

The Anxiety Demon Inside You

Understanding the Driving Force Behind Your Pain

A warrior may conquer a million enemies on the battlefield, but these deeds pale to those who conquer their own demons.

With excerpts from *The Fix Your Anxiety Handbook*

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The American Psychological Association defines “anxiety” as *an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts, and physical changes such as increased blood pressure*. Many people suffer from anxiety, and the symptoms described in the APA’s *Diagnostic and Statistics Manual (DSM-5)* are not unfamiliar. For some, however, the symptoms can be overwhelming and overpowering to the point of near emotional paralysis.

Anxiety is often described as a demon that has taken control of one’s life, turning its victims into helpless and directionless souls, almost incapable of making decisions, and plotting the course of their lives. So, for the purposes of our discussion I will be using the term “*anxiety demon*” to help illustrate the internal physical, intellectual, and emotional implosion that anxiety causes.

Some of the many symptoms of anxiety include:

- ◆ Agitation
- ◆ Avoidance behaviors
- ◆ Chest pains
- ◆ Concentration issues
- ◆ Decreased decision-making
- ◆ Excessive worrying
- ◆ Fatigue
- ◆ Feelings of hopelessness
- ◆ Feelings of terror or impending doom
- ◆ Gastrointestinal problems
- ◆ General loss of confidence
- ◆ Hot flashes
- ◆ Hyperventilation
- ◆ Increased heart rate
- ◆ Irritability and tension

- ◆ Palpitations
- ◆ Shortness of breath
- ◆ Sleeping difficulties and restlessness
- ◆ Sweating
- ◆ Trembling and shaking

People who struggle with anxiety often have a difficult time even with the simplest of tasks. It's hard to keep your mind focused enough to accomplish a goal when you feel as though the world around you is going to collapse at any moment. At the very least, it's just hard to sit in one place attempting to do what it takes to complete a desired chore when you feel like you want to jump out of your own skin.

The Causes of Anxiety

Let's take a look at some of the causes of anxiety. Many of them are legitimate catalysts for this devilish takeover, an insurrection that is mounted at the hands of a demon that operates in an underhanded and insidious fashion. *Insidious*, as I am using it, means that the condition proceeds in a gradual, subtle, and misleading way, but relentlessly, and with effects that can range from mildly uncomfortable to horrific.

The list of the most common causal factors for anxiety include:

- Abuse
- Amphetamines and other accelerants
- Envy
- Fears
- Feelings of not belonging
- Guilt
- Overthinking
- Peer pressure
- Personal loss
- PTSD
- Relationship problems
- Sleep deprivation
- Social media
- Trauma
- Worrying

For some people, it's a simple genetic predisposition; it's something that has been handed down, often through the generations. When I counsel people with anxiety issues, I always take a family history to determine if there could be a genetic connection, either causing the problem, or making it worse. Another method being used today is genetic testing. This allows for a more detailed medical report, providing additional information about possible causal factors related to anxiety. It's also a good idea to talk to other family members, who can add insightful historical information to the therapeutic picture.

Types of Anxiety Disorders

The Mayo Clinic provides a list of some of the types of anxiety disorders, which I have presented in the following text. Although not exhaustive, these descriptions can help you understand this menacing condition a bit better.

- **Agoraphobia** is a type of anxiety disorder in which you fear and often avoid places or situations that might cause you to panic and make you feel trapped, helpless, or embarrassed.
- **Anxiety disorder due to a medical condition** includes symptoms of intense anxiety or panic that are directly caused by a physical health problem.
- **Generalized anxiety disorder** includes persistent and excessive anxiety and worry about activities or events—even ordinary, routine issues. The worry is out of proportion to the actual circumstance, is difficult to control, and affects how you feel physically. It often occurs along with other anxiety disorders or depression.
- **Panic disorder** involves repeated episodes of sudden feelings of intense anxiety and fear or terror that reach a peak within minutes (panic attacks). You may have feelings of impending doom, shortness of breath, chest pain, or a rapid, fluttering, or pounding heart (heart palpitations). These panic attacks may lead to worrying about them happening again or avoiding situations in which they've occurred.
- **Separation anxiety disorder** is a childhood disorder characterized by anxiety that's excessive for the child's developmental level and related to separation from parents or others who have parental roles.
- **Social anxiety disorder (social phobia)** involves high levels of anxiety, fear, and avoidance of social situations due to feelings of embarrassment, self-consciousness, and concern about being judged or viewed negatively by others.

- **Specific phobias** are characterized by major anxiety when you are exposed to a specific object or situation and a desire to avoid it. Phobias provoke panic attacks in some people.
- **Substance-induced anxiety disorder** is characterized by symptoms of intense anxiety or panic that are a direct result of misusing drugs, taking medications, being exposed to a toxic substance, or withdrawal from drugs.
- **Other specified anxiety disorder and unspecified anxiety disorder** are terms for anxiety or phobias that don't meet the exact criteria for any other anxiety disorders but are significant enough to be distressing and disruptive.

I have listed some of the types of anxiety to give you a basic overview of how the condition can present itself. Try to stay away from a self-diagnosis. Knowing more about anxiety can put you in a position to more efficiently address the symptoms you are experiencing. It's always a good idea to consult a physician, or a mental health professional before attempting to do anything yourself.

Hiding in Plain Sight

Anxiety is insidious because it fools you into believing that there is something wrong with you mentally or emotionally, and that is what causes the problem. Although anxiety does include a mental or emotional component, I'm going to help you look a little deeper. When you look at the list of anxiety's causal factors, many of them come from mental or environmental situations. You can react to something that causes you to be afraid or to something that connects you to some past trauma. You might have fears about moving forward in your life, and be apprehensive about your abilities to address those situations without them hurting you, but there is more to it.

Think of something that is insidious as having the ability to hide either what is causing your problem, or something that is necessary for you to understand it. This is exactly what happens when the anxiety demon takes over your life. That insidious part of this infuriating internal nemesis is that, even though you can feel it ravaging your body, you misinterpret its driving force as something that is created in your brain. It is so important to monitor what the rest of your body is doing to fully understand both the cause of this condition, and the route you must take to return to health and peace.

This is the most important statement I will make before we move forward: **Anxiety must be treated as a physical condition first.** This doesn't mean that anxiety always has its origins solely in your body. It does mean that you are not crazy. Not all your headache is the result of what is happening in your brain. For so many people, the

most debilitating part of anxiety is its physical component. That's why physicians prescribe anti-anxiety medications, which act to relieve physical symptoms.

There are many kinds of anxiety. Different components of anxiety affect different people in different ways. Try not to compare your anxiety to anyone else's. Another reason that anxiety is insidious is because it is so often difficult to determine where it's coming from, and as a result what to do about it. It is important to think of anxiety as a physical condition first. This is because your body can have such a turbulent reaction to the assault from the anxiety demon. Once it breaks the body's defenses down, the demon can assume control of, not only your body, but your mind. When that happens, you mistakenly believe that the problem emanates from your brain, and that you are going crazy. This is simply not true.

There are different manifestations of anxiety. That is, there are different symptoms people may experience. You may experience them one at a time, or several may occur at the same time. One symptom may trigger your anxiety on its own, and it may also cause you to experience several more symptoms. To help you acquaint yourself just a bit better with this demon trickster, here is a short list of some different symptoms of anxiety. Don't be concerned if you experience many or even all of them. That is not uncommon, and it is certainly fixable.

The Symptoms Of Anxiety

****Excessive Worrying***

People with anxiety disorders often worry excessively or have a sense of dread. These anxious feelings can stem from a multitude of different sources—some rational and some not so rational.

****Restlessness and Sleep Difficulties***

It is very often difficult for people with anxiety to sleep through the night. People report that they can't turn off their minds, and that their bodies feel unsettled, with a rise in nervous energy.

Sleep and anxiety have a very reciprocal nature. If you do not sleep well, it can trigger anxiety. Conversely, anxiety can cause sleep problems. One usually has a profound effect on the other.

****Concentration Issues***

Having difficulty concentrating is a common symptom of anxiety. People who suffer

from anxiety are often experiencing an overwhelming increase in anxiety, dread, and uncontrolled excitement, all happening at the same time. If you have anxiety, your mind may become inundated with racing thoughts, and this makes focusing, staying on point, and concentration much more difficult.

****Irritability and Tension***

Anxiety can cause you to feel agitated, and you might become easily angered, often lashing out at others. You may lose your patience much quicker than when you are not anxious. Even the slightest stimulus or intrusion may feel as though it is amplified many times over. This is a result of overstimulation of the nervous system.

****Fatigue***

Cellular regeneration is seriously affected due to the loss of sleep that accompanies anxiety. Anxiety causes interrupted sleep patterns, and this can rob you of REM sleep, which is essential to the health of your body's life-giving cells. You may wake up unrefreshed and experience

enhanced tiredness, emotional exhaustion, and eventually fatigue. Mood disorders may also occur and can lead to depression, a condition that frequently accompanies anxiety. If you think you may be depressed, talk to a professional counselor as soon as you can.

Increased Heart Rate and Palpitations

Anxiety can have a profound effect on the heart. As stress increases, you may notice that your heart rate goes up or begins to feel irregular. These feelings are very common during panic attacks. Panic attacks, or anxiety attacks, are characterized by a rapid and pounding heart rate, sweating, shortness of breath, tightness in the throat, chills, and sometimes hot flashes. Panic attacks are typically short-lived, but people with an anxiety disorder may experience them regularly, and that short time can feel like an eternity.

****Sweating and Hot Flashes***

Remember that during periods of anxiety, your body and your mind are operating at a more rapid pace. An increase in body temperature often occurs when your heart rate increases and blood pressure goes up. As your heart rate increases, you may also experience more body heat and may perspire, perhaps excessively.

****Trembling and Shaking***

The stress on your body that occurs with anxiety can cause your limbs to shake

uncontrollably, especially your hands. This is often caused by an increase in the production of adrenaline, which initiates the fight-or-flight response. This is a temporary feeling, but it can be quite uncomfortable and may actually cause your brain to create more fear and anxiety.

****Chest Pains and Shortness of Breath***

Since anxiety has such a significant effect on your body, your breathing may also be affected. You may feel like you cannot get enough oxygen into your lungs, and you might experience some tightness, a heavy feeling, or pain in your chest. This happens as your body begins to move too fast. You may note that when you are stressed, you take shorter, shallower breaths. This increases carbon dioxide production, followed by a decrease in the intake of oxygen. That can have a profound effect on your brain and the rest of your body. The chest pain from an anxiety attack is usually sharper and more localized, while the pain from a heart attack tends to be duller and radiates more. If you are feeling pain that you think could possibly be a heart attack, either consult a doctor or go to the emergency room, just to be safe.

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****Feelings of Terror or Impending Doom***

Anxiety can move from moderate to severe, and at times, it can feel paralyzing. A feeling that something bad is about to happen, or is in the process of happening, can sometimes appear out of nowhere. These symptoms often pass within a few minutes, or they can last for several hours. They are typically the result of an extended experience with anxiety, and the feeling that this devil's playground may never end.

Every anxiety demon has a personality all its own. It has its own beginnings, its own middle, and its own end. You are a person unique to yourself. Try not to compare your anxiety to anyone else's. This may cause you to mistakenly assume that one or more of their symptoms may present the same way as one or more of yours do. Nothing about you happens exactly the same as it happens to someone else. The anxiety demon will take you on a trip that is yours and yours alone. You may experience some or all of the symptoms. At times, one symptom may be profound, and at other times, others may find their way into your life. Also, the intensity and duration of any of these symptoms may vary. Their onset may be one at a time, or several could appear simultaneously.

Learning to identify the characteristics (that is, the symptoms that apply to your individual trip through the anxiety wasteland) and how they affect you is crucial to understanding what has happened, and is happening, as anxiety invades your life. It will also help you move away from those feelings of insanity and hopelessness. It is important to get to understand the monster that has taken over your life. When you do, you will have that

much more control over vanquishing this little demon, and taking back control of your world.

There is much to learn about the anxiety demon. Though it seems to come from nowhere, it (like any other physical/intellectual/emotional condition) has a path that it follows before it exerts its full influence over you. Understanding the physical connection, and learning how to strengthen your body your emotions, and your mind to resist this internal demonic presence, is crucial to moving forward as a person in control of your body, your mind, and your feelings. Anxiety is not who you are, it is what you have, and what you have is beatable. All you need is a plan and support to make it all happen.

Faust Ruggiero is the award-winning author of The Fix Yourself Empowerment Series. For more information about how to address your own personal anxiety demon, go to:

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