



Your comprehensive guide to
breaking free from anxiety

Overcoming Anxiety FOR DUMMIES®



Elaine Iljon Foreman

Consultant Chartered Clinical Psychologist

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Clinical Psychologists

A Reference for the Rest of Us!



UK Edition

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**by Elaine Iljon Foreman, Charles H Elliott, PhD,
and Laura L Smith, PhD**



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Dedication

From Elaine: This book is dedicated to Helga and Nickie Iljon, with special thanks to Sharon Malyan, a real source of inspiration to her students, friends, and most of all, family.

From Charles and Laura: We dedicate this book to our children: Alli, Brian, Sara, and Trevor. And to our parents: William Thomas Smith (1914-1999), Edna Louise Smith, Joe Bond Elliott, and Suzanne Wieder Elliott.

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Introduction

Growing up today, children and parents face yet more worries and anxieties added to the old. Children have always been taught, ‘Don’t talk to strangers’, and there are new messages such as ‘Report suspicious packages’. High profile terrorist incidents give a heightened sense of danger and vulnerability. To some extent we all worry, and there are sometimes good reasons to.

But although today’s world gives people plenty to worry about, so it always has. Just as we don’t want to become victims of terrorism, for example, we can’t let ourselves become victims of anxiety. Anxiety clouds thinking and weakens people’s resolve to live life to the fullest. Some anxiety is realistic and inescapable; yet people can keep it from dominating their lives. Even under duress, everyone can preserve a degree of serenity, and hold on to their humanity, common sense, strength, and zest for life. We can all still love and laugh.

Because we, the authors, believe in our collective resilience, we take a humorous and at times irreverent approach to conquering anxiety. Our message is based on sound, scientifically proven methods. But we won’t bore you with the scientific details. Instead, we present a clear, rapid-fire set of strategies for beating back anxiety and winning the war against worry.

About This Book

We have three goals in writing this book. First, we want you to understand just what anxiety is and its different forms. Second, we think that knowing what’s good about anxiety and what’s bad about it is good for you. Finally, we cover what you’re probably most interested in – discovering how to overcome your anxiety or how to help someone else who has anxiety.

Unlike most books, you don’t have to start on page one and read straight through. Use the extensive Table of Contents to pick and choose what you want to read. Don’t worry about reading parts in any particular order. For example, if you really don’t want much information about the who, what, when, where, and why’s of anxiety, and whether you have it, go ahead and skip Part I. However, we encourage you to at least skim Part I because it contains fascinating facts and information as well as ideas for getting started.

What Not to Read

Not only do you not have to read each and every chapter in order or at all, you don't have to look at each and every icon or aside. We try to give you plenty of current information and facts about anxiety. Some may not interest you, so don't get too anxious about skipping around.

Foolish Assumptions

Who may pick up this book? We assume, probably not too foolishly, that you or someone you love suffers from some type of problem with anxiety. We also believe that you want information to help tame tension and conquer anxiety. Finally, we imagine that you're curious about a variety of helpful strategies to choose from that can fit your lifestyle and personality.

How This Book Is Organised

Overcoming Anxiety For Dummies is organised into six parts and 22 chapters. Here, we tell you a little about each part.

Part I: Detecting and Exposing Anxiety

In these first two chapters, you find out a great deal about anxiety, ranging from who gets it to why people become anxious. We explain the different kinds of anxiety disorders, and we tell you who is most susceptible and why.

In Chapter 3, we help you to overcome the obstacles to change. You discover the most common reasons that people resist working on their anxiety, and what to do about it if you find yourself stuck. Chapter 4 gives you ways to keep track of your progress.

Part II: Understanding Thought Remedies

In Part II, you see how thinking contributes to anxious feelings. We show you a variety of proven strategies that can transform anxious thoughts into calm thoughts. And you discover how the words that you use can increase anxiety and how simply changing your vocabulary decreases anxiety.

Part III: Acting Against Anxiety

One of the best ways to tackle anxiety is by taking action. No place for cowards here. We show you how to look your fears full in the face and conquer them. We also explore other anti-anxiety actions, such as changing your lifestyle.

Part IV: Focusing on Feeling

In this part, we offer a treasure trove of ideas for quelling anxious feelings. These ideas range from special breathing techniques to imaginary journeys – using various means to relax your body and mind. We give you the latest research findings on what works and what doesn't among herbs, supplements, and medication.

Part V: Helping Others with Anxiety

What do you do when someone you love worries too much? We give you the tools to understand the differences between normal fear and anxiety in children. We also provide some simple guidelines to help anxious youngsters. Next, we look at how you can help an adult close to you who suffers from anxiety. As a coach or simply by providing encouragement, you can help your friend or family member conquer anxiety.

Part VI: The Part of Tens

If you're looking for a quick fix or just to review, take a look at these helpful lists. You can read about Ten Ways to Stop Anxiety Quickly, Ten Typical Tactics Doomed to Fail, Ten Ways to Deal with Relapse, and Ten Signs That You Need Professional Help.

Icons Used in This Book



This icon represents a particular tip for getting rid of anxiety.



The Anxiety Quiz icon lets you know when it's time to take a quiz. (Don't worry; the quizzes aren't scored, but they do help you organise your thinking about anxiety.)



This icon appears when we want your attention. Please read for essential information.



The Tip icon alerts you to important insights or clarifications.



These icons appear when you need to be careful or seek professional help.

Where to Go from Here

Overcoming Anxiety For Dummies offers you the best advice based on scientific research in the area of anxiety disorders. We know that if you practise the techniques and strategies provided throughout this book, you're pretty likely to feel calmer. For most people, this book should be a complete guide to fighting fear and enabling you to progress from stress to strength.

However, some stubborn forms of anxiety need more detailed, professional attention. If your anxiety and worry significantly get in the way of your work or play, you need to get help. Start with your family doctor. Anxiety can be conquered: Don't give up.

Part I

Detecting and Exposing Anxiety



'... that's Ragnar the Bloodaxe's, that's Sven the Bonecrusher's, and this one's Eric the Anxious's ...'

In this part . . .

Exploring the ins and outs of anxiety, we discuss the anxiety epidemic and show how anxiety affects the entire body. In this part, you can find all the major categories of anxiety disorders, and get an overview of some things you can do to reduce anxiety. You'll discover how you can easily get stuck tackling your anxiety, and we tell you how to prevent this from happening. Finally, we give you ways to chart your anxiety, so you can look forward to the progress that you'll surely make towards reducing it.

Chapter 1

Analysing and Attacking Anxiety

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In This Chapter

- ▶ Anxiety: Growing by leaps and bounds
 - ▶ Paying the price for anxiety
 - ▶ Understanding anxiety symptoms
 - ▶ Getting help: Choosing the best option
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Anxiety, stress, and worries. Everyone has these experiences. They are part of normal life – no way can we expect to go through life without experiencing them. But sometimes they get out of hand. Then anxiety causes pain, for a surprising number of people. Anxiety can create havoc in the home, destroy relationships, make employees lose time from work, and prevent people from living full, productive lives.

When people talk about their anxiety, you may hear any one or all of the following descriptions:

- ✓ I just can't find the right words to describe my feelings. It's like dread and doom, but a thousand times worse. I want to scream, cry for help, but I'm paralysed. It's the worst feeling in the world.
- ✓ When my panic attacks begin, I feel tightness in my chest. It's as though I'm drowning or suffocating, and I begin to sweat; the fear is overwhelming. I feel like I'm going to die, and I have to sit down because I'm convinced I'm going to faint.
- ✓ I'm lonely. I've always been painfully shy. I want friends, but I'm too embarrassed to contact anyone. I guess I feel anyone I call will think that I'm not worth talking to.
- ✓ I wake up worried every day, even on the weekends. I never feel I've caught up – there's always a list and always responsibility. I worry all the time. Sometimes, when it's really bad, I think about going to sleep and never waking up.

In this chapter, we talk about symptoms of anxiety. We clarify the costs of anxiety – both to you personally and to society. We briefly overview the treatments presented in greater detail in later chapters and give you a tool for choosing the one that may fit your personality best as a way to begin overcoming anxiety. You also get a glimpse of how you can help if someone you care about suffers with anxiety.

Anxiety: You Can't Escape It

Anxiety is the most common of all the so-called mental disorders. Estimates suggest that around 6.5 million people in the UK suffer from an anxiety disorder in any given year, and some calculate that as many as 25 per cent may suffer from an anxiety disorder at one point or another over a lifetime. Statistics around the world vary somewhat from country to country, but anxiety is the most common mental disorder worldwide. And even if you don't have an actual anxiety disorder, you may experience more anxiety than you want. In other words, you definitely aren't alone if you have unwanted anxiety.

And the number of people troubled by anxiety has grown over the years. Why?

Life has never been as complicated as it is today. The working week keeps getting longer rather than shorter, despite legislation. Divorce, separation, and combining families create increased stresses for you to manage. Television news blasts the latest horrors into your living room. Newspapers and magazines chronicle crime, war, and corruption. Terrorism has landed on our shores and escalated to new heights. The media's portrayal of these modern plagues includes full-colour images with unprecedented, graphic detail.

Unfortunately, as stressful and anxiety-arousing as the world is today, only a minority of those suffering from anxiety seek treatment. That's a problem because anxiety causes not only emotional pain and distress, but even death, given that anxiety sometimes contributes to suicide. Furthermore, anxiety costs society as a whole billions of pounds.

Calculating the Costs of Anxiety

Anxiety costs. It costs the sufferer in emotional, physical, and financial terms. But anxiety doesn't stop there. Anxiety also incurs a financial burden for everyone. Stress, worry, and anxiety disrupt relationships, work, leisure, and family.

What does anxiety cost you?

Obviously, if you have a problem with anxiety, you experience the cost of distressed, anxious feelings. Anxiety feels dreadful. You don't need to read a book to know that. But did you know that untreated anxiety takes its toll in other ways as well? These costs include

- ✓ **A physical toll:** Higher blood pressure, tension headaches, and gastrointestinal symptoms can affect your body. In fact, recent research found that certain types of chronic anxiety disorders change the makeup of your brain's structures. Links have also been found between anxiety, stress, and heart disease.
- ✓ **A toll on your kids:** Parents with anxiety more often have anxious children. This is due in part to genetics, but it's also because children learn from observation.
- ✓ **Gaining weight:** Anxiety and stress increase the stress hormone *cortisol*. Cortisol causes fat storage in the abdominal area, thus increasing the risk of heart disease and stroke. Stress also leads to increased eating.
- ✓ **More doctors' appointments:** Those with anxiety frequently experience worrisome physical symptoms. In addition, anxious people often worry a great deal about their health.
- ✓ **Relationship problems:** People with anxiety frequently feel irritable. Sometimes, they withdraw emotionally or do the opposite and dependently cling to their partners.
- ✓ **Sick leave:** Those with anxiety disorders miss work more often than other people.

Adding up the cost to society

Anxiety costs many billions of pounds worldwide. While the costs of mental health problems for UK society are estimated at £77 billion annually, in the US, the Government reports that anxiety costs more than depression, schizophrenia, or any other emotional problem. In the UK, 50 per cent of all working days lost through mental illness are because of anxiety and stress. Even countries that spend little on mental health care incur substantial costs from anxiety disorders. These costs include

- ✓ Decreased productivity
- ✓ Healthcare costs, including medication
- ✓ Self-medication in the form of drugs and alcohol

Decreased productivity can be due to the adverse effects of anxiety on a person's health, or even to suicide. But the financial loss from sick leave and healthcare costs doesn't include the money lost to substance abuse. Many of those with anxiety disorders use alcohol and drugs in order to deal with their anxiety, only to then experience the additional problems of substance abuse. Thus, directly and indirectly, anxiety has a colossal toll on both the person who experiences it as well as society at large.

Recognising the Symptoms of Anxiety

You may be unaware that you suffer from anxiety or an anxiety disorder. That's because anxiety involves a rather wide range of symptoms. Each person experiences slightly different symptoms. And your own specific symptoms determine what kind of anxiety disorder you may have. We discuss the various types of anxiety disorders in detail in Chapter 2.

For now, you should know that some signs of anxiety appear in the form of *thoughts* or *beliefs*. Other indications of anxiety manifest themselves in *bodily sensations*. Still other symptoms show up in various kinds of anxious *behaviours*. Some people experience anxiety signs in all three ways, while others only notice their anxiety in one or two areas.

Thinking anxiously

In Part II, we discuss anxious thinking in great detail. For starters, people with anxiety generally think differently from other people. Look out for the following: You're probably thinking anxiously if you experience



- ✓ **Approval addiction:** If you're an approval addict, you worry a great deal about what other people think about you.
- ✓ **Living in the future and predicting the worst:** When you do this, you think about everything that lies ahead and assume the worst possible outcome, a type of thinking known as *catastrophising*.
- ✓ **Magnification:** People who magnify the importance of negative events usually feel more anxious than other people do.
- ✓ **Perfectionism:** If you're a perfectionist, you assume that any mistake means total failure.
- ✓ **Poor concentration:** Anxious people routinely report that they struggle to focus their thoughts. Short-term memory sometimes suffers as well.
- ✓ **Racing thoughts:** When thoughts race, they run through your mind in a stream of almost uncontrollable worry and concern.

Finding anxiety in your body

Almost all people with severe anxiety experience a range of physical effects. These sensations don't simply occur in your head; they're as real as this book you're holding. The responses to anxiety vary considerably from person to person and include



- ✓ Accelerated heart beat
- ✓ A spike in blood pressure
- ✓ Blurred vision
- ✓ Dizziness
- ✓ Fatigue
- ✓ Feelings of unreality
- ✓ Gastrointestinal upset
- ✓ General aches and pains
- ✓ Muscle tension or spasms
- ✓ Sweating

These are simply the temporary effects that anxiety exerts on your body. Chronic anxiety left untreated can pose serious risks to your health. We discuss the general health effects in greater detail in Chapter 2.

Behaving anxiously

We have three words to describe anxious behaviour: avoidance, avoidance, and avoidance. Anxious people inevitably attempt to get away, and stay away, from the things that make them anxious. Whether it's snakes, heights, crowds, motorways, parties, paying bills, reminders of bad times, or public speaking, anxious people search for escape routes.

One of the most common and obvious examples of anxiety-induced avoidance is how people react to their phobias. Have you ever seen the response of a spider-phobic when confronting one of the beasts? Usually, the phobic beats a hasty retreat.

In the short run, avoidance decreases anxiety. It can make you feel a little better. However, in the long run, avoidance actually maintains and heightens anxiety. We discuss the role that avoidance plays in increasing your anxiety in Chapter 2, and we give you ways of confronting avoidance in Chapter 8.

Seeking Help for Your Anxiety

As we said earlier in this chapter, most people choose to simply live with anxiety rather than seek help. Some people worry that treatment won't work. Or they believe that the medication is the only effective treatment they have, and they hate the possibility of side effects, as well as feeling they should be able to manage on their own and not be so weak as to need help. While certain people are concerned that others might think less of them or mock them if they seek help and are terrified of the embarrassment, others worry about the availability and costs of treatment – the NHS usually has long waiting lists, and private therapy can be expensive.



Well, stop adding worry to worry. You can significantly reduce your anxiety through a variety of interesting strategies. Many of these don't have to cost a single penny. And if one doesn't work, try another. Most people find that at least a couple of the approaches that we review in this book work for them.



Untreated anxiety may cause long-term health problems. So not doing something about your anxiety doesn't make sense.

Matching symptoms and therapies

Anxiety symptoms appear in three different spheres:

- ✓ **Thinking symptoms:** The thoughts that run through your mind.
- ✓ **Behaving symptoms:** The things you do in response to anxiety.
- ✓ **Feeling symptoms:** How your body reacts to anxiety.

You may well experience symptoms from all these groups but find one more powerful and disturbing than the others.

The following sections address treatment for these three kinds of symptom.

Thinking therapies

One of the most effective treatments for a wide range of emotional problems, known as *cognitive therapy*, deals with the way you think about, perceive, and interpret everything that's important to you including

- ✓ Your views about yourself
- ✓ The events that happen to you in life
- ✓ Your future