

Anxiety 101

Anxiety is the sensation generated by the body's response to a mental or physical threat. This reaction causes release of defensive stress hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol and also stimulates the immune system to activate inflammation. Specifically, anxiety is the result of a threat, not the cause.



Anxiety is a powerful automatic survival response. The unconscious brain is estimated to process over 20 million bits of input per second, whereas the conscious brain deals with 40 per second. It is a huge mismatch. That is why it's not subject to isolated rational psychological interventions. The only way to lower anxiety is to drop the levels of stress chemicals and lower inflammation. There are two categories of approaches of accomplishing this:

- **Relaxation strategies**
 - Mindfulness
 - Meditation
 - Active Meditation
 - Forgiveness
 - Play
 - Medical hypnosis

- Biofeedback
- **Stimulating the brain to change (neuroplasticity), decreasing your reactivity to stress.**
 - Learning to “be with your pain”
 - Never discussing your pain (other than with your doctor)
 - Expressive writing
 - Committing to moving forward in your life, with or without your pain
 - Seeking “an enjoyable life”

There are two more critical concepts:

Since anxiety is an unpleasant, core survival reaction, you’ll do almost anything to avoid it. Essentially, anxiety is the pain. The basic intent of it is to cause you to act in a manner to diminish a threat (control) and move on. When you can’t escape a mental or physical threat, your body will secrete more stress hormones and inflammation in order to increase your chances of survival. The sensation generated through this process is anger – anger is anxiety with a chemical kick. They are the same entity. Anger is even less subject to rational interventions.

Not only are there strategies to lower the stress response, there are powerful ways to stimulate increased levels of anti-inflammatory proteins and relaxation chemicals, such as:

- Oxytocin – social bonding, the “love” drug
- Dopamine – reward
- Serotonin – mood elevator
- GABA hormones (the body’s equivalent of Valium).

Your capacity to enjoy your life depends on your skills in minimizing your levels of stress hormones and inflammation and stimulating your “play” chemicals. Modern neuroscience has documented why, “Laughter is the best medicine.”



Through the DOC process, as you learn how to respond and re-direct your reactions from threat to safety. This control allows you to feel safe and generate a deep sense of well-being.