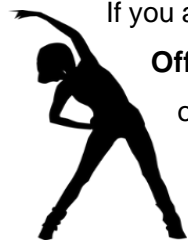
The more we 'keep ourselves safe' by not returning to anxiety provoking situations, the more we compromise our freedom to live the way we want to. At times life can present genuine threats that might compromise our safety, where the fear response is legitimate. However, the examples I've referred to above are typically in response to emotional and irrational thinking. When working with clients, I often ask if they ever notice how babies don't have a care in the world when being carried on to an aeroplane, being driven along a motorway or being carried around in a crowded place, which evidences the fact that our fears derive from learnt behaviours that form our belief system.

Facing a fear is necessary to start erasing it from the primitive, emotional part of our brain so that we can enjoy a calmer, more enjoyable way of living. Avoidance prevents us from moving forward and can make us feel more anxious. An effective way of reducing mild to moderate anxiety is by visiting the 'fear' when we are in a relaxed state. Finding a comfortable place to sit or lie in and listening to a relaxing MP3 offers a blend of tension release and deep relaxation, both of which effectively reduce and resolve stress and anxiety.

Our minds can't tell the difference between imagination and reality so, when we are relaxed and calm we can invite a better, healthier response to fear. If it feels comfortable for you to do so, find a quiet, uninterrupted time to recall the fear and the anxious feelings associated with it. Acknowledge these feelings and become aware of any tension in your body and where that tension is. For example, if it's in your shoulders, place your attention there and imagine a soft, gentle warmth flowing in and around your neck and your shoulders, spreading out and along your muscular system, dissolving all tension from your body.

Bring your attention to your thoughts and, without getting caught up in the fear 'story', acknowledge whether your fear is in the past, the present or the future. Question the origin of the fear(s) and how relevant it is in your life today. Use your imagination to 'reframe' the fear template by visualising how you would like to experience the environment when you no longer experience the fear. See yourself in this place or situation, completely relaxed, noticing the environment, the sights, sounds and smells. Notice how good it feels when you are relaxed and how good you feel too. Enjoy this time for you. With regular practice you can encourage and elicit a more positive and preferable behavioural response to fear.

Shake It off!



If you are about to leave home to do something or go somewhere that usually triggers anxiety you can '**Shake It Off**'. Ensure that you have space where you aren't likely to knock the family heirloom off its shelf! Shake out your hands as vigorously as is comfortable for you, as though you're shaking off water. If possible, extend this exercise with a few star jumps or walking briskly around the house or the garden. Raising your heart rate during exercise is effective in reducing the symptoms of anxiety whilst boosting the feel good hormones, serotonin and dopamine.

If it's not physically or environmentally practical for you to engage in this exercise, music is always a great alternative for draining off the physiological symptoms of anxiety. Find a quiet place where you will not be disturbed or distracted for approximately ten minutes. Either put on or imagine a song or piece of music that makes you feel relaxed and calm, get comfortable and close your eyes. Scan your body, slowly from the top of your head to the soles of your feet and, as you do, imagine any anxiety, tension, worry and/or fear dissolving as you begin to let go and relax. See yourself thinking, acting and reacting in a calm and relaxed manner. Notice how this feels for you and how easy it is to feel this way.

If it's practical and safe for you to do so, you can reduce anxiety on the go by listening to your favourite chill out music through earphones/buds, e.g., when walking, on public transport etc (do not use earphones when driving)

If you are feeling anxious due to a situation or event that you are attending e.g., a job interview, a first date, a new or familiar environment that creates uncertainty or shaky confidence then, prior to leaving home put your favourite feel good tunes on and dance around the house like no-ones watching. This uplifting exercise will provide a boost of the feel good hormones, serotonin and dopamine, both of which reduce anxiety and boost confidence. If it's safe to do so, listening through earphones on your way to wherever you are going will continue to promote the same, positive effect.

Tuning in to Inner Peace



Find a quiet, comfortable place to sit or lie in, with a pillow/cushion to lie your head on and a blanket to place over you (optional). Make sure that you will not be interrupted for approximately 30-40 minutes (if you have young children, it might be that you choose bedtime to enjoy this experience). Using earphones or on loudspeaker, select a relaxation/guided visualisation (from YouTube, music platforms, e.g., Apple/Amazon or by contacting me to purchase a bespoke relaxation MP3). Settle into this time for you, switching off from the outside world for a while and learning how to completely let go. All you need to do is close your eyes, follow the soothing sounds that you are tuning in to and allow your mind to drift off as you welcome inner peace.

You might also benefit from adding a few drops of your favourite hand cream and/or essential oils (e.g., lavender, patchouli) on to the palm of your hands and gently massaging your hands prior to and/or as you are settling into this special time for you. This action is known to generate oxytocin, the feel good 'hug' hormone and will further encourage the reduction of anxiety and tension during this very comforting and reassuring experience.

Engaging in self care is vital for your emotional and physical wellbeing. With regular engagement in this activity, you will benefit from a reduction in anxiety, stress, worry and fear, which can reduce blood pressure, improve your sleep and offer a multitude of benefits, all of which encourage good mental and physical health.

You can enjoy many of my guided relaxation recordings and much more by joining my free FB private members group, 'MindSpace Guided Relaxation FB Live' just follow this link <https://www.facebook.com/groups/379865586230032>

It goes without saying that lowering our stress levels, feeling settled and calm is the antidote to anxiety, so learning to relax often is the key to an abundance of mental and physical health benefits.

For more information about how I can help you reduce anxiety and stress, you can visit my website www.wendyjameshypnotherapy.co.uk or contact me on the number below to arrange a chat on the phone or a video call.

Warm wishes, Wendy

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