

**'AT LAST A LIFE'**

**Anxiety and Panic Free**

**By**

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## Foreword

This book was written to help anyone who is currently suffering from any form of anxiety. Something I believe the medical world should have a better understanding of than at present. In my opinion, too much needless suffering is caused through ignorance of the subject and a lack of helpful information when we first seek help.

I am not condemning the medical profession, as I believe that anxiety is a specialised subject, and as I discovered, not enough people are sufficiently qualified or equipped to help. It is for this very reason that I have written this book and set up my website and blog in the hope that I can bring far more awareness to the subject and help those who, like me, found help and guidance so hard to come by.

My website has now grown into something far bigger than I ever imagined and receives thousands of unique hits each week, which just goes to show how widespread this problem is. My heart goes out to all of you who are suffering and I wish every one of you success in your recovery. Hopefully, what I have written in this book will finally bring you the answers you so desperately seek.

Sometimes the only difference between individuals is the length of time they have suffered. Well, I can assure you that no matter how long you have suffered, you can recover and this book will show you how.

I have lost count of the number of people I have helped who have recovered or are on their way to recovering. I have included many of these communications in this book, to give people a better understanding of their condition and genuine hope for the future.

I have also had wonderful feedback over the years from people telling me how the information contained herein has changed their lives. I have even received messages from GPs and therapists, advising me that they have recommended my work to their patients and how the book is now on prescription at selected surgeries. In fact, the real success of the book has come through word of mouth and it is something I am very proud of.

I never wanted to write just another book on the subject, I wanted this book to be the only point of reference people would ever need and it means as much to me as the person who is reading it to know that it helps. My main consideration was to make it as easy as possible to read and understand, in the hope of getting my message across and breaking through all the jargon that you may have read and found hard to understand in the past. Every page is packed with what I believe to be the best information I gathered during and beyond my recovery.

I was just like you, the very people who are reading this book who may be thinking, “Yes, you got better, but I cannot. You must be stronger than me. You have not got the problems that I have”. Well, I said this to myself many times in my days of suffering and anxiety ruled my life for ten years. It was so bad that I had to give up my job. I lost friends and had no social life. I was constantly crying and frustrated with the person I had become.

Most days, I did not want to get out of bed in the morning. Yes, that person really was me, and as I look back, it is still hard to believe that I was that person. Anxiety robbed me of everything - my personality, my social life and my ability to be normal. Trust me, no matter how bad you feel or how far you have sunk into the depths of despair, you have the power within you to recover. The real you is still there. It never leaves and is just buried underneath symptoms at this present time.

You may also have been through every so-called cure out there and thrown money at numerous treatments with little to no success. Well, that was me, I tried it all and nothing worked. I lost heart and thought I would never get better, but I refused to suffer for the rest of my life and I never gave up on my search for real answers.

All those treatments that promise to make you feel better within two weeks, offering the new miracle cure, just give false hope. It just can't happen this way because it takes time to recover, to feel emotions again and to change old habits and beliefs. If there were an instant cure out there you wouldn't have to keep searching for it, we would all know about it, and someone would be very wealthy!!

I finally found the answers I was looking for through my own studies and insights and discovered a road to recovery that not only made sense but actually worked.

So, read on and discover what I believe is the only true way to reach recovery. Everything I learned during my recovery and beyond is written for you in this book, and by the time you reach the last chapter, you will have discovered what it took me years to learn.

Paul David

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# Chapter 1

## My Story

Firstly, I would like to introduce myself. My name is Paul, I live in England and suffered from anxiety for ten years. I am now fully recovered and this is my story.

My first encounter with anxiety happened when I was 22 years old. I was young, and I suppose, naive and started to party hard and dabble in soft drugs - nothing too heavy, I was just taking them socially and thought I was doing myself no harm until I began to see a lot of negative changes in my personality and emotional state.

I started to feel as though I was somewhere else, I did not want to talk to people and started to feel depressed for no reason, but the thing that scared me most was that I began to feel extremely anxious for no apparent reason. Fear would also rise within me on occasions and when it did, my whole body would shake and my heart would beat so fast that I was scared I was dying. This was the beginning of ten years of anxiety!

It was at this point that I did what most people do and went to see my doctor. I will never forget that first meeting with him. I sat there chatting at what seemed like one hundred miles an hour while my hands were shaking and my mind was racing. I just thought "I don't know what is wrong with me, but you're a doctor, and you should know. Just give me my magic pill, and I will be on my way".

Well, as I sat there, I was given no explanation as to what was wrong with me. The doctor just seemed to stare at me with a blank expression on his face, wondering why I was so agitated and talking so fast. He listened to what I had to say, advised me to take it easy, signed me off with two forms of medication



and told me to come back in a few weeks. That was it – no explanation, nothing - but I knew it would take more than a few weeks at home to cure me.

I left the doctor's surgery more bewildered and scared than ever. I concluded that if the doctor did not know, then it must be something very serious. I then spent the next few weeks, walking around, trying to make sense of how I felt. I began to, not only fear my current state but also fight and obsess about it, yet, I found no real answers and certainly no relief.

This was the beginning of my long journey with anxiety, during which time I spent months being shifted from one doctor to the next and one therapist to another. I was given different medications and was once even persuaded to part with my money to buy a contraption to wear around my neck and so many other so-called cures, but nothing worked.

From one day to the next, I lived in my head as I tried to figure out why I felt the way I did, only to hit one brick wall after another. The only thing I knew for sure was that as the years passed, I was getting worse, not better. I continually asked myself the question "When will somebody finally be able to tell me what's wrong with me?"

This went on for ten years - yes, ten years. Most of my family did not understand why I had changed from being a confident person into someone who they hardly recognised. How could they know what was wrong with me when even I didn't know? The hardest part for me was losing who I was while having no clue how to regain my former self.

I am sure that some of you reading this can relate to the above and will have experienced the same personality disintegration as I did. Some of the most common symptoms I suffered from are listed below:

1. Feeling strange, unreal, not with it
2. Depression
3. Shaking hands
4. Fast heartbeat
5. No interest in anything
6. Tired and weary
7. Disconnected from reality
8. Irritable
9. Mind constantly racing
10. Constantly anxious

I had many more, but these were the most common symptoms. I could have saved myself ten years of suffering if only I had been given the right advice from the very beginning and an explanation as to why I felt the way I did.

If you suffer from any or all of the above, don't despair. In the next few chapters, I will explain to you why you feel like you do and what is keeping you in the cycle. I also want to reassure you that you are not going crazy, but feel no different from the many thousands, if not millions, of others who are currently experiencing the same symptoms as you are.

No matter what stage of anxiety or panic you have reached; full recovery is possible for everyone. If anyone should know that, it is me. I suffered from pretty much every symptom of fear and anxiety for ten years. I tried numerous methods and different forms of medication, only to get nowhere.

I just felt like I was going around in circles from one disappointment to another. It was only after I learnt about anxiety and panic and put this knowledge into practice, that I was able to finally lead myself back to a life free from stress, fear and anxiety.

Full recovery requires an understanding of this condition and a little patience. Most have suffered for so long that they just want to be better now. Well, I was the same. I also wanted

instant success. Unfortunately, our mind and body take time to recover. This is only natural as we have been through so much. Most of us did not begin to feel like we do overnight; it was a gradual process and so this process takes time to reverse. But, trust me, what a journey it can be and it is well worth the wait.

Many people have come to me for help, almost in tears as they see no way out. Fast forward a few months and they cannot believe how far they have come. So, don't despair if you feel you have hit rock bottom, no matter how you feel or how much anxiety has taken over your life, the real you is still there just waiting to resurface.

## Chapter 2

### What are these feelings I feel?

In my experience, there are usually three stages leading to how you eventually feel.

Firstly, there is what is known as 'tired nerves' where you feel that you are dragging your tired body around all day, going through the motions of living, but having little or no interest in anything. This stage is usually created by long-term stress and worry, which gradually exhausts your muscles and results in your whole nervous system taking a real battering, causing the feelings mentioned above. I have been asked many times why anxiety sufferers feel so physically tired. The answer is that adrenalin affects your body by making it work much faster than usual and can drain the energy from your muscles. This is the reason your limbs may ache and why you feel so physically tired at times.

This usually leads to the next stage - mental exhaustion. This is where the sufferer may experience constant mental fatigue and no matter how much sleep or rest they get; they still feel exhausted. Many people suffering from mental exhaustion complain that they cannot think straight, experience confusion and find themselves irritable and snappy for no reason. Many seek solitude as they find it hard to connect with the world and others and lack any kind of motivation or enthusiasm for life.

These symptoms are caused by no more than the brain being overworked due to excessive thinking or worrying. The brain has been worked way beyond what it was designed to cope with and so becomes exhausted. When people reach this stage, even a simple conversation or the act of reading a book can be hard work.

So, if the above describes how you are currently feeling, then trust me, you are not going crazy. It is just a tired body and brain, exhausted through worry, stress and overthinking. The main reason for this is that you have most likely started to worry about the way you feel and the effect it's having on your life, while mentally trying to figure a way out of the prison you currently find yourself in.

This can then lead to the third stage, which is emotional exhaustion. This is where you no longer feel any positive emotions, your enthusiasm for life has disappeared and you are now left just feeling empty, like a walking shell that is just existing.

This is the one that hurt me the most and the one that can eventually strip you of your confidence. This stage comes when you feel that there is no hope and you will never get better. Day by day your confidence can erode and you may not even feel like getting dressed in the morning. "What's the point when I feel like this?" you may ask. Your spirit also seems to fade and you question how you ever became the person you are now.

You may have experienced one of these three stages, or you may have felt, or be feeling, all three. However, like me, you can recover from all of them no matter how far you think you may have sunk. Your mind and body are waiting to recover, they want to heal and all of these stages can be reversed until, eventually, you become the person you once were.

Let me clear one thing up - anxiety is not an illness; it is a condition. Anxiety is not something that picks on people. It is a self-created condition that is mainly brought on by long-term stress and worry and is your brain and body's way of telling you that it has been overworked. Your body and mind are trying to communicate with you through the form of suffering and telling you to slow down and take things easy.

Your mind and body are just like a car that needs looking after in order to run correctly and have limits on how far they can be pushed. If you push them beyond this, then they cannot perform as they should and begin to break down.

I am contacted by more businessmen/women and people in the medical field than any other profession. These are people who tend to work too many hours and are under a great deal of stress at work. Many don't listen to their bodies when they first experience stress and so carry on overdoing things, which can then lead to constant feelings of exhaustion and anxiety.

Think of it like this. If I were to go out and buy a blender that has a maximum running speed of 1000 rpm, but I am not happy with this and want it to go faster, so I tweak it up to make it go at double that speed, what would happen? The motor would burn out and it would quickly break down, as it was never designed to go at this speed. I have overworked it!

Well, it is the same as your mind and body, and this is the reason you feel anxious and, in many cases, mentally fatigued. Your nerves have become bad and your brain is exhausted through overuse; through pushing yourself beyond what you were designed to handle. This is why it is so important to take your symptoms of anxiety with a pinch of salt and not to get stressed or worry about them too. The last thing you want to do now is add more worry and stress to an already overworked and stressed mind and body that are crying out to be left alone.

### **Let me explain...**

You may have reached the point of suffering through too much stress or worry - that makes sense. But why does it continue?

The answer is that anxiety has become your new problem and you now have something else to stress and worry about. Just when your mind and body crave a rest, it takes on more

worrying thoughts and more stress about how you are feeling. 'What is wrong with me?', 'Why do I feel like this?' you may ask. You become bewildered and lost, and each day becomes a battle as you try to think and fight your way out of this hell.

All this extra thinking, stress and worry then has you feeling even worse, so you worry and question it even more. Anxiety may be the last thing you think of at night and the first thing on your mind when you wake. Anxiety has become you, and you are now entrenched in the full anxiety cycle. I am sure many people can relate to this.

Do you see now why we stay in the cycle? This is the reason people find themselves going around in circles and getting nowhere whilst falling deeper into the condition because they do the opposite of everything they should do. In your desperation to get better, you have kept yourself in a loop of suffering by doing the very things that got you into this condition in the first place. Trying to worry, fight and think your way out of anxiety is like trying to heal a broken leg by going out for a run, you just end up breaking yourself even more.

## Chapter 3

### The Breakthrough

We can all experience anxiety at some point in our lives. There is a whole new range of stresses in society today - finding the money to pay the mortgage, worrying about our children, stress at work - all of these things can contribute towards making us feel anxious and stressed.

A certain amount of stress is only natural. The real problem arises when this stress is continuous and our mind and body never get a rest from this endless onslaught of worry, which in turn can cause our nerves to become sensitised. The weeks/months of worry and stress have caused your nerves to constantly vibrate or become 'bad' and all this anxious energy we have created has been stored up within the body, causing us to feel anxious for no real reason.

Now you must be wondering how I managed to discover the key to recovery, the key that, had I known about it all those years ago, would have helped me to get better so much earlier. The day came after years of suffering. It came as I was seeing yet another therapist at my local hospital who, once again, could not give me any answers to my condition and did nothing to make me feel any better. The appointment lasted twenty minutes, during which time I told her my problems, she listened and finished by asking me if I wished to switch my medication. Again, I was given no explanation as to why I felt the way I did.

However, this particular therapist had been told of someone in another town who was supposed to specialise more on the subject of anxiety and asked me if I would like her to make an appointment for me to visit. I agreed to go as I was desperate and willing to try anything. I gained no more hope from the prospect of attending this meeting than I did from any of the



other sessions I'd had with all the other so-called experts. Much to my surprise, this meeting turned out to be very different from any of the others. I can remember the therapist's first words to me. He said: "Paul, you will never get better until you stop trying to get better" This statement made no sense to me at the time, but over the next few months, it was to be the very statement that helped me recover.

During our meeting, I knew there was real hope that I could recover. For the first time, what he had said to me not only made sense, but it also felt right. Of all the other treatments I had tried over the years, and boy did I try them all, not one of them felt right. I would pay the money and go through the motions, but they certainly never made me feel any better and I was never given any explanation as to why I felt the way I did, something my present therapist had managed to achieve on my first meeting.

This therapist was only a small part of my recovery, but what he did do was point me in a different direction. It was through his help that I was motivated to begin studying the whole subject of anxiety and panic so that I would leave no stone unturned in trying to help others who suffered as I did. What I discovered is what I am now going to pass on to you in this book. In my opinion, it is the only path that leads to success, so, read on, and you too can also have "**A LIFE AT LAST**"

**Footnote:** Before I go on, I would like to explain why all these so-called cures did not work. I tried treatments like acupuncture, homoeopathy, hypnosis and many more. The reason they did not work was because I was trying to rid myself of how I felt. This is the problem; so many people just want this 'dreadful thing to go away'. They go from one treatment to another, sometimes spending a small fortune doing the exact opposite of what they should be doing, which is allowing themselves to feel the way they do.

## Chapter 4

### Understanding Anxiety

The key point is to understand that our mind and body can only take so much stress and worry before we start to feel run down, stressed, emotionally drained and exhausted. This could be caused by the loss of a loved one, personal problems, or working long hours without taking time out to relax. Our mind and body can only take so much and this is where the word breakdown comes in.

The trouble then is that when we first feel the symptoms of anxiety, these 'feelings' become our new daily problem. Now, not only do we feel anxious, but we don't understand why we feel like we do. It may frighten us and we may feel like we are losing ourselves or going crazy. We may worry daily about how we are feeling and question it deeply. We may also feel frustrated with our current predicament and so fill ourselves with self-pity. We may feel we have exhausted every avenue looking for relief yet nothing is helping and as time passes, we may feel more despondent than ever.

The above is a very common cycle and something I certainly went through. The main reason we are trapped in this cycle is that we don't understand why we feel like we do. We become confused and so what else can we do but blindly try and figure a way out of this hell? The worse we feel, the more we fight and the more frustrated and confused we become. It's a vicious cycle, but one that is easily reversible. The anxiety cycle is like pouring petrol on a fire; it will never go out until we stop adding more fuel to it.

As explained, an essential element in discovering the key to recovery is ***understanding*** why we feel like we do. "Why is it so important?" you may ask. "I just want it all to go away". Well, it's so important because it takes the whole fear out of

how you feel. If you fear something, it is bound to dominate your life. If you don't understand what's happening, you will continue to go around in circles, continually thinking and worrying about your condition, while trying to struggle and fight your way out.

With understanding also comes less questioning, which in turn gives your brain a rest and enables you to think more clearly. With knowledge also comes less worry over how you are feeling, giving your nervous system the break it needs to repair itself. Knowledge of your condition is what finally breaks the loop so that a process of healing can occur.

### **Recovery is for everyone**

On the anxiety scale, I registered pretty high, but no two people will experience the same symptoms. The point is, no matter what symptoms you are experiencing or what stage you feel you are at, they all come under the same umbrella and recovery is possible for all of you. I am forever telling people not to separate each symptom and worry about them individually.

You may experience many symptoms when suffering yet there is no reason to attempt to unravel them all, just place them all under the same umbrella of anxiety. When I recovered all of my symptoms pretty much left at the same time. The aim is to lessen the time you worry and obsess about how you are feeling and to regain the courage to go about your daily life.

Let me explain by going back to that statement: "You will not get better until you stop trying to get better". What does it mean? Well, let's say that someone came to me and said "Paul, I have these strange feelings all day, like pins and needles, and I can't concentrate. I feel unreal at times and continually anxious. What should I do? "

The answer is "Nothing"

"Nothing?"

"Yes, nothing. Just allow yourself to feel the way you do. By doing nothing, you will give your exhausted brain and nerves a rest and the chance to heal".

"But surely, I should fight it? "I must get the better of this thing".

"OK, go ahead then, but you have been doing this for years and it has not helped".

"What do you mean then?"

"I mean, you can't control your anxiety, it is normal to feel this way after what you have put yourself through. Your body and mind are tired of you running around trying to find answers, worrying and obsessing about how you are feeling. You are just keeping yourself in this state by adding more fear and worry while exhausting yourself further."

Let me ask you a question. "When you break your leg, what do you do?"

"Erm, well, it goes in a pot, I rest it and allow it to heal".

"Well, why on earth, don't you do that with your exhausted mind and body then? You don't say, 'My leg hurts, I must stop it hurting' and then start running around in your mind all day trying to think of ways you can stop it hurting and tensing against the pain."

The truth is the body and mind have the best inbuilt healing system in the world if you just step back and allow them to do their job. They don't need or want your constant interference through endless effort, worry and struggle. Constantly trying to

manipulate your current state is exhausting, completely pointless and counter-productive. How can overthinking ever heal an exhausted brain crying out to be left alone? How can worrying, the very thing that creates anxiety ever lead you to recovery?

The mistake so many make is that they spend all their time trying to get rid of or manage their anxiety and never cut out the root of the problem. We can only truly recover by no longer creating the anxiety and then allowing ourselves to go through a process of healing the past suffering we have created.

### **This is the key!**

Even when I was confident that all these uncomfortable feelings I was experiencing came from something as simple as a build-up of anxious energy, tired nerves and an exhausted brain, I still had to remind myself at times, but once I understood what was causing me to feel the way I did, then a lot of the fear disappeared. Yes, I still felt awful for the most part, as understanding alone was not a free pass out of feeling the way I did. It just pointed me towards the way out but there was still a process of healing to go through.

In saying that, there was a reduction in my suffering as I had stopped with all the 'What's wrong with me'? Why do I feel like this? I had stopped thrashing my exhausted brain and nerves with more worry and questions about how I was feeling and so they finally had the break they so craved. I had also now ceased battling with my condition by allowing myself to feel the way I did. I finally felt some relief because I had stopped adding more suffering to my suffering and finally broken the cycle.

Look at it this way: If you have a cold, you don't worry about it. It does not bother you because you understand it and why it is there, so although it is a slight annoyance, you pay little attention to it and don't let it bother you too much. This is the

stage I reached with my feelings of anxiety. This change in attitude came through less fear and a better understanding of my condition and a huge realisation that I was the cause of so much of my suffering and the loop I was in.

**Here is a short story to get the point across:**

A friend of mine, with whom I go running, recently had an operation on his knee and so was unable to run for a while. The doctor told him that it would take a few months to heal and to expect to feel pain for a few weeks. He accepted this and just got on with his day despite the pain. Imagine if he had spent all his spare time looking for an answer to make the pain go away overnight; each day searching in his mind, Googling miracle cures, looking for a doctor that could make it better instantly while fighting to control the pain. In doing this, he would be attempting the impossible and would only exhaust himself, adding further suffering to that which he was already experiencing. Yet this is how so many people approach their anxiety, thinking this will somehow bring them freedom from it.

That's precisely the point I reached. I finally admitted defeat and accepted that anxiety would be a part of my life for a while and that I would give my mind and body as much time as they needed to heal. Previously, I used to wake up and monitor how I felt while spending all day trying to do something about it. I finally accepted that when I woke, I would feel exhausted and anxious, my mind would probably race and I would feel odd and detached for most of the day. I would not ignore it or pretend to like it, but for once, I was not going to try and do anything about it.

With this new approach, I could still feel awful at times, but for the first time, I had given my body and mind a much-needed break. If my body had been able to speak, it would have said "Thank you so much for that, Paul. I have been crying out for that break for so long. Did you ever think I could heal myself while you worried and stressed so much? Think about it; you

want me to recover from stress-induced symptoms and there you are stressing about them. I mean, come on, I may be the best healing system in the world, but even I am not that good! Your brain would also like to say thank you for the rest. It was so very tired and this is why you found thinking so hard, why your mind raced and you felt so detached from reality”.

I also stopped hiding away from how I felt and started engaging with life again. If I felt anxious, then I felt anxious and it would just have to come along with me for the day. I just said, “Anxiety you have taken enough of my life, but no more, I want to regain control and move beyond the walls you have created”. I am not saying this is easy and it does take some courage, especially for those who have avoided for so long. Even if you start with small steps and continue on this path, then I can guarantee they will turn into huge strides. I have seen people barely able to leave the house to then travel around the world within a year. How much you progress is down to your courage and determination.

As well as going back out there and allowing anxiety to be present, a big part of my recovery came through *no longer making it my daily aim to get better*. I may repeat this often, but I want to really get my point across. You don't have to search for recovery, rather let recovery come to you. I used to go to work and feel odd and anxious, but instead of worrying about it or trying to manipulate my experience; I just got on with the task at hand. I found it hard to concentrate at times, and my attention kept reverting back to me and how I was feeling, but I just got on with my day. Anxiety was beginning to lose its hold on me, and I was no longer a slave to it.

When you realise that there is no outside miracle cure and recovery comes from within, this can be a relief in itself. You no longer have to search in your mind for answers or go from one treatment to another, hoping that elusive cure, the one you must have missed, is out there. I was one of those people, certain that the quick answer must be out there somewhere. I

now know this is not the case and I wasted a lot of time and money trying to find it.

### **How long does it take to recover?**

Several people have asked me how long it took me to recover. The day I could say I recovered was the day that anxiety and its symptoms did not bother me anymore. I had lost my fear of all my symptoms and knew it was only a matter of time before I was back to my old self. Some of my symptoms still lingered, but they had lessened in intensity and just did not bother me like they once did. Eventually, my mind and body just repaired themselves, and I have now become the person I was before I became anxious. I won't pretend it was plain sailing - it was a very up-and-down affair and took time - but when you feel improvements, you know you are on the right road and patience becomes pretty easy.

So yes, my recovery took time and I had to be patient. I saw someone who was great for me and this person's words put me on the right track. But my real progress came from a combination of knowledge, my own deep insights and trial and error. Also, there is no better education than the experience of coming through anxiety. The only people I have ever respected on the subject are the people who have been through it and come out the other side.

In the beginning and after finding no real answers, I just had to work it all out for myself. When I knew I was on the right track, I began to study the whole subject of anxiety and took a real interest in how the mind and body worked. When the penny dropped and I understood things fully, improvement came quite quickly. When you have spent ten years getting worse, then you know when you are on the right road.



## Chapter 5

### Give Up the Fight

*In this chapter, I want to get the message across about giving up the fight with your anxiety before moving on to other advice. I make no apologies for going over things more than once in different ways as I'm determined to help you understand what I am trying to say.*

Firstly, let me explain in more detail why so many are stuck in the cycle of anxiety and, in many cases, feel they are getting worse. This is because they are fighting a constant battle to feel better and defeat their symptoms. They may spend all day trying to 'rid' themselves of how they feel. They may attempt to unravel the whole day trying to work out what they did wrong or why they felt like they did. They may spend their entire time in deep thought trying to find a way out while breaking down from time to time as they see no way out. The harder they try to escape from their mental and emotional torment, the worse they feel, believing that no one understands, and finding little or no help wherever they turn.

I know this person was me. I thought so deeply each day that I was losing touch with the world around me. I fought these feelings and let them frustrate me so much that my anxiety certainly got worse.

I also spent my whole time acting through the day, hoping that no one would notice how I felt. I never once thought about doing anything else but trying to fight and think myself better. What else could I do but fight and figure it out for myself, when I was given no advice or explanation for how I felt? Little did I know that I was doing the exact opposite of what I should be doing.

## Learning to experience your emotions

Rather than run away and try to rid yourself of how you feel, I want you to go towards how you are feeling. For once, realise it is OK to experience your anxious feelings, rather than suppress or fight against them. Remember, it's only natural in the circumstances to feel the way you do, there is not a single thing you can do to feel better instantly, so this battle with yourself is pointless. Someone once said, 'You must make anxiety your friend for you 'both' to live in peaceful harmony' and this is so very true.

'Allowing' is not another technique to try and feel better. This is where so many go wrong, as on hearing this advice, many sufferers then spend all their day **trying** to allow and use it as another technique to rid themselves of their anxious feelings. Allowing yourself to feel the way you do is not about trying to feel good; it's about allowing yourself to feel terrible if need be.

The opposite of 'allowing' is struggling, resisting, avoiding, fighting and overthinking; all the things that keep you in the cycle of suffering. As you can see, all the above practices come from a place of trying to escape how you currently feel and the reason why they never work. True 'allowing' is a surrendering of all techniques and attempts to manipulate your inner state. True surrender is the gateway to recovery as it gives your mind and body the break they need to heal themselves. It stops you from recreating your suffering, finally breaks the cycle and so allows a process of healing to begin.

Below is an example of 'realisation' received from a sufferer, and my response to her:

*"After reading all the great information in your book, I am beginning to understand a few things that I was doing wrong. For instance, when I was feeling on edge, not feeling quite right, like something was going to happen, I would have a couple of drinks to make the feelings go away. I now realise*

*that by doing this, I was running away from my feelings; it was a way of suppressing them and not allowing myself to experience them. Well, for the last week or so, I've stopped doing that, and I'm beginning to feel better, not completely 100% but a lot better than of late."*

**My reply was:**

*"That was an excellent insight into the fact that you were running away from your feelings and not allowing yourself to experience them. To be free of our anxious feelings, we must be willing to feel them; this is how we become free of this anxious energy within. I have told many people over the years that they can either spend a few months allowing themselves to experience their anxious feelings and be free of them or they can spend a lifetime trying to manage, suppress and avoid them. Also, once you face these feelings and nothing bad happens, they lose your respect. Is that it? You may say. This is how I unmasked a lot of my anxiety and was no longer bluffed by it.*

*We can also get stuck in a cycle of suppression by avoiding the places we think may cause us to feel uncomfortable. Not only is this another form of avoiding emotions, but we can also enter a cycle of avoidance that stops us from living our lives. The only way to break this cycle is to happily go towards these places and situations and experience what comes up willingly. Stripped back to basics, anxiety, although uncomfortable, is just a harmless movement of inner energy that we are more than capable of handling.*

*Paul"*

So, go towards these feelings and don't try to deny their presence. Allow yourself to feel the way that you do. Some people falsely believe that if they do this, these feelings will overtake them and so they try to keep a grip on themselves

and hold everything together. Yet the opposite is true, the more they let go of this grip, the less intense the feelings.

Again, I will use my own real-life experience to explain what I did and where I went wrong:

I once walked around, thinking deeply about how I felt. I was always worrying and questioning why I was getting worse and not better. I kept going around in circles, trying to figure a way out of my inner prison. I continually felt angry and frustrated about how I was feeling, wondering when this thing would go away. I was also full of self-pity and cried myself to sleep more than once.

Can you see how much extra stress and pressure I was putting myself under each day? Even a healthy body would have struggled to cope, never mind an exhausted one that was suffering from anxiety. Why I got worse and not better over the years makes total sense to me now. I was thrashing my mind and body daily, constantly trying to do something about the way I felt. Eventually, through utter exhaustion and getting nowhere, I finally gave up and said, "I'm done, I would rather feel this way than spend all day fighting it".

I had never accepted how I felt before, not for one minute. I had been trying to deny something that was totally normal in the circumstances and just made it worse with all my attempts to escape it.

My mind and body could not begin to recover until I gave up this daily war that I had created within myself and this is when the statement "You will never get better until you stop trying" finally made so much sense to me. It was once my daily aim to 'get rid' of how I was feeling. If my body could speak, it would have said "Paul, please step out of the way, leave me alone and let me heal myself; you are making things far worse".

What I am saying is to allow anxiety to be part of your day and stop worrying/obsessing about it. Tell yourself that it is OK to feel like this for the time being. I am not saying you have to like it, just learn to live alongside it. Also, give your body and mind as much space as they need to heal. Too many people are far too impatient and want instant relief. So many people falsely believe that there is some secret out there, some technique or saying that will help them step straight out of their suffering. Unfortunately, this is not the case.

I wanted immediate success for ten years and never found it, so this time I was willing to give myself time to recover. I had been through so much; it made sense that it was going to take time to regain my former self.

To begin with, I just aimed for progress and was happy with that. I never demanded or expected anything, which, on reflection, helped me so much. Remember, your mind and body take time to adjust, and each day that you give up the battle with your current state, you are giving your mind and body another day to repair themselves.

Think about this: If fighting worked, you would be cured by now, so why not try the opposite? I blindly thought I had to get rid of my anxiety at all costs before I could have a life. The truth was I could have a life alongside anxiety; it truly was OK to feel this way. What I initially failed to see was that my anxiety was only a small part of how I was feeling. The real issue was coming through this battle I was having with myself; this complete non-acceptance of my current state was the main cause of my suffering.

Someone once said to me, "But how can I allow these feelings to be present when they feel so awful?" My reply was, "It is not the anxiety that has led you to this point; it is not even the anxiety that has created the majority of your suffering. It is the constant battle and refusal to feel how you do that has. Your initial anxiety has nothing to do with most of the symptoms you

now feel. If you let go of this battle and surrender yourself to how you feel, then a lot of your suffering will fall away. Not all of it, as there is so much left to heal, but you may find you have more peace than before.”

## **Other people's stories**

I will refer to other people's words from time to time because I believe it helps to hear what others have to say, particularly those who have been through the same experiences and come out the other side. These are from real people that I have helped in the past and it shows just how many of them have come through once they received the right help and guidance.

Below is a post taken from my blog from Scarlet, who is now fully recovered, and it sums up exactly what I want to get across. Here she talks about the need to live your life and not let anxiety make choices for you and how sitting at home, hoping and wishing it all away does not work.

## **Scarlet's Post**

*You just need to put Paul's advice into practice as often as you can in order to get off the 'hamster wheel' of anxiety and get on with 'normal' everyday living. Even when you don't feel like it, go out, go to work, down to the pub, cycling, whatever you fancy doing. Don't be put off by inappropriate feelings or thoughts...do it anyway. For normal feelings to return, we have to live as normal a life as possible. I made the mistake for the first year of sitting and waiting to get well before I actually 'lived', thinking this was the way to do it. It took me the best part of a year to find out this was totally wrong. My anxiety levels shot up during this time also. I ended up ruminating all day and became almost housebound.*

Scarlet is right and this is something I try to get across early. Don't hide away indoors; don't wait until you feel better to go

out and live your life. Don't put off anything because of how you feel. Just live your life regardless. You may also feel worse when you first do this because you are coming out of your comfort zone, but it is the actual doing which begins to take the edge off feelings and in time normal feelings begin to override the feelings of strangeness. As Scarlet says, "For normal feelings to return, we have to live as normal a life as possible". Nothing is gained by hiding away. In the latter stages of my recovery, I always went everywhere at will, no matter how I felt. I knew that this was the only way to move forward and I no longer allowed anxiety to make decisions for me.

Yes, sometimes I felt like hiding away, but I rarely did. Sometimes I felt uncomfortable in certain situations, but I thought 'So what, this is a sign of growth and not me forever'. I knew deep down that putting myself in situations that I had avoided in the past would help me to recover. It would also teach my mind that the outside world was a nice and safe place to engage with. By hiding away, I would be sending the opposite message and my fear and anxiety would only grow.

I am not saying I started running around like a headless chicken proving how strong I was, sometimes I felt so spent and tired I would need to rest for a day or two. But in the main, I just started socialising more. I went running, took the dog for a walk, went swimming and just began to live again. Yes, at first it was strange and sometimes I had to drag myself there, but I always went. Eventually, I felt more comfortable and more at one with the world around me. I had stopped sitting at home brooding, hoping that a miracle would come along and rid me of how I was feeling.

A woman once said to me "But Paul I have been going to work, doing chores and living my life and I still feel as anxious as ever and I am finding it incredibly tiring to keep doing so." This lady had spent the previous 15 minutes with me, starting every sentence with "I worry that.....". I explained to her that

living her life was not going to be some secret to anxiety falling away while she carried on worrying and stressing about everything. The worrying and stressing also had to cease if she wanted to recover; otherwise, she was just recreating her anxious feelings and exhausting herself with worry.

The living part was so her mind got more comfortable with her surroundings again and to give her another focus, rather than spending all day ruminating. I also explained to her that it was fine to slow down and take it easy if she felt too emotionally and physically drained on a particular day. There is a huge difference between avoiding life because of how you feel and doing so because you need some downtime.

One thing I quickly learnt is that the road to recovery is not all plain sailing and there are many ups and downs. You should enjoy the good days and don't get too down about the bad. The most important thing to remember is that in order to get better, you may have to live alongside the old you for a while, including feelings of dread and anxiousness. This can't be avoided, but with a little patience, a new you will begin to emerge.

Below is part of an email from someone I helped. This lady was in a deep hole when she first came across my site. At the time of writing, she is well on her way to recovery and in her own words, 'A thousand times better'.

*Hi Paul,*

*I was thinking yesterday about how far I have come. There were times when I thought I was trapped with anxiety forever... but thinking about it, all the 'fighting to control' is what trapped me and not the actual symptoms. If I had left the stress-induced symptoms alone, then I would never have ended up in the state I did! But I persevered, and now I am seeing big results. I don't ever worry about whether or not I will recover now - it's like it's inbuilt that I now know I will.*



She had finally got it. It was the fighting and trying to control her anxiety that made her sink deeper into the condition. If she had just got on with her day accepting the anxiety-induced symptoms, she would have let go of so much worry, effort and struggle, thus inviting recovery in. Previously she did the exact opposite and spent all her day trying to rid herself of the way she felt by attempting to think and fight her way out and so became stuck in a loop of creating more suffering.

### **Learning to live again**

By going out and living your life, you are changing habits and reprogramming your brain. It's not easy at times, but it brings so many victories, and this is where confidence is built. It is the continued doing that brings so many rewards. As one lady put it "It's like re-training the brain". You also have to lose the need to be in control of your inner world. At one time, if I did not feel right, then I thought I had to fix it, but I eventually learned to go with the 'craziness', as I put it, and not fight against it.

One lady who struggled with anxiety and let it dominate her day recently sent me an email saying, "I feel anxious today Paul but, hey, for the first time in years it's OK". This is the stage she needed to reach. More than anything else, the first step is to view anxiety differently and to change your attitude towards it so that it does not dominate your every waking moment. It is never about how you feel - you can do very little about that – it has more to do with your attitude towards it. If you want to fight, worry and obsess about it daily and let it get you down, spending the whole day in a battle you cannot win, then go ahead, but trust me, you will feel far worse. As I keep saying, we create our own suffering, once we see this for ourselves, it then makes no sense to carry on doing what is hurting us.

## Chapter 6

### Anxiety Backpack

I have mentioned to others about the anxiety backpack that we tend to carry around and how it can weigh us down. Several people have asked me what I mean by this, so here is a more detailed explanation in a story I have shared with people in the past.

When you first began to suffer, someone came along, knocked on your door and told you that in order to recover, you needed this anxiety backpack; a bit like a carry-around survival kit. You were curious and believed this stranger and so you invited them in. Surely, they just had your best interests at heart. As they spoke, they made big promises about this backpack being vital for you, explaining to you how it would keep you safe and take you on the road to recovery.

You are so excited at the prospect of their promises that you buy it immediately. The stranger tells you that you must put this backpack on first thing in the morning, carry it around everywhere you go and only take it off last thing at night, but they assure you everything you need to recover is in there and that it will not only help you but also keep you safe. You can also buy extra things for this backpack whenever you wish. It is always a good idea to add more to this backpack. It does get heavier, but they tell you it's all vital for your recovery. So, you excitedly agree to buy it and when the stranger has gone on their way, you open it to see what's inside.

The first thing you find is a list of websites to save into your Internet browser; this includes links to anxiety chat rooms, articles, anxiety literature and many more anxiety-related links. It says you must hang around these forums for as long as it takes you to find the magic answer that will make it all go

away. Also, it advises you to keep reading all the literature you have gathered as this will eventually make you feel better. It also recommends you pop into the chat rooms to tell others how you are feeling and also swap anxiety-related stories with other sufferers. All this makes sense to you and so off you go to register on the forum, and as luck would have it, the backpack also gives you a list of great names to sign up with. You choose 'anxietyguy'. Brilliant, how appropriate; you cannot wait to talk with others, share your story and get all the answers you need.

So, you pop on this backpack and go on the Internet forums, introduce yourself and start telling your story while asking a host of questions. You're initially a little confused as everyone seems to be answering your questions with a different answer and you're not sure which reply is correct and which is not. You also look at the dates of when people joined and they seem to have been here for years, still asking the same questions. How can this be, if this is the answer?

After spending a lot of time here, you don't feel that much better. The odd person has passed on a bit of advice that seemed to help a little and you have realised you're not alone, but the constant stories of people suffering doesn't make you feel better like the backpack promised. It only makes you feel more bogged down with it all and the subject now appears to have taken over your life. You are now talking so much about anxiety that you can't seem to think of anything else. You're already a little tired of carrying this backpack around with you, but you're sure it is vital for your recovery, so you take another look inside to see what you can find.

The next thing it tells you to do is to Google the subject, put in all your symptoms and it even has a list of great links to put into your favourites. This makes sense - Googling how you feel must surely help. So off you go and once again you're finding different bits of advice on the World Wide Web, but again a lot of it is conflicting. Some say do this and some say

do the opposite and so you don't seem to know who to trust. There are also lots of people on the internet promising to cure you overnight, but you're not quite sure this could be true as, surely, if this were the case, someone would have told you about this on the forum and why do they want so much money to do this, what is their real intention? On the odd occasion, you do come across something of value and it seems to make sense, but where is this secret answer to make it all go away? That's all you want.

So, you decide to Google some more and if you struggle with a particular symptom, then you are told to research this one in detail. The backpack says you must search until you find something or someone to make it all go away; that each symptom is important and must be researched fully and eliminated.

As you have many symptoms, this Googling is taking up a lot of your time and apart from the odd bit of decent information that seems to make you feel a little better temporarily this golden piece of information and that person who is going to tell you how to make it all go away seems as elusive as ever. The day has also been tiring and all this research has been mentally draining. So, you decide to take your backpack off for the day and start again in the morning.

As you wake, you decide you want to go out and leave the research for today, but you're feeling a little anxious and wonder what else is in this backpack. Maybe there is something in there that will take the edge away. Inside is a list of people that are going to help you. There are counsellors, acupuncturists and hypnotherapists. This all sounds great, so you throw on your backpack. Yes, the backpack is heavy, and it's tiring carrying this thing around each day, but it's vital you do this as you never know when you may need to look inside and, of course, it promises to keep you safe and holds all the answers to your recovery.

So, you now get this list out and start to book in with these people who you're told can help you. The trouble is when you go to see some of these counsellors, many of them just want to drag up the past, which doesn't seem to help. The odd one does talk some sense, but it only seems to make you feel better during the time you are communicating with them and maybe for a few hours after.

The acupuncturist seems nice enough and the hypnotherapist seems convincing too, but apart from some temporary relief, they don't seem to be helping. "Why can't they make this damn anxiety go away? Why can't they give me the answers I am looking for? Is the list I have the wrong list? If it is, maybe if I see a new therapist off my own back that may help". These are the questions you ask yourself. So, you carry on going from one person to another and although they all appear to mean well, none of them are able to make it go away for good. You decide to cut your losses and take another look into your backpack, as this route has become far too expensive and you just seem to be going around in circles.

The backpack is getting extremely heavy now and really begins to hinder your day. All these rules and techniques you have been given seem to make you feel worse, not better. You start thinking you're a lost cause and that the rules of recovery don't apply to you. But you were told the answers were inside, so you decide to take another look. The next bit of advice is to see your doctor and get on medication. Yes, this also makes sense. When we don't feel well, we go and get some pills. You are excited by this and are convinced the doctor will make it all go away.

So off you go to see your doctor and after a brief chat about how you feel, he finds the pills that will work for you and off you go to take them as instructed. Again though, these pills don't have the effect you thought they would. They have taken the edge off a little, but they seem to make you feel spaced out and create other side effects. You don't particularly like them

and feel the slight benefits are outweighed by the side effects and they have not taken away your anxiety as the backpack promised. After a few months of swapping tablets, you decide to come off them and try to do it on your own without the extra complications of being on medication.

This backpack seems to be letting you down now. You keep doing as instructed, but you seem to be sinking deeper. You decide to see what else is in there, as you don't feel great at the minute. As you dig deeper inside, there are some instructions entitled 'How not to feel anxiety'. Yes, this sounds like what you need. You don't want to feel it at all. The list states that it is better to stay in more and avoid social interaction and certain places. It says, "Wherever you feel anxious, then avoid that place". Yes, this makes sense. You can do this until you feel better then start going out again later. So instead of accepting invites to social events, you start making excuses not to go. You also begin avoiding big crowds of people. That concert you go to every year is now an absolute no-no. The supermarket always has you feeling a little anxious so that can go on the list of places to avoid too.

Nothing terrible has ever happened at these places apart from you feeling a little uncomfortable, but why feel a little uncomfortable when you don't have to feel uncomfortable at all? Well, this seems all well and good and appears to make sense, but your life now seems to be getting more and more restricted. You miss socialising and you miss people and the things you used to do. Your list of places to avoid has now increased and when you do try to go out now, you seem to be worse than when you started avoiding. How did it come to this? But this backpack has the answers so you must be doing the right thing, it just doesn't feel like you are. You are still Googling often, still going on the forums, avoiding feeling anxious and you have even started looking at new therapists in your area. One talks a great game on his website and he seems convincing, so maybe you'll start the counselling route again.

You eventually decide against the counselling as it's far too expensive and you feel you have become addicted to just feeling better when you talk to them, but nothing ever seems to come out of it long term. Also, they keep sending you home with a bunch of homework and techniques and you are fed up with these, it just feels like a huge effort to continually implement them all. You want to leave the subject behind and not have to constantly think about what you need to do and not do or how you should approach this and that situation. You are just getting more and more fed up with it all.

The next morning you feel as anxious as ever and are starting to feel bogged down with the subject. You decide to look in your backpack for more advice. Inside it says the world is a scary place and you must be protected, so it includes a list of safety behaviours. They advise things like, if you go out make sure you sit near the exit; you must always have access to escape. If you see someone you know and they want to chat, make sure you have an excuse ready to get away. Start using online shopping sites; it will save you from having to go to the supermarket. If someone rings you, don't answer; just text them back and say you missed their call. This seems a good idea and should keep you safe. You like the idea of feeling safe.

But yet again, after trying out all these safety behaviours, you don't feel any better. You now start to question things like. "Why do I have to do all this? Everyone else seems to be able to manage in life without going through all these rituals. I feel like I am teaching my mind there is danger in everything when there is not. Could this be counter-productive, and have I fallen for a lie here?" You are starting to question this whole backpack, but a small part of you still believes the answers lie in there.

You wake up the next day and look at your backpack lying on the floor and you don't want to carry it around with you

anymore; it is really weighing you down now. It promised so much, yet delivered so little. All the answers were supposed to be in there, yet you feel you have got worse. You keep looking in there and all it says is don't do this and don't go there. You must not feel anxiety. Avoidance is your best course of action, but it just doesn't feel that way. There are maps in there of places it is safe to go to and places it is not. These maps are really affecting your life; why can't I just go anywhere? You ask.

There are loads of instructions on how to get rid of your anxiety, but you have tried Googling, the miracle cures, the doctors and the therapists, but nothing is making it go away as promised. One other thing you notice is that very few other people are carrying this backpack around with them. You start to question things, like "How are these people going about their daily lives without one?", "How are they keeping safe?", "How come it's OK for them to go where they want and not me?", "They don't seem to view the world as scary and the world is the same place for them as it is for me. Maybe this backpack got it wrong when it told me the world was a place to fear."

Other people seem so happy and free, and you envy them not having to spend every day attempting to work things out or get rid of something. How nice it must be not to have to go on the forums. How nice it must be not to have to Google each night looking for answers and not to live so much in your head. You just want to be like them.

You're feeling so mentally and physically drained carrying this around with you, researching, trying to stay safe and trying to make it all go away. You look at the mountain of self-help books you have gathered over the years. You look at them and think, "Did I ever really need them? Did they just reinforce the idea that I was broken and needed fixing? Have I become addicted to the feeling of hope I get when reading them, without them ever really helping? You don't know anymore,



but something just feels wrong here. You feel like you have been on the wrong track to get better. Every single instinct you have screams to you that you have, but it's late and you need to sleep on this.

The next morning when you wake, you think again of all the people you have seen without the need for this backpack. Something inside you is screaming, "I don't think I need this backpack! What if I just throw it away? What if I just forget the search, stop the therapists, log off all the forums and go where I want to go? What if I waste no more mental energy trying to get better or work any of this out? What if I no longer spend any more time trying to get rid of something? Would something bad happen? What exactly is this backpack keeping me safe from anyway? Do I need its help? It certainly doesn't feel like it has helped in any way. Maybe I don't need to spend all day trying to avoid or get rid of it as my backpack advised. Maybe it was just trying to convince me something was wrong and keep me in a loop of therapists and solutions. Maybe the person who sold me the idea was a con man. Maybe I fell for a lie, a trick to keep me stuck." Maybe I have been doing all this to myself!!".

Well, there is only one way to find out; you are going to leave your backpack at home and ignore every bit of advice in there. So, to begin with, there will be no more safety behaviours and rituals. Your Internet searches will now be about your true passions and interests, like cycling and walking. All your Internet favourites and literature on anxiety will go. You will also no longer avoid feeling anxious. Bring it on; nothing has ever happened when you have felt that way anyway. All the counsellors' phone numbers can go in the bin. Oh, it feels good emptying this backpack and throwing it all away. There is a little part of you that feels apprehensive – will you truly be safe without it? Well everyone else seems to be, so why not?

As you are emptying your backpack, you find a little note at the bottom that says: "I am sorry for conning you out of your

money. I needed to feed my family and it is a very easy con to pull off. I am sorry for pretending this was the way home and that all that was in this backpack would cure you. I know by the time you read this note, you will have come to the bottom of the backpack and realised it has only made you feel worse. You may even have come to your own conclusions by now, but, if not, here is the real secret of recovery - it's very simple:

You don't need this backpack, you never did. You were looking in the wrong direction. There was never anything to get rid of, never anything to avoid and there is nothing wrong with you. You have just reached this stage through a few simple misunderstandings. By trying to fix yourself and get rid of anxiety, you have been creating more of it and staying in a loop of suffering. You are not broken like you think you are, so just go out and live your life. There never was anything to avoid. The list I put in there was just to convince you that the world was a scary place. It's not and never was. If you keep following the list of places to avoid, it has the opposite effect and trains your mind to be afraid of a non-existent threat. I was making things worse with this advice and I am sorry.

You also don't need all those safety behaviours. The best way to recover is to carry on doing the things you would normally do. Never, ever let how you feel make decisions for you. Anxiety loves avoidance and hates action. Do what you would always do and take how you feel with you, for once find out what happens on the other side of action and take no notice of the scenarios your anxious mind creates. Feeling anxious is not always pleasant, but it is nothing more than excess energy in the body that cannot harm you in any way.

And you don't need to stay in therapy; this just reinforces the fact there is something wrong with you and that someone will eventually save you. But only you can save yourself, as you are the one that has been creating this. When you truly understand this, you will realise that you and only you have the power to no longer do the things that were keeping you stuck.

The last thing you need right now is a bunch of methods or techniques to manage your anxiety. This just keeps you focused on yourself and makes you believe the answer lies in ridding yourself of thoughts and emotions, but in doing this, you are forever at war with yourself. This is a war that does not need to be fought and is just exhausting and counter-productive. You need to understand that these emotions want to be felt so that they can be released. So please stop trying to find ways to suppress or get rid of them. If you no longer want to feel certain emotions, then you need to feel them; this is the only way to be free of them.

Oh, and forget the forums. They just feed the subject of anxiety through you daily and have you thinking of nothing else. They also drain you mentally and can become a distraction and a crutch that can take you away from actually living your life. Go on a forum about your true passion and reconnect with that instead.

Also, delete your favourites from your browser. I should never have told you to read about it every day and keep up the research; that also just feeds the subject into your subconscious on a daily basis and the internet is full of conflicting advice. You are better off just leaving a lot of questions unanswered and getting on with your day. If you find some information that hits home, just read it and move on; otherwise, you will have a computer full of pages to keep referring back to in order to find temporary relief. Once you truly understand, you will realise how little information you actually need.

Regarding the pills, if they help take the edge off and create action, there is a place for them, but they won't cure you. They can end up as sticking plasters that come with their own problems.

Certain self-help books have their purpose and a lot do help educate you, but they are now acting as a safety blanket. "Not feeling great today, let's read that book again and feel a bit of relief". So, read a book about something completely different; learn to move on from the subject. You never lose what you have learnt, so put those books in a drawer and forget about them. If in a few weeks, you need a little refresher, then pick your favourite page out and take a read. But it's now time to try and get off this self-help route. There just comes a point when you have to stop reading and researching and start living again.

The truth is that this backpack was useless. It was never going to give you the answers you were searching for and in most cases, was designed to make you feel worse. Can you now see how we do so much of this to ourselves? For your sake and the sake of my conscience, please throw your backpack away. You are safe and fine without it.

### **Letting go of my own backpack**

Everyone has his or her own kind of backpack. Some carry more around than others. The more you carry around, the heavier and more exhausting things become. When I finally threw mine away, it was a tremendous relief and freed up so much mental energy.

So yes, the story above was my own backpack and it is not meant to tell people what they should and should not do when it comes to medication, books or therapists; people can make their own choices on that. If you are seeing someone and they are bringing you comfort and helping in some way, then, by all means, keep seeing them, but at some point, you have to break away and reclaim your life without crutches.

Try not to get lost in the whole self-help field for the rest of your life or you will just get stuck in a world of 'there is something wrong and I need to find someone or something to

fix me'. It is this search that becomes so exhausting, the constant need to find answers, work everything out, the internal battle you have to rid yourself of how you are feeling; this is the true cause of your suffering and the irony is that you are doing it to yourself. It took me a long time to see this, but when I did, everything began to change.

So, the above is my own story, the conclusions I came to and how I felt so much better when I threw my backpack away. When I did, I felt so much lighter, my thinking was so much clearer, and I felt far more alive and began to reconnect with the world around me again. I thought I needed all this to get better, yet it was all these rituals, techniques, rules, deep thinking and analysing that was the problem. For as long as I thought I was broken and needed fixing, I was forever going to stay on the self-help route trying to find temporary relief while never finding what I really craved, which was long-term relief.

I recently spoke with a woman whom I respect very much on mental health and she said "Paul, I have said it for years. People don't need people like me to fix them, as that is something I cannot do. They just have to learn to see the truth behind their own suffering and my job is to help them see that. They are all mentally healthy but have just lost themselves through the misuse of thought. All mental distress bar none comes from stressful thinking and when they think they are broken, then this stressful thinking goes into overdrive and they can stay stuck for years."

I totally agree with her. I have never had one person come to me who did not get to the anxious state through stress and worry, which in turn is stressful thinking. I have also never had anyone who has been stuck for years who has not had more stressful thinking because of the state they now find themselves in. I would say I spent around 95% of my days in thought when I was anxious - worrying, analysing, fixing, researching and planning - and was utterly confused as to why I had such poor mental health, why my mind felt utterly

exhausted and why I felt so self-aware and stuck in my head. What I did to myself now seems crazy and so utterly pointless and counter-productive, but at the time it seemed perfectly natural.

So, to finish this chapter, there is nothing to find, nothing to fix and nowhere to get to. Through no fault of your own, you have taken yourself away from your natural default setting of mental well-being. I will talk more about this later, but when you see the truth behind this, then you will realise that there truly is nothing to do and how freeing is that? I have had so many people come to me and almost break down in tears when they realise they no longer have to fight, struggle or think their way back to well-being. Left alone, your mind and body will do this for you; it was never your job.

# Chapter 7

## Panic Attacks Explained

In this chapter, I will explain panic attacks in more detail so that you fully understand what is happening to you during one, which in turn will help you become less afraid of their presence. It will also help you to realise that they do not just happen to you because you have been chosen and that there is always a reason behind them.

### **What causes panic attacks?**

The primary cause of a panic attack is a build-up of anxious/fearful energy created through continuous stress and worry. This energy builds up over time to such an extent that the body then needs to release it. This is why panic attacks pretty much always occur to someone who has been through a stressful time in their life.

If we understand this and allow this release to happen, then we will not enter into the next stage. The next stage occurs when we start to fear this uncomfortable release. The fear of this release and what is happening to us is what kicks in the fight or flight mechanism and this is the point in which we experience what is commonly known as a panic attack. So, a panic attack is nothing more than a release of built-up energy created through worry and stress, which when feared can trigger our fight or flight mechanism, leading to a release of adrenalin into our system.

The same process happens when a volcano erupts. There has been a build-up of energy in the mountain over time and so to go back to its calm state it needs to release this excess energy. So, to be free of your own build-up of energy, then you need to allow yourself to experience it. Your body is actually doing you a favour here in releasing it. Understanding what is

happening and why is the key to helping you allow this process to happen without you trying to avoid or suppress this release.

During my period of suffering, I felt fear rise on occasions, but I only ever had one full-blown panic attack. Some people suffering from anxiety experience none at all, but for others, they become part of their lives.

These episodes of panic, or energy releases as I would rather call them, can rule a person's life to such an extent that the person becomes unable to do what other people take for granted. A simple trip to the shops or a car journey can become an ordeal and, in turn, can rob them of their very freedom to live a normal life.

When I experienced my first full-blown panic attack, I was sat down playing cards in my local pub. I was going through severe anxiety at the time and had become stressed and fed up with it all. I had started to really worry about my current state and my life in general and eventually, this fearful/anxious energy built up to such an extent that my body had to release it. Because I feared this intense release of energy it then kicked in my fight or flight response and so adrenalin was also coursing through me, resulting in my heart beating faster and my breathing becoming very shallow.

Initially, I felt incredibly overwhelmed and closed in, and the temptation to escape was massive, but I stayed put and let it run its course. I added no more fear or internal dialogue to the mix, and within less than a minute, I had calmed right down and felt pretty much back to normal. Why? Because this excess energy had now been released. As awful as the feelings are, it is worth pointing out that they are harmless and you are not about to collapse, have a heart attack or lose control, and you are certainly in no real danger. The key is to truly understand that any energy release is not in the slightest bit harmful or dangerous. Despite how uncomfortable and



overwhelmed you feel, nothing bad can happen. It is just a release of built-up energy and a release of adrenalin.

The most important thing here is to understand that life is not responsible for how you feel. The outside is not the cause of your energy releases. The mistake so many make is that they blame the outside for how they feel and falsely believe that avoiding the outside is the answer to their problems. The outside is never the problem; otherwise, we would all feel fear in the same places. The problem is on the inside; the outside is just triggering what needs to be released inside. It is not in any way responsible for how you feel. So never feel like you have to avoid the outside or certain situations.

Avoiding life just teaches your mind that the outside is a scary, threatening place to be and so it stays on constant alert to keep you safe from a non-existent threat and hence starts to activate the fight or flight response in normal everyday situations. This is why people who have avoided life for so long find even a simple trip to the shops an ordeal. They have taught their mind that there is danger out there and so it is only doing its job by producing a constant fear response when they go out of their current comfort zones.

So, the way out for me was twofold. Firstly, I had to re-train my mind through a process of non-avoidance that the world outside was a safe place to engage in. Your mind only changes its response by watching your actions. If you begin to avoid a certain place, then the fear response for this place will be turned up. This is why people can be fine in one situation and find another so challenging. The one they find challenging is the one they have avoided, believing it to be the source of the way they feel.

So, if you willingly go towards these places you have previously avoided, then the mind will start to understand that you are safe and begin to turn this fear response down. Your mind is innocent in all of this. It is just doing what it is designed

to do. So, the next time I felt fear for no reason, I would thank my mind for trying to keep me safe but do it anyway. I realised it was a false alarm and so I would not react to the fear response my mind was creating by attempting to escape the situation. It was now up to me to re-train my mind's response and let it know through my actions that I was perfectly fine and there was no danger in everyday situations.

The second thing I had to do was allow the release of this fearful/anxious energy that had built up inside me. This meant allowing myself to experience it fully and no longer spend my time avoiding any triggers or trying to suppress or control this energy. It was also important that I no longer recreated this energy by falling back into more worry and stress.

### **Let me explain further**

When we have a cold, we know the symptoms so we don't worry about them. We may have a headache or an upset tummy, but we don't have a problem with that. We all get them from time to time. But what happens when, for no apparent reason, we experience the feeling of panic for the first time? AAAAGGGHHHH ... No one told us about this, so this really must be something serious.

You have no one you can talk to about this, but: "Oh my God, what happened there?" Well, think about it this way: If you came face to face with a dangerous dog that you feared in the street, your heart would race and start beating very fast. You would feel panicky and very uncomfortable. But when it was all over, you would begin to relax, and your body would return to normal. No problem there, you would expect to feel like this in that situation, who wouldn't? But this is different - you felt panicky for no reason - WHY?

Imagine a cup that is gradually being topped up with water until eventually it fills up and cannot hold any more, so it overflows. If you are stressing or worrying over a long period,

be it through bereavement, a relationship break-up or long-term problems, then slowly but surely you are building up this anxious/fearful energy within. Then suddenly, wham, you feel panicky for no apparent reason, when in fact your body is looking after itself and releasing that energy of worry and stress that has been building up over the previous weeks/months.

My actual overflow that day was all the stress and worry about my initial anxiety. This is the reason I suffered my first episode of panic – my anxiety became my new problem. If I had just lived with it and not worried and stressed about it daily, then the cup would not have overflowed and I would just have been left with my feelings of anxiety.

Now if you had been told the above at school or by your parents, you would still have felt panicky, but you would have been able to say to yourself, “Hey, I have been through a really stressful time recently and this is just an overflow of energy I have created through long term stress and worry that is now releasing itself”. But because nobody does explain this to you, you tell yourself that this must be serious.

You go home and question everything that happened to you. Not only do you question everything that has happened, but you then start to worry that it will happen again. “Oh no, what if I feel like that again?” you say to yourself, you may then start to avoid anywhere you feel may trigger another episode. The stage you need to get to is to no longer care if you feel fear or not and then you no longer fear another release - easier said than done when all you may have done so far is to fear, avoid and run away from this release of energy.

Although I only had one severe attack, I had many episodes where I wanted to run away or escape. I remember being on a flight where I was very poorly on the way out. Flying had never bothered me in the past and I had no problem with it. But I was extremely poorly on this flight and just wanted to get off as I

thought I was going to faint. I finally reached my destination and was poorly for six days and had to see a local doctor. Well, on the way back, I was at the airport and I started with all the “What if I feel like that again”.

I became so anxious that I reached the point where I said to my partner “I can’t get on” After speaking to a woman representing the aircraft company, I was told that the plane would have to be held up while they pulled my baggage off.

Then, all of a sudden, I thought: “If I don’t fly, then once again I am giving in to how I feel. Whatever happens, happens”. So, I just got on that plane and flew back with no problems at all. Fear did surface a little as I stepped onto the aircraft, but I just thought “Come along then, I don’t care, my door is open”. I arrived at my destination, and I was so proud of myself for having passed through those feelings and all those negative thoughts of avoidance. Yes, some fear surfaced, but it died down as it always does. That day gave me so much confidence for the future that it was better to just see it through and discover for myself that there was nothing at all on the other side of these uncomfortable feelings.

The more you start to live alongside how you feel, then the easier things become, and as you allow yourself to go through uncomfortable situations over and over again, you gain the confidence of knowing that nothing bad ever happens. The key here is to come out of your safety zones and try to see these feelings through without attempting to control or put a stop to them. This is what releases this energy while also turning down the fear response in the brain.

When you start to move towards these feelings with an attitude of, “OK, come on, do your worst. Do what you have to do; I no longer care”, you stop adding fear to fear. Instead of avoiding or running away, I used to say: “OK, the door is wide open, come if you wish” and to my surprise, apart from feeling uncomfortable, nothing happened. When I allowed these

feelings to be present, I thought: “Is that it? Is that what I have been running away from and avoiding for so long?” When I started to do this, I soon realised there was no dark place in which I would lose control.

One thing that truly helped me was to realise that we all have this fight or flight response within us. It is part of our survival mechanism and a much-needed one. When this natural fear response occurred, I knew deep down that nothing terrible could happen to me.

We are all built perfectly to survive. Our heart pumps blood around our body, our lungs work to keep oxygen flowing and our stomach digests food, so we have a constant supply of energy. It doesn't matter which organ you look at; they all work perfectly and are needed for our survival. Whoever or whatever created us knew exactly what they were doing and so, this being the case, then the fear response could never be anything but normal. It wasn't meant to be harmful; it couldn't lead to me 'losing it' or going crazy. It was there to protect me. Yes, it felt scary, it was meant to and if it didn't, then I wouldn't have the urge to escape when I was presented with real danger.

A sense of calm almost always comes straight after fear peaks, which is the point when you feel you have to escape. The fight or flight system kicks in and says, “You seem to be scared of something, do you want to escape?” When you stay put and give it the answer 'no', it seems to say, “OK that's fine, I'll turn the fear response down then” and so fear then starts to subside and you feel much calmer. After seeing it this way, I didn't fear the emotion of fear like I once did and was far more willing to experience it. It just became another human emotion; an uncomfortable one, yes, but just another harmless emotion all the same.

The key point to remember is that when the fear peaks and you feel the need to escape - don't - just see it through. The

need to escape comes from your instinctive reaction to your fight or flight mechanism that is there to protect you. The trouble is; in your current state and through your past actions of avoidance, it now doesn't know the difference between a real threat and a false one and it is now up to you to guide it back on the right path through your future actions.

A woman once got in touch and said "Paul I have started going out and living again, I went to a few music concerts and at first it was scary, but I did it and now I have no problem at all there and can really enjoy myself. I still get a few pangs here and there but nothing major. I'm not sure why the fear has gone, but it is so freeing".

This woman had done nothing more than train her brain to understand that there was no danger at the concert and so gradually her brain turned the fear response off. She had also released a lot of this fearful/anxious energy by allowing herself to experience it.

I also went against my instinct to escape, as there was nothing to run away from. In reality, I was never running away from a place, I was always running away from a feeling and so I eventually realised that this is what needed addressing and that running away and avoiding would just create new problems and never solve the issue.

When I felt any fear rising, I just allowed myself to experience it without trying to escape or suppress it. I just carried on with whatever I was doing, and after the peak, there was always calm. Nothing terrible happened and what confidence that gave me for the future. I knew that if I felt like that again, I could cope and my confidence just grew. Again, do you see the benefits of this and the science behind it? By allowing yourself to experience fear, then you are releasing all this fearful/anxious energy within and, by no longer trying to escape, you are teaching your mind that you are perfectly safe

in life and so the fear response is then turned down and you can now live a much freer life.

I am not telling you to go here and there, putting yourself in every situation you find difficult straight away. Small strides will do at first, as long as you go out with the attitude that you are going to allow yourself to experience any feelings that may surface. There is also no such thing as failure and I do understand how strong and uncomfortable these emotions can be. So, if you find things become too much and you find yourself retreating, then just try again. Each person's comfort zone is entirely different and as long as you keep trying to expand on your own, then progress is inevitable.

To elaborate on this, I once watched a TV programme that caught my attention. The program started with a woman who had been burgled and met the burglar face to face. Two years down the line, she never went out, was constantly living in fear and suffered from severe anxiety and panic. This was having a terrible impact on her life, she wanted help and so there was a therapist in this field brought in to advise her.

He happened to mention something that had a significant impact on me and which I could identify with. He said, "I went through something very similar, but I refused to let it rule my life". He went on to explain that he understood the concept that if he did not get straight back out there and face his fears, then he would encounter far greater problems. So, he went towards what he feared and refused to hide away. He was mugged and wanted to get straight back out there, realising that it was better to do this than allow the problem to grow. The most important thing is he did it straight away rather than build up any avoidance behaviours that could cause more problems down the line.

He went on to say: "The answer to your problems lies within you and you have to go towards what you fear to get your life back". He never said it was easy, but suggested that the habits

this lady had developed of refusing to go out and needing someone with her constantly, were counterproductive and that she needed to do the exact opposite in order to move on from this experience.

What she did wrong was to never allow herself to feel any fear. For her, it was about avoiding these feelings at all costs. She would ring her boyfriend 20 times a day, and when he got back, he was never allowed to go out. She would not go anywhere because of how she felt and so the problem escalated.

What she needed to do was allow herself to feel those feelings of fear and insecurity and go through them. She only needed to take little steps initially, like not ringing her boyfriend as much, but she had to feel some fear and discomfort in order to release herself from her prison and to teach her mind that she was perfectly safe. Only then would she begin to feel more comfortable. She could never expect to regain her life by constantly seeking reassurance or needing someone by her side.

I am not blaming this lady, she was just going along with her instincts, but it was the avoidance behaviour that led to her having no life and needing this constant security. It was all the worry and stress about her predicament that was filling her with all this fearful energy that was just building up inside her and why she felt such strong and constant anxiety and fear.

I want you to remember the following statement because it is very important "To release yourself from fear, you have to become present to the experience of fear itself rather than trying to escape or avoid it".

I always went towards any uncomfortable emotions and refused to get into avoidance behaviour once my knowledge of the subject grew because I knew deep down that this was the worst thing I could do. I realised that if I didn't do everything at



will and allow myself to feel some fear, then my life would just become even more restricted.

***Avoid your fears, and they will grow, move towards them, and they will subside.***

As I moved into recovery, I often felt fear rise, but I just saw it now as a feeling and understood it. I knew the fear response was not pointing towards a genuine threat and I no longer cared if I felt it or not - my fear of fear had gone. That is the stage you get to when you see things through and don't spend your time running away from situations. This approach brings so many rewards. Avoidance just brings more feelings of defeat, more feelings of hopelessness and continued suffering.

At first, you may feel worse when following this route but feeling uncomfortable when doing something new is not a sign of failure. It is not a signal to retreat. It is a sign of real growth and a sign that you are regaining your life. Growth doesn't occur without feeling uncomfortable, so don't retreat from feeling discomfort. Embrace it and realise something good is happening.

It never surprises me when people come back to me and say, "I did it! I felt a little fear, yes, but it was not too bad. Now I understand that fear doesn't have to make decisions for me and I am still in charge". They may only have driven around the block in the car, but their achievement has shown them that there is a light at the end of the tunnel and given them the confidence to believe that they can get better and live a normal life again.

**Your fears only exist in the mind, not in reality**

There is no point of no return. I have seen so many come through once they have decided not to let these feelings dominate their life anymore. They have gone through them

enough times to no longer let them bother them. You can do anything as long as you no longer run away from how you feel.

This is the way forward. No one can hope to hide away at home, waiting for that miracle where they wake up and all this is behind them. Trust in what worked for me. I never took the easy way out. I wanted to live again and I was not going to let these feelings hold me back. If I had to experience these uncomfortable emotions to recover, then so be it. Anything was better than having no life at all.

### **To summarise**

We have been feeling fear since the dawn of time. It is nothing new and is an integral part of our body's mechanism. Once you truly understand that the physical sensations are not harmful or dangerous in any way, then you begin to lose your fear of fear and a cycle is once again broken. Once you realise that a panic attack is nothing more than built-up energy that is coming up to be released so as to free itself from your inner space then you are more than willing to experience it

### **Face Everything And Recover**

## Chapter 8

### Racing/Intrusive Thoughts

Worrying, obsessive, intrusive or racing thoughts are some of the symptoms of anxiety that can bother people the most. They do not understand how they can have these thoughts that seem so scary and come with such impact and frequency.

These worrisome, intrusive thoughts seem to come automatically, and those who suffer from them have little to no control over their presence.

These can be intrusive thoughts about their health, life, those closest to them or even negative thoughts about themselves, thus creating a negative self-image. They may be repetitive, compulsive thoughts about interactions they have had during the day or things that have happened in the past or may happen in the future.

#### **Why your thoughts never seem to cease**

The main reason you have numerous thoughts running through your mind is because of all your confusion about how you are feeling and the need to try and figure everything out as you attempt to escape your current state. Thinking has become an addiction, and so now the brain has a constant momentum to it and the reason it never seems to shut up.

You may go around in circles all day long, looking for answers and trying to find a way out of this hell you find yourself in. Some people may struggle to sleep as they reflect on the whole day, trying to figure it all out. Because of this the mind continually stays active and never gets the rest it needs to be at peace

Worrying can also become a habit. When you are in an anxious state, thoughts and emotions seem to be exaggerated, and everything is magnified. A little problem becomes massive and something that you could dismiss when you were healthier, sticks around all day.

### **How do I control my thoughts?**

The simple answer is that you can't control them. You can't control your thoughts any more than you can manage your heartbeat. If you could, then you would be able to continually think positive thoughts and stop unwanted thoughts coming, which we know through experience is not possible. If it were, then there would be no negative, worrisome, racing thoughts and you wouldn't be reading this chapter.

You can be free of negative, worrying thoughts, but it won't come through trying to control your thinking process. Trying to push down or suppress the thoughts you don't want, won't free you from them either; in fact, it will have the opposite effect.

Understanding this one fact is the first step to being free of obsessive thinking, as you can now stop wasting vital brain energy trying to control, change or suppress your thoughts. Trying to control or silence the mind just leads to more thinking and so you end up in a constant loop of creating more noise.

It is important to understand that it is your mind that generates thoughts, not you. So, trying to control your thinking serves no purpose; it only exhausts, frustrates and keeps you locked in a cycle of constant thinking.

### **Thoughts are just energy forms**

Thoughts are just a form of energy passing through your consciousness and are mainly formed through the energy you are currently experiencing. So, if you are feeling depressed,

then they tend to have a sad flavour to them. If you are angry, then they usually have an angry flavour to them, if you are happy, then they will most likely have a joyous flavour to them and so on.

So, this is why when you are fearful/anxious, your thoughts tend to have an anxious/worrisome flavour to them. This does not make them real; in fact, it tells you how false and unimportant they are. A lot of these thoughts are your mind's way of trying to release what is trapped within, be it anxious/fearful energy or old subconscious beliefs that serve you no purpose.

This is why your mind can be a lot calmer after strenuous exercise, as a lot of this energy has been burnt off. It is also why people can get addicted to exercise in an effort to quieten their mind or numb and silence it with alcohol. It is what I initially attempted to do until I realised that I was still trying to suppress and control my mind and not getting to the root of the problem.

### **Why do my intrusive thoughts come with such speed and frequency?**

The intrusive thoughts come with such frequency due to your constant obsession with over-thinking; through the need to keep going over things, worrying about things and trying to fix them. It is your overuse of the mind and the thinking process that gives it momentum and forms a habit of constant thinking. This is why your mind can feel exhausted, out of control and frantic. It's like you want to find the 'off' button but can't.

Trying to think your way to a calmer mind means you are going back to using the mind in an attempt to control the mind, which means more thinking and why nothing is solved this way.

## **Why are your thoughts so negative?**

People ask me why their thoughts always seem to be mostly negative, and my reply is "Because these are the thoughts which you give the most attention to, and the thoughts you give the most attention to will keep repeating within your mind as you are not allowing them to pass on through".

This understanding is true for anyone. If we were just going through our day and thinking about what we need to get in for lunch, the appointment with the vet or the new shoes we need for the night out next week, then these thoughts would just come and then pass on through.

But then suddenly we see someone we know walk past, so we wave and yet they turn away without acknowledging us.

We then think "Oh no, what have I done to upset them?"

We can then spend the next few hours on this incident, saying things like:

"I've always been there for her, why was she so ignorant?"

"That's the last time I will bother with her!"

As this thought has been deemed far more important than the others, it is not allowed to pass on through. So, it sticks and keeps repeating itself in our mind due to our obsession with it and stays there until we can come up with a solution to ease our concerns.

Then all of a sudden, our friend texts us and apologises for not waving back. They didn't recognise us until they got further down the street and then realised who it was. Due to this, our mind is appeased and so the thought is then able to pass on through and we then find the relief we were looking for.

When we suffer our thoughts also tend to be negative due to the fact that when we feel anxious and down, we usually think far more negative thoughts than positive ones and so thinking negatively becomes a habit. So, it is vital to allow these thoughts to pass on through without obsessing about them or believing them to be factual. There is no truth in thoughts; they are all just coming from faulty beliefs, old conditioning or the energy we are currently experiencing.

You may often come across people who never seem happy, who always have something bad to say about others and are continually complaining. Is it because life treats them differently or that negative thinking has just become a habit for them? Our mind is like a garden; if we keep planting weeds, then that is what will continue to grow.

### **Don't put belief into your negative thoughts**

Once you put belief into any negative or intrusive thought and identify with it, then it will most likely bring down your mood, and so more negative thinking will occur.

If your mind produces any negative or intrusive thoughts, then allow it to do so without giving them your belief or attention. Without your belief and attention, these thoughts are free to pass on through into nothingness. Even if a thought keeps repeating itself within your mind, don't try to stop it. Don't try to reason with it, just allow it to repeat itself until it runs out of energy, which, without the fuel of your constant focus and attention, it will.

### **Why intrusive thoughts are of no importance, whatever their content**

What continually changes can never be real and your thoughts are changing all the time, as are your emotions. It doesn't matter what you think or how you feel; the world spins the

same for everyone. The outside doesn't change because of how you think, just your personal experience of it does.

Your thinking literally creates your experience and why we all experience life differently, as no two people think the same. This thinking process works well when our thoughts are mainly calm and balanced because they don't create much turbulence or a distorted view of reality.

The problem only occurs when our thoughts become worrisome, negative and fearful. As then, the outside falsely appears to be a fearful, negative and worrisome place to exist in, full of problems that continuously need our attention. This is because our outer world is always a reflection of our inner state; there are no exceptions to this.

It is only the belief in these thoughts that causes people to start avoiding life and to worry and complain more, not realising that their outer world hasn't changed, just their thinking process. The world is the same, non-threatening place it was before they suffered. It just no longer appears that way due to their identification with the fearful/anxious thoughts in their mind. Without identification and belief in their anxious/fearful thoughts, these thoughts would not disturb them or continue to influence their life.

The trouble is, most people don't look to clean up their inner state and instead look to change or control the outer world and others, falsely believing that this is where the problem lies. This can then lead to constant drama and conflict within their life and personal relationships, leading to more negative thinking and in many cases, feelings of resentment and guilt.

### **Don't see your thoughts as reality**

How many times are our thoughts about a person or a situation entirely wrong? Someone who has insecure thinking



may constantly think their partner is going to leave and so may need constant reassurance.

Someone who has anxious thoughts may believe that everything will go wrong. They then feel like they have to stay in constant control and so may spend all their day worrying about things that haven't even happened.

Someone with thoughts about low self-esteem may falsely believe that nobody cares about them and so the smallest thing can offend them or they fall into people-pleasing habits, always wanting and needing people's acceptance.

Can you see how people's individual thoughts, when identified with, can shape a person's experience of life?

Let's take the first example above and explain in more detail how your past experiences can lead to your current thought process. Also, the example below could apply to either gender; I just chose a female at random.

So, let's say a woman has been cheated on in her last two relationships. Due to this, she will then be much more inclined to have thoughts about the next one going wrong. Because of these thoughts, her new partner and the relationship will most likely begin to suffer. The thought could be 'He will just do the same to me'. She may then question where he is, continually seek assurances and drive herself crazy through her insecurities until the relationship finally breaks down.

Now there was nothing wrong with this thought appearing as it came through a belief created through her past experiences. The problem occurred because she became identified with the thought and saw it as the complete truth. Now I am not saying this new man was a knight in shining armour or another frog, but the point is the new relationship never stood a chance

because of her identification with her current thinking patterns and why it is so important to see through them.

If this lady could have caught this thought and realised it was just a conditioned response due to her past experiences and not necessarily fact, then she could have put her insecurities to one side and given the new man and relationship a chance. Those insecurities may have still popped up, but she could have seen the truth behind why they appeared and not reacted so strongly towards them.

This is the same as someone going to a supermarket and having an anxiety attack for the first time. Due to this experience, the next time they are due to visit their mind may come up with the thought 'Hey this is where you felt anxious before, don't go back'. As you can see, the mind is designed to keep you safe and protect you and so it is just doing its job.

But on this occasion, it had got it wrong; the anxiety attack had nothing to do with the supermarket; this was just a mere coincidence. As logically what real danger is there in walking around putting groceries in a basket? The supermarket doesn't become more dangerous because of a thought you have, it stays the same safe and peaceful place it has always been, only your belief in that thought has the opportunity to disguise this fact and affect your behaviour.

You may also experience an emotional response to go alongside this fearful thought. This response mainly comes from a belief in the thought; without that belief, the response in most cases weakens in its intensity. Again, you can see the emotional response as a false alarm and part of the mind's protection systems and override this too. The way to override this response and ultimately turn the fear response down is always to show it that you're fine.

"But how do I know the difference between a real threat and an imaginary one?" you may ask. Trust me, if there is a real danger then you will know about it, you won't have to question which is false and which is not. Just remember you are always in control of the decisions you make, you can always override your anxious thinking or emotional response and live the life you wish.

### **Thoughts are not reality; they are illusions brought to life by your belief in them**

Time and again, our thinking will prove to be incorrect and have no truth in reality. This false thinking happens to every one of us at some point. Yet we always go back to our thinking to tell us the truth about a situation, never stepping back and thinking that maybe our thoughts don't deserve the respect we give them.

Remember, thoughts are not the problem here; you can think whatever you wish. It is your identification and belief in them that creates the problem. Only then can they take over and dictate how you live your life.

Some very wise person once said to me "Paul your mind is not talking to you, it is just talking, you really don't have to listen to it, be your own master and make your own way in life".

### **Distracting yourself from your thoughts is just another form of suppression**

Don't attempt to distract yourself from your thoughts, just allow them to run freely in the background and they will run out of momentum all by themselves with no involvement or interference from you. Also, the less you get involved with your thinking, the more the momentum in your mind will die down, and so the habit of over-thinking will diminish.

So, don't ever think, "I must not think that". Let all thoughts come and do not attempt to suppress or turn away from any of them. See them for what they are - thoughts/energy forms, exaggerated because of the way you are currently feeling. Many are just old conditioned thoughts of no value created through your past experiences and some are created through your mind trying to make sense of everything and release the energy that has been built up within, like a kettle releasing steam.

It doesn't matter what their source is; the same approach applies. The conditioned thought eventually disappears through a lack and belief and interest in it and so do the ones created through your mind releasing its pent-up energy and momentum, so learn to give all thoughts their space without getting involved with them and they will begin to diminish as they no longer have the fuel of your interest to continue.

### **Don't get angry or attempt to fight with your mind**

As you may have now realised, the mind can never become peaceful through force. It can only come to its own resting place when you pull your interest away and let go of trying to control it. If you held a bowl of water and wanted the water to settle, you wouldn't start trying to do this by force, as all this would do is disturb it even more. What you would do is just put it down, let it slosh around for a while and allow it to settle all by itself.

You always find peace through a non-doing, not a doing. This is the way to be free of any form of negative thinking and calm your overactive mind. Peace will never come through struggle, strain and control. Never get into a battle with your mind. Never try to force it to think differently or to quieten it down by force or willpower.

## **How do I release past negative thoughts?**

If you have constant thoughts about the way someone treated you, or a bad experience you went through, and keep regurgitating it in your mind, then the memory of this experience is never released. The thought will just keep gaining energy, and so the brain will keep on repeating it, which again will begin to disturb your peace of mind.

The experience you are thinking about is not happening now, so you are free to let it go; it is the letting go of it that frees you. The memory, which again is just a thought form in your mind, begins to run out of energy and so your mind is then able to release this experience and become free of what was disturbing you. It is not the past experience that is hurting you; it is you holding on to it that is.

Keeping it within, while repeatedly going over it doesn't help in any way, shape or form. It just keeps disturbing your peace in this moment and serves no other purpose. I am not saying there aren't things that people find hard to let go of, and some may need to talk this through before they can let go completely, but I see people holding on for months to a minor argument they had with a friend or a throwaway comment someone made to them weeks ago.

This is why after a break-up people recommend throwing away all traces of the person, deleting them off your phone and all social media as this is the best way to get over them. This means that by removing all traces of them, you are not continually reminded of that person as much and so the memory of them eventually fades away. In doing this, you are free from the pain of the break up far quicker than you would be by holding on to it and going over past photos and memories.

You can free yourself of any old memory if you pull your attention away from it. The only thing that keeps a thought in place (which is all a memory is) is your need to keep going over it, instead of deciding to let it go.

**Below are the words of someone from my blog who was able to overcome their own intrusive thoughts.**

Intrusive thoughts were really annoying when I had them. I'd start getting some modest handle on my life and then the mental chatter (sometimes dark and violent, sometimes silly and absurd or some small part of a song playing over and over) would start. What took the wind out of their sails for me was letting them go on and on for as long as they wanted to, realising through Paul's advice that I had no control over them and that they held no truth or bearing on reality.

This didn't mean that they would immediately stop; it just meant I was done struggling with them. I'd be in the kitchen and they would start up. So, I adopted an attitude of "Spend as much time with me as you wish' and I'd then go back to doing whatever I was doing. Even if my attention was pulled towards them, I just let that happen too but I would not give them any attention or belief. And in time I did not even notice that they were gone, they were just that, 'gone'.

### **To summarise**

The most important thing to take away from this chapter is that thoughts in themselves are not the problem; it is your identification and involvement with them that is. This identification is what creates non-existent problems and drama in your life, what has you going over things or believing a negative self-image. When you identify and put so much belief into your thoughts, deeming them to be important and worthy of your attention, you give them more energy and more power over you.

Don't try to sort out the noise in your mind through any form of control or suppression, if your mind wants to be noisy, then allow it the freedom to be noisy, if it wants to throw up some dark or crazy thoughts then allow it to do so. Allow it to think and worry about whatever it wishes while you become a detached observer, unaffected by the mind's antics, and learn to no longer get involved with its drama and stories.

No thought is more important than another, and none of them are personal. Without identification, thoughts have no power and no fuel to continue. When you are finally able to see this, it will change everything. Just remember you don't create thoughts, your mind does, so don't take personal responsibility for them, they hold no truth and have no reality to them.

I learnt to say 'My mind came up with this nonsensical thought today' rather than 'I keep thinking this awful thought about.....' this created some separation and so these thoughts became less personable and believable. I would also say "My mind is very noisy today, it will soon settle if I leave it be" rather than saying "I can't stop thinking today, it is driving me crazy" This helped me no longer try and jump in and control my mind or get frustrated with it.

It is important to realise that the mind's nature is to be calm most of the time. It has just ended up in this state due to what we have put it through; the worry, the stress and the overthinking. We are responsible for the mind's current state, not the mind itself.

All it needs to go back to its natural state of peace and clarity is to be left alone. Trust me; if you leave the mind alone, then it will sort itself out and eventually find its natural resting state and regain its equilibrium. It truly needs no interference from you to once again be at peace.

## Chapter 9

### Success Stories

In the past, I have helped people voluntarily, answered emails and also run a blog. Below are some of the posts, replies and conversations from these interactions. A lot of the responses are from people who have recovered or were well on their way to recovery.

Below are a few words from Diane, who started to really understand the message I was passing on to her.

*I remember a few months back reading a post from a lady who said something like “today I have done as Paul says and finally given up the fight” and she mentioned that she was now ready to let the anxiety be there for as long as it needed to be. I would read and re-read that post because it gave me a lot of hope. I can finally say that after two years of suffering from anxiety, I think I am at that place and truly understand what this lady was saying.*

*Lately, I have been focusing on just living my life for me and not the anxiety, and then the other day as I was walking up to the front door of my house, I felt this sense of calm and understanding. The anxiety was still there, but I truly felt as though it was OK. It was there, but it now meant nothing and it wasn't going to hurt me. I have since experienced moments in the day when I realise I don't feel it at all and there is a feeling of space in my chest where there was once a painful tightening. It really takes practice to spot when I automatically start adding fear to my anxiety symptoms, but I am getting much better at that also.*

*My mind still churns out some silly thoughts and the*



*sleeping thing is at times not great, but all of this is starting not to matter that much. I was making recovery way too important and just focusing on how to rid myself of how I felt, instead of just living and allowing what came along naturally. I am sure that there are going to be moments in the future when I will need to re-learn this, but I have much more confidence in my ability to come through it now.*

John's story, again a post from my blog:

*Anxiety just does not seem to matter to me anymore. If for whatever reason, I feel a wave of anxiety, I just let 'whatever' happen to me and I have had many rewards during recovery. In those moments, when we are feeling at our worst, we have a choice. We can either (a) Make ourselves worse by worrying, fighting and trying to think our way out, or (b) Relax, let go and finally allow ourselves to experience it.*

*I have tried both of these approaches and the second option wins hands down every time. I think for me, it was the initial fear of my symptoms and the belief that I had some control over the way I felt that caused me to continually fight and resist how I was feeling.*

*Another point I'd like to mention is that recently my girlfriend has been really stressed about exams and revision and has been losing sleep through it all. One day she said to me, 'I'm lost; whatever I try to do, I just can't get to sleep'. So, I said to her, don't try to get to sleep, just let everything go and if you sleep, then great and if you don't, you don't. She couldn't believe that something as simple as 'not doing anything' had eased her sleeping troubles. It felt strange to be the teacher instead of the pupil on anxiety!*

*Now that I have finally let go of the battle to get rid of anxiety (how I thought I even could I don't know) I know it is not one that can be won through strain and struggle. When I have intrusive thoughts or feel anxious, it's not important to me to try to rid myself of them anymore either. I no longer feel the need to repeat sayings in my head, such as 'I accept this', hoping that if I believed it enough, then this awful thing would go away.*

*I can't explain it, so I won't try, but I am feeling positive. I have finally let go of the battle and found peace regardless of the fact that I still have anxiety. Each day was a struggle before, wondering when this awful feeling would go away. Now I couldn't care less if it takes weeks or months and I genuinely mean that.*

*I now 100% believe that this thing will pass in its own time. It also makes total sense to me now with my previous constant interference, as to why my mind and body couldn't heal. Anxiety may have filled the past few years with fear, but the future is mine now and I am not going to spend a single day worrying whether or not it is going to be there.*

*I also believe that striving for acceptance of this condition can also become a battle in itself. As soon as I let go and started to live alongside these feelings without any effort to get rid of them, the acceptance of my condition came to me automatically and there was no need for any sayings or mantras.*

Below is an e-mail from Jeff, someone who was almost housebound when he first read my book and landed on my site.

*This e-mail is not to question anything. This e-mail is not to try to figure anything out. This e-mail is just a*

*response to everything you have been helping me with Paul. You have saved my life and helped me begin to recover when I lost all hope. The physical feelings of anxiety are SLOWLY starting to subside. Believe me when I say it is slow, but I cannot explain it, I just feel different, and a good different at that. I have faith in myself now.*

*It's very difficult at first, as I would question everything, like "How in the hell am I supposed to get through the day with how I feel?", "If I just accept it and go on with my day, this will overtake me surely" and "I must try to control it so that it does not do that!" That is the attitude I used to have. I was just constantly stressing about how I was feeling and about as far away from allowing as I could be; I see that now! So, I finally said ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!*

*I woke up this past Monday morning and said to myself, "Okay Jeff, you may feel crappy today, but you have these things you need to do at work. You need to get the binders done; you have to make all these copies and you have XYZ projects to work on, get these things done and don't just sit at your desk all day worrying about the way you are feeling". My goodness was it hard to do that. It was so hard because I have been doing the opposite for so long. But I did it on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and today! I went out with my roommates on Wednesday and Thursday night, and not because I had to, but because I actually WANTED to! And tonight, I look forward to the same.*

*Paul, the hardest part of allowing yourself to feel like this, is at the beginning, doing things when the "voice" inside of you is screaming STAY HOME!! IT'S EASIER! SIT AT YOUR DESK, IT'S EASIER! Practising what you preach is very difficult at first. It just does not feel right, it feels gross, and my*

*body feels like absolute garbage. I felt like my entire body was rotting or something. I never knew anxiety could feel so crappy. I thought it was just something that people get when they are stressed, and then it goes away. But as soon as you start battling to get rid of it, then it has a snowball effect.*

*Once you learn the correct method towards recovery, it gets easier and then the feelings don't come quite as strong or as often. Your true personality also starts to come back too; this was a massive relief to me as I genuinely thought I had lost who I was. I know through my own experience that this is the true way to recover. It's like John Mayer writes in his song, "I'm in repair, I'm not together, but I'm getting there".*

*Thank you and God bless.*

*Jeff*

Below is an excellent example of what I try to get across, posted on my blog from a lady who was well on her way to recovery.

*Hi, I just wanted to come here and tell my story of the new attitude I have learnt and how much progress I have made in the last few months.*

*I was in a real hole a while back after a very stressful time in my life. I went from the person that would light up a room, to one that didn't even want to get out of bed in the morning. I felt I had failed as a wife and a mother and had no idea what was wrong with me or how to help myself.*

*Since finding Paul and implementing the advice given to me, I have progressed from experiencing anxiety*

*every day, thick depersonalisation, unrelenting fear and wandering thoughts that had to do with everything and anything, to a new me. I just want to let people know that in time, the anxiety and all the symptoms that go with it do leave.*

*Of course, while you go through recovery your awareness can be stuck on you for a while, but it makes sense not to even question this, as all you have been doing is noticing and fearing everything that's been going on for as long as you have felt this way.*

*On my road to recovery, every time I felt anxiety, fear, panic, DP or intense thoughts, I would almost be happy about it. Here is my chance to change this cycle, to release this stuff, RIGHT NOW!! With these feelings, I can reverse this thing; if I allow these feelings in then, I am also changing my reaction to them, which also takes their power away. I am going to sit back and allow them to come and let them make me feel, however I feel. I realised that I was still in control and no matter what was going on inside of me, I could make my own decisions and create my own experience beyond these emotions and thoughts.*

*The longer the feelings stayed with me, the longer I had the opportunity to teach myself that these are not a problem and I don't have to feel threatened. Over time, I taught my mind to react to these feelings in a calmer and more loving way. Rather than my previous reactions of "Oh my God, I'm so scared. What is wrong with me? I'm never going to get out of this. I must fix it" Of course you feel uncomfortable still, but it's almost like you learn to be comfortable with being uncomfortable. The only way I can describe it is the way Paul puts it, in that you learn to fall into your suffering, rather than constantly rejecting it.*

*It truly is a process. You have to train your mind to think differently, and in time it will react differently to these feelings, rather than with fear and frustration, the very things that keep them alive. The most important message I got out of this book was the desire for the anxiety to be present if it wished, as it was the only way to make progress with this. This is something I never even considered before and ended up a bigger mess because of this one simple but invaluable pointer.*

*Before I viewed anxiety and everything that came with it as the thickest terror of the world and when it had its hold on me, I just felt helpless and powerless. Now, through what I have learnt, I look at it as almost a teacher who is on my side and wants me to succeed, as whenever it's around, that is when I have the opportunity to let go of it and grow.*

*“So, remember “Anxiety is not a disease and therefore it needs no cure”.*

*Best wishes*

*Maria*

Below are some words of comfort for others, posted by a lady on my blog:

*Hi, I'm 21 and a 4th year nursing student. I suffered an anxiety attack in April of 2008 and went down the road of deep thinking and constant worry about how I was feeling, which left me with constant anxiety and feelings of depersonalisation. I found Paul's information in the summer and started applying it to my life. It took a while to understand the information and truly apply it. I just want to say that my anxiety has been leaving me over the last few months due to this new approach. I*

want to tell you all, or reassure you, that it is TRULY a process.

The key is to LIVE as normally as possible and focus on outside OUTWARD tasks like reading, exercising and socialising. This stops the constant inward thinking of your condition and gives the mind the break it needs. As I applied this new behaviour, I noticed moments of normality that kept adding up as the days passed!!!! I am not fully recovered, but I am 90% better than I was a few months ago and with each week that passes I am making more progress and truly believe that the old me is very close to resurfacing.

It's just a matter of keeping my mind busy and focusing on outward tasks rather than myself. This does not mean I run around frantically doing things to forget my anxiety, as this would be running away. No, if it's there, it's there. I just spend less and less time on the subject and more on living my life with anxiety present or not.

Everyone worries that they may be the only one who doesn't recover. This is part of the self-doubt that we all have when suffering. But just keep following Paul's advice. Live your normal life alongside anxiety, accept the thoughts and let them be in the background. Try not to analyse them (it takes practice I know - but small steps at first) and face any fears that you may have head on.

Do not avoid doing things and go to the places that you would have done before your anxiety came along, take it all with you, even if you feel strange. You are changing a behaviour and to do this, you need to live alongside the old behaviour for a while until the new behaviour overrides the old one. I also now understand that if I do TRY to feel better, then it is actually causing me to care about how I am feeling, which in turn

*causes the fighting, worry and obsessing habit to return. I finally believe I am on track with something here. It's that basic need to be in control that holds us back.*

*I promise you Paul's approach works; it has been a lifesaver for me. I genuinely hope this encourages other people.*

My reply to this post was:

Yes, that is precisely what I am trying to get across. I am really glad you were able to apply it and also keep the faith that this would work rather than going for the quick fix. Too many people are so influenced by the way they are feeling at the moment, that they don't see past today, they experience one bad day and then think they are back to square one. Rather than searching for recovery or demanding it, you have let it come to you in its own time.

I am forever telling people "While you think that anxiety is something that happens to you, rather than something you create, then you will be forever searching for someone or something outside of yourself to fix you or get rid of it, not realising that the only way to recover resides in you.

Below is an encouraging post from Brian, who has found a new confidence to get on with his life.

*One day something just snapped in me and said 'NO MORE!' I am not going to be a prisoner to anxiety any longer. It was so hard at first! But I slowly started to do things that I used to do (drive, shop, go out, cook, etc...) It was REALLY strange at first, but I kept pushing on. No matter how weird or how bad the symptoms got, I kept going and going. I figured what's the worst that can happen? Die? Well if I died, then I wouldn't feel this way anymore.*



*I have come so far with this new attitude and approach. I get the random scary thoughts at times, and my heart skips a beat now and then, but I don't obsess or react to them as I used to. I accept them as part of recovery and don't see them as anything to do with me. I now see anxiety as a gift and not a curse because I now know that after going through this, I can achieve ANYTHING! Even if I do have setbacks (which I have had), they can never be as bad as my first episode because I now have the tools and knowledge to work with. TRUST IN YOURSELF and Good Luck.*

*Brian*

This next came from someone who, within two days of reading my book, went from being a complete wreck to viewing how she felt in a completely different way. As she made some excellent points and understood truly what I was trying to get across, I thought it was important to add it.

*Well, I guess I am kind of new to anxiety in a certain sense. I have always been a bit of a worrier and used to freak myself out that I had every illness in the world. My biggest fear was (like many) going mad or "losing my mind". Well, this site and Paul's book has been invaluable to me, and it's only been TWO days since I read the book.*

*I suffered a very tragic loss on Oct 07 (stillbirth at 25 weeks) and it tore my reality apart. I went into tremendous shock and was so upset that what I was feeling was happening to ME!!! The world terrified the holy crap out of me and I had no idea who/what/where I was.*

*Somehow, I held it together and after so much falling apart, it didn't seem possible. My anxiety was HUGE at the start; I had no idea what was happening to me at all. I was terrified I was going to get postnatal depression/postnatal psychosis (because others did) etc. I convinced myself at one stage that I actually had it and, of course, cue the scary thoughts which fuelled that belief and so the worry-anxiety cycle continued.*

*When I felt a little better and due to an expensive house move, I went back to work. This lifted my spirits for a few weeks, but I soon felt the down-ness coming back again and then I kind of spiralled until a few weeks ago, the feelings and scary thoughts got SO bad that I honestly believe that day I was having a nervous breakdown. The scary thoughts were the worst for me. I was convinced I could do some harm to my partner.*

*It was so bad that I was terrified of my kitchen knives (ALL BECAUSE OF ONE THOUGHT) and because I pondered and completely obsessed about that thought. I was now even more convinced that I had postnatal depression, which made me feel worse and so it went on and on with cycles of anxiety, fear, depression, adrenalin, frayed nerves. I was just so utterly EXHAUSTED.*

*How I continued going to work, I will never know. I was going around like a ghost, like a shell; it was awful. I was beating myself up constantly because I SHOULD have been feeling better...I just should have! I am a true information gatherer and so I proceeded to frantically search every symptom on the net and of course, like many of us, convinced myself that I had every disorder in the book. The number of times I asked my partner if he thought I had this or that. No amount of convincing would appease me. Then I came across Paul and his book (Thank you).*

*It has only been a few days, but now I finally realise what's causing all of this. I went through a terrible trauma, and so, yes, there was a tremendous amount of stress and shock on my mind and body, which created the initial anxiety. I then started to stress and worry about how I was feeling on a daily basis. It was at this point I pushed things too far and why I ended up in the state that I did. My poor mind and body now just wanted and needed, to rest and recuperate. But did I give it the break it deserved and needed...NO! Of course, I didn't; I punished them both even more.*

*Now I finally realise where the bodily sensations come from. They came from all the extra worry and stress I was piling up onto an already exhausted mind and body. Is it any wonder that I felt the way that I did !!*

*I have now learned that no matter how I feel it's okay and that's all there is to it. Whatever I am feeling, I am feeling. If I feel depersonalisation; is it any wonder? My mind is exhausted after all I have put it through...so it's okay. If my stomach churns (which it still does a lot) that's okay too, just sensitised nerves created through stress. If my hands shake, sure, that's okay also, my nerves are a little fraught at the minute.*

*Scary thoughts...I've learned a lot from this one...I didn't believe that if I just followed Paul's advice when the thoughts came, it would work. Believe me; I'm a sceptic when it comes to ME! But It worked!*

*I know I am only two days into it, but my advice when these intrusive thoughts come is just to let them in. Allow them to bounce around in there; let them have a stretch and a roar and pay them no mind. I now just see these scary thoughts as my mind releasing all this fearful/anxious energy that I previously built up inside.*

*This may or may not be the case, but seeing them this way works for me. Even at this early stage, the thoughts just don't seem as scary.*

*By taking this approach, I now know that all I am doing is stopping all the extra stress and worry piling up and in doing so, giving my mind and body the chance to heal. As soon as I read the information in Paul's book, something just clicked, it just made utter sense to me and his words hit me deeply. Maybe I was just ready to hear the message.*

*Anyway, this is what I have learnt about anxiety.*

*Accept whatever you are feeling. Don't "try" to let it go; don't force it away and don't try to make yourself feel better. Don't try to talk yourself down, but invite every bit of it in. Live it, experience it, realise that it's all a part of what you are going through at the moment. Don't fear it. You WILL NOT collapse and die. So, what if you look a bit weird in front of people? How you feel is entirely natural in the circumstances, the same as it is for me after what I had been through. Just trust in the fact you will get better and be back to your old self. Remove the fear and you remove the problem. Anxiety lives on your fear of it and the symptoms it produces, but through understanding and patience, I believe we all can come through, just as Paul and so many others have.*

*Shirley*

The following post was from a lady on my blog who replied to someone who was worried about going away on holiday. This lady is now fully recovered.

*Marc, go to Ireland and deal with however you may feel on any particular day. You do not, in any way, know*

*how you are going to feel and what honestly is the worst that will happen? You may have anxiety all day, but so what! Do not give up on living life, the minute anyone avoids anything because of anxiety, then that is precisely what they are doing. I know because I did this for a very, very long time and I recovered by simply saying enough is enough, I have to at least try and do the things I would like to do.*

*At first, things were tough, but I persevered and in time, things became so much easier. The initial steps are always the worst as we are stepping out of our comfort zones and initially, our mind doesn't like change and so can react by filling us with a certain amount of fear and dread, but these emotions do pass I promise. What are a few uncomfortable feelings in exchange for regaining our life? It really is no contest in my book.*

*Anxiety can feel like a jail, but the person suffering from it is the only one who has the key to free themselves. You just have to start turning that key, however slowly until you break out of it.*

*Just carry on, do the things that you have planned, even if you are dreading it, do things that you need to every day. Wash the pots, take the kids to school, go to work, watch a film, read a book, and do not let anxiety stop you. You have to carry on living to be able to overcome anxiety; it is the only way.*

*Helen*

To finish, I have included some posts from my blog that were written by me, that I thought were important to add: I do try to include my own experiences in the hope that it will help people to understand as I believe that it is much better than just writing down information. I may also keep presenting the same

message differently within this book. This is because so many people have told me that by doing this, it has really helped get the message home.

This post was entitled **“Moving forward with Anxiety”**.

To start this post, I wanted to share the following words from someone saying how the penny had finally dropped toward recovering from anxiety.

Paul, I finally “got it”. I understood what you have been saying and I finally let go of so much pointless worry and stress over how I was feeling. For a few months, I also did whatever any normal person who didn’t have anxiety would do. I travelled, hung out with friends, anything, no matter how bad I felt. I now feel normal again after years of anxiety and depersonalisation and I just wanted to come back and say thank you.

What he has done is go towards his feelings of anxiety/dread and not let them stop him from living his life. Not only that, but he truly believed that this would work in the long run. Too many people think ‘Well I have been there today and I still feel bad. I just need to get rid of these damn feelings. That’s the only way I can get on with my life again’. A lack of patience is why so many continue to stay in the cycle.

If there was an anxiety shop and someone came in and said: “Hello, I have anxiety; not sure why but it has been there for a few years now, how come?” I would say:

“Do you worry about it?”

“Well yes, I do, I want it to go away”

“Do you go towards or try to avoid these feelings?”

“Well, I mainly avoid them as I don’t want to feel them”

“Do you try and figure a way out of this or just get on with your day?”

“Well, I try and figure a way out. It’s tiring and I do go around in circles, but I have to get rid of these feelings, don’t I?”

“Have you ever thought about allowing yourself to feel like this? This will stop the worry cycle, the constant tuning in and the fighting to ‘rid’ yourself of how you feel. This is what will finally break the loop that you find yourself stuck in”.

“No, I have never thought of doing that”

“Well, you should, as this is why it’s been around for a few years. You have been stuck in a loop of trying not to feel the way you do”. This approach has created a pointless war within you and it is this self-created battle with yourself that has kept you in the cycle of suffering.

This is the day a light went on for me. I looked back and realised that everything I had previously done was about trying to get rid of how I was feeling. The books, the medication, the therapists, the deep thinking, the fighting and the worrying had all been about trying to feel different; it was always about trying to change my current state. And this led to me doing all the stuff above that eventually broke me and why I suffered as I did, it had nothing to do with my initial anxiety.

Again, I realised that I was the creator of my suffering and all the attempts to get rid of my suffering had only created more problems and kept me in a cycle. I could not believe I had not seen this so clearly before. It was at this point I said ‘What if I didn’t try to feel any different than I do, as uncomfortable as it may be? I realised that if I allowed anxiety and any other symptom to be part of my life, then the battle with myself was over. I knew that by allowing myself to feel the way I did, a big

part of my suffering would begin to fall away, as it was this very battle that was causing me so much pain.

My anxiety didn't hang around because I had some lifetime curse or disorder; it hung around because I spent all my time stressing and worrying about it. I wasn't mentally exhausted because of anxiety; I was mentally exhausted because I spent years trying to think my way out of it. I didn't feel so self-aware because of anxiety; I felt so self-aware because I had spent months on end obsessing about myself and how I was feeling. I didn't feel so detached because of my anxiety; I felt so detached because I had done so much inward thinking and stopped living my life. My anxiety had little to do with so many of my current symptoms. These were all created by my attempts to get rid of anxiety and so there was my answer, stop trying to get rid of it.

I also realised on a deep level, that to be free of this anxious energy within me; then I had to allow myself to experience it. I saw it as taking the lid off a steaming pot on the stove. Taking the lid off the steaming pot would allow this excess steam to release itself. If it were constantly suppressed and kept in the pot, then it would end up causing a whole host of problems and eventually blow the lid off itself. For years I had tried to keep the lid on the pot, through suppression, distraction, and fighting. I did everything but allow this anxious energy to rise up within me so that it could free itself from my inner space.

As I have stated before when you feel this anxious energy, then it is a good thing; it is your body trying to release it. It doesn't want this anxious energy inside any more than you do and this is why it brings it to the surface. But we refuse to allow the body to free it up with all our attempts to not feel it and so it keeps trying until we finally get the message and allow its presence within us.

This is what the concept of allowing does; it allows the release of this energy. If you try to 'allow' as another technique to feel



better (which so many do), then you have missed the point entirely and are just using it as another form of suppression.

## **Regaining your life**

The only way to have your life back is to embrace how you feel at any given moment. It is exactly where you need to be in that moment, exactly what you need to feel, so drop your battle and resistance towards it.

I could still feel pretty awful at times during my recovery, but I had now broken the loop by no longer being at war with it. Don't misunderstand me; I had some testing days. I remember going out to a quiz each week and sitting there feeling dreadful and just wanting to go home. I would feel apprehensive at times and almost give in to the temptation to rush home, but I never did. I knew this was all part of the recovery process.

The KEY point for me in these times was the point where I had the urge to go home. It was at that stage that I just bought another drink and stayed, as I knew this was where progress lay. Anxiety had lost my respect. I had said: "Come if you wish, I no longer care. I am in charge from now on". As time went by, I actually loved it when I was tested. It was a case of "Yes, we have been here before and I always win. I am staying, come what may, be present or not; it makes no difference to me". This attitude came through understanding that there was no real threat when I felt anxious. It was just my body releasing some anxious energy within me. I didn't have to take this energy to mean that anything was wrong or that I needed to escape in any way.

Prior to this, as soon as I was feeling uncomfortable, I would go home, feel sorry for myself and go over why things went wrong again, when, ironically, I had just left the very place that would have helped me to recover. Instead, I had given my feelings way too much respect, ran away from how I felt and anxiety had won again. I knew that if I wanted to get through

this, I had to learn not to care if I felt anxious or not and this was the point I finally reached.

### **Breaking out of the self-help merry-go-round**

I was once knee-deep in self-help books and visiting different counsellors. I was walking around with a bunch of techniques, sayings and coping strategies that all these various sources had presented to me and I felt no better. In fact, I felt worse and even more trapped within my head. This is because I was using all of these strategies to try to avoid feeling this way, and when I felt uncomfortable, I would run through my 'to-do' list, to try and feel different. I was doing the very thing I should not have been doing and that was to try and constantly change how I was feeling, which ultimately felt like a full-time job and utterly exhausted me. I then realised that I did not need any technique or strategy to cope or manage how I was feeling; I needed nothing at all.

All I needed was the will and courage to allow myself to feel and think the way I did. I learnt very quickly that feelings and emotions pass far quicker when left alone, rather than continually attempting to change them or force them out. Another huge step for me was dropping the need to control, the need to find a solution and the need to fix. I had learnt to stop analysing the hell out of how I felt, which finally got me out of my head and allowed me to become more present with my surroundings.

So, learn to let go and not allow the subject to become you, accept yourself for who you are, take a walk, spend time in nature or take up a hobby. Don't waste hours and hours on the subject of 'you' believing that you have to find a solution and figure everything out. All you will achieve by doing this is to mentally and emotionally drain yourself. The more you analyse a problem the further away you get from a solution. The more you miss out on living your life, the more entrenched in the subject you become.

Below is another post from my blog.

## **Making space for your anxious thoughts and feelings**

Today I wanted to talk about giving space to unwanted emotions, as I still read posts on here about people wanting to find ways to rid themselves of their anxious thoughts and feelings. Below is my own experience with this and how I approached it,

At the height of my suffering, I used to wake up full of anxiety with my head all muddled with anxious thoughts. I would then spend the first hour of my day trying to make sense of it all, questioning it and trying different sayings and techniques to make myself feel better. The trouble was, this had the opposite effect and made me feel even worse. Then one day, I remember waking up feeling awful and just as I was about to start my usual ritual, I decided to let the negative feelings and confusion be there without any struggle or objection. For once they were allowed to be there and take over my inner space. I did not do this to feel better; I had just had enough and was worn out through constantly trying to reject or change them.

The result of this was that I instantly felt calmer and more at ease. I then realised I had been doing everything wrong. I now understood that it was the struggle with my current state that was keeping me in the loop. These feelings needed to be experienced to be released and the more I tried to push them away, then the more they knocked on the door. They were like a troublesome party guest I kept trying to throw out, only for them to come back making even more noise. The more you struggle to get rid of them, the angrier they get and the more they try to bother you. Trust me if you want an emotion to grow stronger then my advice is to struggle with it, as this is all it achieves. You are far better opening the door and allowing the troublesome guest in.

Another example from my days of suffering is that I was pretty awful at talking on phones for an extended period. I used to get very anxious and would either try to cut the call short or ramble my way through it the best I could. I would also pace up and down while taking the call. I was pretty advanced in my recovery at this point and thought it was just something I was stuck with but had no idea why. I remember taking a call from an old friend and once again, I began pacing up and down while trying to hold it together by rambling on. Suddenly, I had a huge lightbulb moment and realised that it was my feelings I was running away from and that I was not giving them space to be there. The rambling on was a form of rejecting the feelings by trying to distract myself from them, and the pacing up and down was a form of running away in an attempt to escape them.

In seeing this, I then stood still, stopped rambling and just allowed myself to feel anxious instead of trying to distract myself or run away from it. Again, the difference was immense and because I had now let go of focusing on myself and my performance, I started to feel far more at one with the conversation I was having. Within a short space of time and a bit of practice, I was fine talking on the phone. Again, it was me who was creating this problem by not giving myself the space to experience these anxious feelings. Instead, I was anxious about feeling anxious and how I was coming across, which just multiplied the feelings and as my attention was solely focused on myself I was finding it near impossible to be present towards the conversation.

Anxious thoughts and feelings just want a chance to be acknowledged and experienced and then they will go quietly. How you feel now is entirely natural in the circumstances, so stop struggling with yourself, learn to let go and just surrender to them.

# Chapter 10

## Other Symptoms Explained

Here I am going to cover some other common symptoms, which will hopefully help ease certain worries and concerns that people have. It is important to realise that all symptoms subside as our anxiety levels go down. So, don't fall into the trap of thinking you have to deal with each symptom individually or that one symptom is more important than the other.

### Trouble Sleeping

Many people tell me they have trouble sleeping when suffering from anxiety and that they have tried everything to get a good night's rest, with little success. I also went through this and the primary cause is an overactive mind. What I did to overcome this was to allow my mind to chatter away if need be and not 'try' to get to sleep or worry about it. I had the attitude that if I sleep, I sleep, and if not, well, so be it. This attitude of not putting pressure on myself to sleep helped enormously and is the advice I give to everyone. It is the very act of trying to sleep and worrying about not sleeping that keeps the mind active and alert, and so it has the opposite effect.

If you go to bed and your mind is full of worries due to your current state, then just allow the mind to worry, but don't get involved with it. Just leave it to voice its concerns like a radio in the background while you become aloof to its noise.

Even all the sleep tips I read about did not help, like, making sure the room is a certain temperature, avoiding caffeine before bed, listening to some relaxing music, etc. All these practices made sleep more of an issue for me and made things worse, so I let go of them all and just allowed it to happen naturally.

Ask someone who sleeps well what they do to achieve this and they will say they don't do anything. Ask someone who sleeps poorly and they will most likely come up with numerous strategies and techniques.

Sleep is the most natural thing in the world if we hand it back to nature and make no effort to do so; there is nothing you need to do to achieve it.

**Here are a few words from someone I helped who overcame their own struggle with sleep.**

The sleep disturbances took on a few forms. First were the nights when I couldn't get any sleep at all. Second were the nights I'd be able to fall asleep, but I would wake up very early and feel intensely on edge. Finally, there were the nights when as soon as I would doze off, I would immediately be jolted awake, or at least conscious of my surroundings and knew that sleep slipped away. This final type of interference could play out all night long: doze/jolt awake... doze/jolt awake.

Along with this was the constant thinking about sleep during the day. I would run scenarios through in my mind. Crumble under the fear of never being able to fall asleep peacefully or normally again. I'd obsess about the fact that I was obsessing about sleep; understanding that those who sleep normally give sleep little to no thought during their waking hours (at least not to the degree I did).

I would recognise that the obsessions about sleep would come on automatically and since this was happening automatically, I would never be able to reclaim any sense of normality with respects to my sleeping. The fear felt too profound and final to ever leave me; like a gaping wound that had no possibility of ever healing over.

I had taken numerous prescription drugs which didn't put a dent on my sleeping but had me moving about like a drugged zombie. Along with the prescriptions were the over the counters and the various natural remedies (no impact whatsoever). The sleep tricks and sleep hygiene - which only made me focus on sleep that much more.

Paul's approach, though I doubted it greatly with respect to this aspect of my anxiety (which I've noticed isn't that dissimilar from others: we all have that one big thing that we believe is somehow immune to acceptance) was eventually what lead me out of the sleepless nightmare.

I had to stop caring. I put so much weight on needing to get good sleep at night (after the insomnia had already started). For a mind already struggling with anxiety, this kind of expectation is just adding more fuel to the fire. Even after my occasional good night, I would always be back to doubting during the day. "It must have been a fluke.... tonight will be worse".

I couldn't stop the constant mental chatter and hyper-awareness towards sleeping. So, I needed to start a new relationship with sleeping (which was actually the old relationship). All of the sleeping tricks were tossed out. Sleep hygiene methods were ditched. Sleep restriction practices were done.

All pills were discarded. No more dimming all of the lights in the house after 7 p.m. I would use my computer late into the evening again. I would go out with my wife and friends again. I would have spicy foods for dinner and even a soda after 10 p.m. All the things that I did prior to having any concerns about sleep. I needed to tell those immediate/automatic fearful thoughts that I was no longer going to heed their promptings. If I got great sleep at night: oh

well, it doesn't matter. If I had terrible or no sleep at night: big deal, so I'll be a little rundown during the day.

I no longer chatted about my sleep issues with anyone. Even if I was weak in the legs with doubt and eyes welling up with tears from hopeless despair, I would simply tell myself "I'm done making this a bigger issue". I gave it the permission to do to my body what it wanted to, but that I would no longer be a marionette doll to it when it came to the decisions, I was going to make concerning how I lived my life.

When I was falling asleep, I noticed that some nights my mind would just race with random thoughts. Sometimes those thoughts would be charged with such a negative feel to them that I would perspire, constantly run to the bathroom, and toss around on the bed.

Other times the thoughts wouldn't have a negative feel to them, but they would still grip my attention. All of the sleeping tricks of trying to force peaceful thoughts into my head never worked. It was like pushing down further on the accelerator hoping to slow the car down.

But what if I relinquished all control and let those thoughts take me where they wanted to? I would close my eyes and almost envision that I was watching a movie play out. An incredibly nonsensical and sometimes tormenting movie, but a movie nonetheless. That took the wind out of the sails of the thoughts more than trying to force happy, peaceful thoughts ever did. And most nights I would notice that I must have eventually dozed off because I was certainly waking up.

There were nights when the fear and doubt would be drowning me. I would flip back and forth between wanting to fall to my knees, begging and pleading or wanting to start punching the wall (or myself) in a fit of paroxysm. Early on, I would follow



the lead of those promptings and do just that: cry, begging for this nightmare to end or punch the air, the wall, my own face.

This simply needed to stop. I would let the fear be there, but as I stated before: I was not going to let my wilful actions be a puppet to the puppeteer of anxiety/depression/insomnia. In doing all of this, the thoughts became less intense and eventually just stopped. The nights got so much better and sleep no longer became an issue; it just happened naturally.

There was a time when I was certain I was broken for good and that this nightmare would never end. Now it has ended and I look back fondly on those times.

### **Distorted Vision**

A lot of people complain about this more bewildering symptom of anxiety. People who suffer from this symptom say that everything appears to be covered in faint dots, or that objects look hazy or blurred and they can't quite focus on them properly.

The main reason for this is that when under stress, our pupils can dilate, which affects our vision and causes the symptoms described above. Also, when anxious our vision can narrow down to focus on a threat.

This is something I also suffered with and, initially, this symptom did frustrate me and took up a lot of my attention which only created more stress. I finally realised that the eye floaters and blurred vision were not the problem; it was my reaction to them that was. Once I disregarded them as a problem, then I hardly even noticed their presence and once my anxiety subsided, then my vision went back to normal.

## **Ringing Ears**

This is one of the less common symptoms of anxiety, but one I suffered with for a short period. It is said that this symptom could be due to a side effect of antidepressants or other medication. The reason why people with anxiety can suffer from time to time with ringing ears is still inconclusive, although new research is pointing more towards it being a symptom of continuous stress. As my anxiety weakened, so did this symptom. It did not last long at all and after talking to others who suffered from this issue, they also spoke of it as being temporary.

## **Feeling Guilty**

A lot of people who suffer from anxiety can experience feelings of guilt. This guilt is brought about by the realisation that someone who at one time could do things so easily, now struggles to get through the day. They may have a family and feel guilty that they can no longer do the things they once did with their partner or children. They may even attempt to fight their way through the day, putting on an act to prove to themselves that this thing will not get the better of them, only to go to bed at night more exhausted and anxious than ever. Anxiety can affect people from every profession, even doctors, the very people we first go to for help, so let me stress that you have nothing to feel guilty about.

Some partners can be very supportive of how you feel, but some may not be. They may put pressure on you to 'pull yourself together' and the constant strain of trying to cope can tire you further. Thankfully, I did have an understanding partner and I explained to her that the person she saw now was not the real me. I asked her to bear with me and told her that I wanted to be the person I once was and that, in time, I would be. I lost a few friends as I was hardly ever available to go out. Certain people at work would snub me as I barely spoke, but I did not wallow in all this! I knew I had to let all this

negative stuff go. I was not going to add any more worry and self-pity to the mix, as that was the last thing my mind and body needed. I also knew that I could sort all those issues out later when I felt better.

There were times though when I felt like I was playing a role in a film, acting to try to appear normal, while attempting to hide how I truly felt. The mental energy I exerted trying to maintain this act, day after day, was immense and just exhausted me further. Eventually, I stopped trying to be the person I thought I should be and allowed myself to fall into how I was. So, if you see yourself in this way, then learn to put yourself first. You need to stop putting on an act, stop trying to be the person you once were and tell yourself that you don't have to keep up this pretence any longer.

If you have an understanding family or partner, then great, you have the support you need. If not, I would suggest that you ask your family or partner to listen to you without judgement. You can even recommend that they read this book and explain to them how much you need their support while you recover. If they genuinely care, then they will understand and give you their support. A lot of their impatience is caused by frustration, a frustration, mainly built out of worry, that the person they now see is not the person they once knew and they want you back as much as you do. A little more understanding from them may give you the freedom to start recovery.

Self-pity is another emotion that can drag you further into this condition. Again, this stems from a reluctance to accept the way you are, as you keep asking yourself the question 'Why me?' Always feeling sorry for yourself will only eat away at your self-confidence and cause you to feel more and more down about the way you feel. It is very easy to fall into this trap and I cannot stress enough just how important it is to accept how you feel, harbour as little self-pity as possible and never feel like you are weak or letting anyone down.

## **Loss of Confidence**

When I was at my worst, my confidence plummeted. I felt as if I was worthless and had nothing interesting to say. I did not see the point of anything and felt as if I was just existing. That is what anxiety does to you, it robs you of your personality, your confidence and your very identity. My own experience caused me to feel as if my emotions had become frozen. Some people say they can't even feel love for the people they care about and others don't feel any emotions at all. This is precisely how I felt, nothing anyone could do or say could make me happy. I could have won the lottery and I would not have even smiled. I felt numb, and there were times when I thought I would never smile again.

I just want to let everyone know that this is not you forever and your emotions do come back as you start to recover. Your confidence and personality do gradually return, building up in layers, until eventually, you feel like the person you once were.

I feel more confident now than I did before I suffered. All the hurdles I have passed, and the experiences I have come through have helped me to grow into a stronger person.

## **Feeling Depressed**

Some sufferers of anxiety can start to feel extremely drained and down, and in some cases, anxiety can lead to people suffering from genuine bouts of depression. I would say I was in the middle of the two. I had some down days and weeks, but I would not say I developed full-on depression. So, whatever stage you feel you are at and if you are feeling down in any way, then hopefully the information below will help you.

My bouts of feeling extremely down developed through constantly overthinking, worrying and fighting my condition on a daily basis. That, and the complete hopelessness of my

current state and how it was restricting my life, led to a lot of self-pity and negative thinking.

I was just so mentally and physically worn out that it started to affect my mood. I always likened how I felt to a nearly flat battery. I could function, but only at the bare minimum. There was no fun or enjoyment in anything anymore and I began to feel incredibly down and started to withdraw from life and others. I also found it hard to socialise and do simple daily tasks; getting through the day was an achievement in itself.

Just remember that depression is a state of mind; it is not an accurate reflection of the world around you. The world is not the depressive, fearful place it appears to be when we suffer. It is only our current state of mind that makes it appear so.

Before this realisation, I thought my depression was mainly due to the world, my life and others, and not my state of mind. This realisation helped me a lot as I now stopped blaming the world around me, which in turn saved me from a lot of overthinking and conflict with others and life itself. My main concern now was, not to try and change the outside, but to concentrate on sorting out the inside and regain my well-being.

Previously I would blame life and others for how I felt, lash out and constantly snap at those around me. I eventually realised that it was not their fault and lashing out at those closest to me was not helping me. It was just driving people away and led to me feeling even worse about myself. So, I began to take real responsibility for myself and started talking to others about how I was feeling, rather than continually projecting how I felt onto them.

Even though initially it was difficult, as all I wanted to do was hide away, I started to go for bike rides, walks and took up swimming to break up my old routine, shake off the cobwebs and take my mind off of how I was feeling.

This new regime helped me greatly and gave me another focus towards my day instead of focusing on myself. Going out for a run, walk or any other form of daily exercise is far better than sitting at home brooding about how you feel. Exercise in itself releases endorphins, which are great for lifting your mood and helps burn off all those stress chemicals that can build up through the day.

I also stopped eating junk food and started eating more natural foods, as well as cutting down significantly on my alcohol consumption. Medication is a personal choice, but I always believed that being outside in nature and a natural diet would serve me much better. For me, these were nature's natural antidepressants without any of the side effects of medication and so I always headed down this route.

I also found it hugely helpful to fall into and allow my feelings of sadness fully and just see it as some inner weather passing by. I put no story around it, didn't try to feel any different than I did and just let these emotions pass in their own time. It was far more exhausting when I fought to try and manipulate my inner state or put fake smiles on to cover up how I was feeling inside.

### **Negative thinking only increases your depression**

Your thought patterns, along with your attitude, are also crucial when overcoming any bout of depression. Too many people begin to turn in on themselves and start to think negatively about themselves and their current state. Although this is understandable, this approach is not helpful and entirely counterproductive. By doing this, thinking negatively becomes a habit which just crushes our spirit even more and creates a loop of negative thinking. These negative thoughts, when repeated continuously, can also become part of our subconscious and so we eventually get to the stage where we don't have to think negatively, it just happens automatically.

It is also important to change your train of thought so that you no longer keep adding negativity to your mind. It is not just about letting the past negative thoughts die away; it is also about no longer creating fresh negative thinking. You don't have to walk around all the time trying to think positively as this can seem like faking it. As long as you don't go around continually thinking negatively or believing your past negative thinking, then things will change automatically.

Just watch out for all the negative thinking you create and try to change the way you perceive things. Instead of saying "This is me now, nothing will ever change", say "I don't feel great at the moment, but I am going to make the changes and come through this". Instead of saying "I have nothing to look forward to and I hate my life" maybe say "This is just a temporary part of my life that I have the power to change and maybe I'll become an even better person because of it".

Again, I'm not asking you to put a fake spin on everything. When we feel this way, it is hard to be positive about anything. But try to think about things in a more neutral way rather than always filling your mind with negative thoughts. The main thing is to try and have as little self-pity as possible and genuinely believe this is not you forever.

### **Feeling mentally drained**

My bouts of sadness and my poor mental state were the result of all the excessive overthinking, worrying and battling with myself. I could now see why I felt so flat, drained, detached and why I felt little joy in anything. I had caused my mental and emotional battery to run on empty and it was now up to me to recharge it. So, I decided I would no longer mentally thrash myself by entering into a constant cycle of negative thinking, worry and stress. My depression was a huge wake-up call for me to change and I realised that my body and mind needed me more than ever now.

Even with this change in attitude, I still expected to feel down, flat and mentally exhausted while my battery levels were so depleted. I would just have to accept my current state for the time being and do the best I could until my mental and emotional batteries started to recharge.

My advice for overcoming any kind of sadness or depression is to go for a walk in nature, take timeouts, exercise, listen to uplifting music, mix with others and, most importantly, be kind to yourself by ending the constant daily battle and negative thought process.

I came through my bouts of deep sadness because I made the changes above. These changes also helped me after my recovery and I did become a better person because of what I went through. I am a far more confident person than I was before my suffering and I tend always to see the good in my life.

This new outlook all came about because I understood the importance of living my life alongside how I felt; by allowing the low states rather than fighting them; by looking after my physical and mental health, by refusing to believe this was me forever and by not hiding away or wallowing in self-pity.

I am also very proud that I stayed positive and came through this very tough part of my life. This has given me new inner strength; a strength to believe that I can overcome anything. If I learnt one valuable lesson, it is that we were never put on this earth to suffer and that suffering is our alarm call. It is telling us that what we are doing is not serving us in life and that a change is needed.



# Chapter 11

## Overcoming Mental Exhaustion

### What is mental Exhaustion?

Mental exhaustion, also known as brain fog occurs when a person indulges in too much mental activity, never giving their brains a chance to rest and recuperate. This mental burnout can be the result of overthinking, continuous stress, worry, constant self-concern or introspection.

As all of the above are typical behaviours of the anxiety sufferer, it comes as no surprise why so many who suffer from anxiety also experience the symptoms of mental fatigue.

### Common symptoms of mental exhaustion

- Foggy head, a feeling of detachment
- Feeling mentally and physically worn out
- Feeling the need for solitude and social isolation
- Finding conversations difficult and a real mental strain
- Unable to concentrate, always forgetting things
- Often irritable, especially around others
- Thinking is slow and laboured, lack of clarity
- Headaches or a tight feeling around the head
- Often sad or depressed, lack of emotion
- Feeling self-aware, stuck in your own head
- Repetitive and obsessive thoughts
- Mind going blank/freezing when in conversation
- Loss of confidence
- Feeling like your head is full of junk
- Trouble sleeping, waking up early or regular in the night
- Unable to think straight, confused and muddled thinking
- Losing track when trying to read or watch a movie
- Lack of enthusiasm and enjoyment in life

Someone dealing with mental exhaustion can find themselves overwhelmed by everyday tasks and at times may feel the need to walk away from all their responsibilities. They may have a desire for everyone to leave them alone and feel that they don't have the mental energy for anything or anyone.

They may also find it hard to concentrate and feel a sense of detachment from their surroundings. Even a simple task like reading a book, following a conversation or watching a TV program can be difficult. They may keep forgetting what they are doing halfway through a task or keep making mistakes at work. They may be constantly irritable and snapping at those around them and have a real need for solitude and time alone and if they feel they can't get it, they may lash out.

If the above describes you in any way, then it is pretty likely that you are suffering from mental burnout.

As stated, mental exhaustion is created by overworking the brain, mainly through stressful/worrisome thinking. Your brain is a physical organ, and like any other organ, it needs periods of rest to recuperate. When it is overworked and doesn't get the break it needs, then it will start showing signs of fatigue.

This fatigue you experience is your brain's way of sending you a message through the form of suffering. It is telling you that it cannot cope with this constant over-thinking, worrying or self-concern and that it needs a break from this continuous mental activity so that it can begin to heal.

### **Why do anxiety sufferers feel so mentally worn out?**

The mental exhaustion that anxiety sufferers experience is mainly due to the over-thinking of their condition; this is caused by continually trying to find a solution through their thinking process and worrying about the state they are in.

They may also spend a lot of their time reading about their condition, be it on forums chatting with other sufferers or spending a lot of their time searching on the internet. Trying to find answers and relief can become a full-time job for many.

Another common reason is due to the sufferer trying to keep up a pretence to the outside world and those around them that everything is fine. Attempting to keep up this act can be extremely challenging and exhausting. Add that to all the worry about how anxiety is affecting their life and their attachment to all the worrying thoughts that they may be experiencing, and it becomes pretty clear why they find themselves so mentally fatigued.

### **My own experience with mental fatigue**

Mental exhaustion was something I also suffered with and for pretty much all the reasons above. This is why I found it hard to be around people; I just didn't have the mental energy to hold a conversation. I initially thought that this was a sign that I didn't feel comfortable around people when this was not strictly the case. It had more to do with the fact that I didn't have the mental energy to be around people and hold conversations.

It is also why I craved solitude. I thought that I was anti-social or that I was losing the will to enjoy life, but it was just my brain needing a break. It was crying out for a rest and saying, "We aren't doing anything today, I haven't the energy and need a rest". It is also why I found it hard to read or watch TV. My brain didn't have the power or space to take anything in and just wanted to do the bare minimum.

I never saw the signs of exhaustion initially but, when I did, how I felt started to make complete sense. It also occurred to me that if I gave my brain the rest it so craved and required, then all of these symptoms would disappear.

The mistake I initially made was that I was always trying to overcome the symptoms (which was exhausting in itself) and never went towards the cause of why I felt the way I did. I finally realised that I needed to get to the root of the problem and find out what was causing the exhaustion and not waste any more mental energy trying to manage or fix it.

I now recognised on a profound level that I could never think my way out of this condition and that this was always going to have the opposite effect and keep me in the cycle, I actually couldn't believe how I had missed this before.

**Recovery from mental fatigue will not come through trying to think your way out of it.**

Trying to recover from mental exhaustion by trying to solve it, fix it or escape it just requires more thinking, wastes more mental energy and so keeps you in the cycle.

**Here is an example:**

If you ran 24 marathons in 24 days and your leg was utterly fatigued and aching to the point of real suffering, would you then think it is a good idea to go out for another run to try and stop it hurting? No, you would realise that for it to heal, you would need to rest it. Nothing else would make any sense.

The trouble is that most people do the opposite when they feel mentally worn out. Through a misunderstanding of what is causing them to feel the way they do, they may try to mentally battle, worry and think their way out of how they feel, which of course tires the brain further, and so no progress is ever made.

## **The start of my recovery from mental exhaustion**

The way out for me was by first recognising what the problem was. I had no idea what was causing me to feel this way initially. I just thought it was another symptom of my anxiety and it was something that I had to work on and defeat.

So where did I go to defeat this symptom? Yes, right back into my thinking mind. I was trying to cure the symptoms of overthinking by overthinking more, and I just became more mentally fatigued! Through a total misunderstanding, I had no idea that what I was doing was keeping me in a loop of suffering. Unfortunately, we don't always see the message our mind and body are sending us and do the opposite of what is required.

The way out of this condition was for me to allow myself to feel the symptoms of mental exhaustion without trying to do anything about them. I couldn't anyway. My brain was just manifesting the signs of fatigue which I had no control over and for which I was responsible. I finally saw it for what it was, which stopped me from fearing and obsessing over it and ceased me trying to solve it.

So much overthinking ended with just this one insight. Understanding what had kept me in the cycle now stopped me mentally trying to escape or fix this condition. So much wasted brain activity ceased there and then and my brain could finally get the rest it needed to start the healing process.

## **How to recover from mental exhaustion**

Mental exhaustion can easily be reversed with the right understanding and approach. If possible, you could make changes in your personal life that can reduce your stress or give you more downtime. Just having a new outlook on life and realising what is causing so much of your pain helps

enormously, as when you see the reason behind your suffering, it is much easier to make the changes required.

In most cases, when we worry or stress over things, it is not the outside that needs to change, but more our perception of outside events. If you want more peace in your life, always concentrate on improving the inside and not the outside. Once you find more peace within, it's amazing how many fewer problems you seem to have on the outside. What once sent you into a worry storm, hardly seems to bother you now, and if there are real problems in your life, you feel much calmer in dealing with them.

### **Realising we create our own mental fatigue**

I finally realised that all my suffering came back to me, I was the creator of it, yet I always thought it was just how I was, or I would blame others or outside events for it. Suffering in any form is like an alarm that will keep on going off until you stop doing the things that are causing you to suffer. It is your mind and body's way of saying that something needs to be seen and recognised so that change can happen.

Recovery is never about continually treating the symptoms, but finding out the cause and no longer doing what is causing you to feel the way you do and then going through a process of healing the past suffering you have created.

The most relaxing holiday in the world won't do anything if you then come back and start worrying and stressing over everything once again. You have to go to the root of what is making you suffer and make changes there. Even when I saw through the cycle of my mental exhaustion, I still had to go through a period of healing. I still had to experience the symptoms of what I had previously created until clarity finally returned.

It was the same with anxiety, when I saw through the whole condition and what was causing me to stay in the loop. I still had to go through a process of healing until I was finally free.

### **Helpful tips on recovering from mental exhaustion**

1. Try not to take out how you are feeling on those around you. The way you are feeling is a personal thing and directing it towards others doesn't help anyone; it just creates more stress and conflict. You are far better talking to them about how you feel which will then bring more patience and understanding.

2. Be patient. Recovering from mental fatigue can take time. Getting frustrated or impatient will most likely lead you to go back to trying to find a quick fix, which will once again result in overthinking. The easier you are on yourself, the faster your brain can heal.

3. Spend more time outdoors and in nature. Don't sit at home, looking at the same surroundings and brooding about your predicament. Go outside and give your mind a new environment to enjoy and some fresh air. Being outdoors works wonders at clearing out the mental cobwebs.

4. Don't try and think your way out of your mental fatigue. Worrying and overthinking are precisely the things that caused you to feel the way you did in the first place. The symptoms aren't pleasant, but there is nothing you can do mentally to speed up the process of healing. Trying to do so has the opposite effect.

5. Take things at your own pace; don't feel any guilt for the things you can and can't do. Be prepared to say no to tasks that seem too much for you at the minute.

6. Look after your mind and body. Avoid too much alcohol, bad eating and sleeping habits. It is essential to keep your energy

levels up by eating well, exercising and getting enough mental rest when your energy levels are depleted.

7. Give your brain a break from time to time and unplug everything, from your PC to your TV and do something simple or nothing at all. Many people find this hard as they are so used to being busy or need constant mental stimulation. Shutting off this stimulation, even for just a small part of the day, can be hugely beneficial in the long run.

8. Stop continuously talking and reading about the subject of anxiety. Cut down on the books, the forums and your general obsession with how you are feeling. There is nothing wrong with educating yourself on the subject as long as your self-concern doesn't become a daily obsession.

You can follow the above and also create your own practices to give the brain more downtime. You know yourself better than anyone, so do what feels right for you.

The bottom line is to find a way to give the brain more of a break by taking some mental timeouts and cutting down on stress, worry and overthinking. Following the above is what will begin the healing process and finally lead your brain back to feeling refreshed and improve your clarity and concentration levels.



## Chapter 12

### Recovery can be an up and down affair

I feel that it is important to let people know that when they are on the road to recovery, it can be a bit of an up and down affair. Sometimes I would think that I had taken one step forward only to take two steps back. Here are some of the mistakes I made, so hopefully you can avoid them.

#### Dealing with Setbacks

When I knew I was on the right path, I had days when I felt good and then suddenly out of the blue, I would have a really bad day/week and feel completely engulfed with symptoms once again. I knew deep down this was part of recovery and had come across advice in the past to just accept any setback as part of the healing process.

Well, what did I do with this advice after my first few setbacks? The exact opposite of what I should have been doing. I started questioning it all over again, falling into the trap of telling myself that this was not working. I thought I was on my way to recovery, but now I felt worse than ever. I did this on numerous occasions, feeling great one week and terrible the next until I understood that this was to be expected and was part and parcel of recovery.

Allowing myself to feel the way I did, meant doing so when I felt at my worst and not just when I felt OK. Of course, there was no struggle or resistance (that only created more suffering) when I felt fine; there was no need to. The key here was to allow myself to fall into my deepest suffering without feeling the need to fix, change or suppress it; only then would I truly surrender and give my mind and body the time and space it needed to heal.

I think I had come so far through allowing myself to feel the way I did, that when I was engulfed with symptoms again, I became so disappointed and bewildered that my need to scramble back to how I felt previously overrode what I had learnt. I then concluded that there was a period in my suffering where I felt terrible all the time, so surely this up-and-down affair meant I was finally moving forward. I should have celebrated the fact that it was now an up and down affair and not with me 24/7. This was a sign of progress and not something to fight or get down about. I finally realised there was no right or wrong way to feel, it was how I was meant to feel in that moment and if I labelled anything as wrong, then I would only fall back into trying to resist or change my experience.

Trust me, even during your deepest setback, you never lose what you have learnt or the progress you have made; it is always there stored away within you. Old memories and emotions can return at the most unexpected times. This is only to be expected, so just allow yourself to experience them fully without resistance. Don't question why you feel so bad today when you felt so good last week. It is not important so just accept these days as part of your recovery, all states pass when left alone.

My advice, and what helped me the most in a setback, was to allow myself to fall into any hole. By this, I mean I just allow myself to fall right into my suffering without any resistance, struggle or inner dialogue to try and change it. This is what people find so difficult, as they feel that if they do this, their feelings will manifest themselves and grow. I can assure you that this is not the case. If you don't believe me, then the next time you feel anxious or uncomfortable, instead of resisting or struggling with these feelings, allow yourself to fall right into them and see what happens.

Sometimes when I encountered certain setbacks, I found my spirits dwindled. I suppose I just wanted to ignore the world

again and drift back into self-pity and, at times, I was very tempted to give up.

Even though I had these moments and you may be having them too, my desire to recover always overrode them and I carried on living my life regardless of how I felt. If you find yourself in this situation, then please don't fall into the trap of thinking 'I don't want to do that today, I will wait until tomorrow'. If you genuinely want to go and it is only the thought of feeling uncomfortable that is stopping you, then put your coat on and go, don't be bluffed into avoidance due to a feeling.

I remember being asked by friends to go to the racecourse on a few occasions but always refused, as I knew I would feel uncomfortable and not particularly enjoy it. Then one day I just thought, 'No matter how I feel, I am going. If I feel uncomfortable or strange, then I do. I need to start taking steps forward if I want things to change.'

I finally went to the racecourse, and even though I didn't particularly enjoy it, it was not as bad as I thought it would be. I then made it a regular practice, and every time I went, I began to feel less uncomfortable, less strange and more able to enjoy it. At first, it was just the unfamiliarity of doing something different that made me feel uncomfortable and a bit odd, but I accepted how I felt and carried on regardless.

Gradually through continued living, I felt far more part of what I was doing and forgot about how I was feeling. So, don't put off doing things until you feel like it, just take all the apprehension and strangeness with you and live the life you wish.

You may also have that habitual inner voice that says "Don't go you will feel uncomfortable; you know you will". But listening to this defeatist inner voice is what holds you back; you need to go against your instincts to follow it and do it

anyway. Recovery lies in these very places and will not be achieved through your avoidance of them.

## **Refresh your mind**

During my early stages of suffering, I indulged in too much self-defeatist thinking. This constant brooding caused me to neglect a lot of things - getting dressed, my appearance, going out and meeting friends as I was generally always feeling sorry for myself.

The same routine, day in and day out, can also create a sense of staleness where you begin to find no joy in anything and everything feels like a real effort. If you are one of those people who stays in bed or mopes around the house all day without getting dressed, this is for you. Just try to take an interest in something, no matter how difficult it is to motivate yourself.

Even if it's just starting a job around the house, joining a class or taking up a new hobby like painting or drawing, anything that gives you a new focus. Just learn to give your day meaning and you may find it refreshes that dull, tired mind of yours.

Too many people want to hide away at home and just 'wish it away' hoping that one day they will wake up and it will all be behind them. Unfortunately, it does not work like this. Recovery comes through making changes and the breaking down of old habits and no amount of self-pity and wishing it all away will help. You need to come out of the safety zone and make these changes. Don't spend all day asking yourself "What's the point?" Just do something you used to enjoy, even if at first it takes some effort.

When you are feeling anxious and mentally spent then everything does feel like an effort initially and I am not asking you to climb Mount Everest in a day; just start with the small

things and build yourself up from there. Just remember that people who don't suffer from anxiety need to stimulate their minds too; otherwise, they will start to feel a sense of boredom and lack of joy. Anxiety sufferers are just the same; it is just the motivation factor that is different and a significant barrier to them doing so.

The above advice is what helped me to recover. I had become stuck in a rut by going through the same routine every day. Going out and doing something different with my day helped refresh my mind and broke through my habit of always thinking about myself.

People sometimes say to me, "But how can I get up and do things when I feel so numb and empty? I just want to hide away". My answer is always the same. Go along with the numbness and emptiness and take it with you. Feeling this way may take a lot of enjoyment out of the experience, but it does not stop you going. It is also the continued doing that brings back the old you and new emotions begin to replace the old ones. So, don't wait until you are better to start living, live now.

### **Accept recovery can take time**

I cannot stress enough the importance of this point, so please read through this section very carefully and thoroughly absorb the content. No matter how many times I tell people to step back and let recovery take care of itself, so many still attempt to manipulate their inner state or try to find a way to fast-track recovery by looking for a miracle cure that does not exist.

I will repeat this.....

What I had was a nervous breakdown; this occurs because your mind and body can only take so much. When you are going through a prolonged period of stress and worry, your mind and body cannot cope and so it breaks down. It has

reached a breaking point and has said enough is enough. This may lead to feelings of anxiousness, feelings of panic and in many cases, a feeling of detachment and depression. It does not matter what the symptoms are; they are all a result of you pushing your mind and body beyond their limits.

Now all your mind and body are asking for is rest and time to rejuvenate themselves. Do we give them that time? No! Through no fault of our own, we then worry about these symptoms, worry we are going crazy and exert immense mental energy attempting to fix ourselves. This puts more worry and strain on our already fatigued mind and body and so we may begin to feel worse. We then tell ourselves that we must get a grip of this thing, so we fight it and worry even more. Well, I think you can now see why these symptoms persist.

My breakdown brought on a whole host of symptoms and emotions for me to worry about, attempt to solve and battle against. A process of healing could not begin until I finally saw the loop, I was stuck in.

Before I could ever hope to feel better, I knew that this battle with myself had to cease. The main reason for this battle was an impatience to feel better. When I truly saw the cause of my suffering and why I was stuck in a cycle, it became obvious to me that the process of healing would take time. In one way this was a relief to me as the battle with myself was finally over. In another way, I was disappointed because I truly hoped that I could step straight out of how I felt if I just found the right understanding or technique.

The truth is, I have yet to speak to one sufferer who found a magic pill or technique that made them feel better instantly. Each person who recovered had to go through a process of healing to regain their true self. So, do be patient, put no pressure on yourself to get better and give your mind and body as much time as they need to heal.

## **Don't be influenced by how you feel**

As stated previously people who suffer from anxiety can experience many different symptoms. Some may believe that because they have not read about certain ones or seen them mentioned anywhere before, they may be suffering from something else. Anxiety can create many symptoms and to list them all would serve no purpose. All I ask is that you are not discouraged by anything that you feel at this present time.

When I shut my eyes at night, I sometimes felt as though I was floating away from my body, but I just put this down to my overworked mind playing its tricks on me. Due to my increasing knowledge of the subject, I began to accept all of my symptoms and did not question any of them. I just stayed calm in my attitude and allowed their presence.

My whole attitude to allowing my feelings came through genuinely understanding that I had no control over them and that any attempt at control was just counterproductive. I realised deeply that all my efforts at control were the main reason for the majority of my suffering. It just made no sense to carry on trying to manipulate my inner state.

One question I am often asked is "How do I give my nerves a chance to rest when I feel so anxious?"

Well, yes, your nerves are sensitised at the moment and they may seem as though they give you no rest from your feelings of anxiety. The reason this cycle continues is that **we're anxious because we're anxious**. Can you relate to this? All the "Oh God, I hate this, I just want it to go away. When will this ever end?" This is what keeps your nerves tense and sensitised, as you are not giving them a chance to calm down due to all this continued worry and anxious thinking. It does not matter whether you feel anxious or not; your nerves will only have a chance to calm down when you stop worrying about your current state.

## **Still feeling apprehensive**

I can only describe this as a constant background feeling of apprehension that something terrible is going to happen. One woman described it as 'like being in no man's land'.

I also experienced this feeling of apprehension a lot during recovery and it seemed to hover over me as though it was waiting to drag me back under. It was just a sense of constant mild anxiety in the background that I found quite disorientating.

I then accepted that anxiety had been part of me for so long and it was only natural to feel this way and the feeling of disorientation was the transition between my suffering and feeling normal again. In other words, feeling normal felt strange initially and so I was stuck with this in-between feeling for a while. When I allowed this feeling of apprehension to be there and saw it as part of recovery, it began to fade and feeling normal soon became my new normal.

## **It's my party and I'll cry if I want to**

Things can get on top of us when we suffer from anxiety, even when we start to do things the right way. I had days where I thought everything was behind me and days where I felt that nothing was changing. Recovery felt so close one day and so far away the next. Well, this is your recovery and your party, so don't be afraid to have a good cry and let things out if need be. I remember doing this on occasions and then waking up the next day ready to move forward again. I also had days where I would shut out the world due to feeling sorry for myself. I think everyone in life does this from time to time; sometimes things just get on top of you and we just need a cry or a timeout before we get up again.

These days were very few and far between as I refused to go down the self-pity route, but they helped in their own little way and I would always come through ready and more determined



than ever to move forward. Just remember, what has gone has gone. It does not matter how long you have suffered; how many years you think you have wasted or how many times you feel you have failed in the past. You now have a new goal and with renewed knowledge, courage and determination, you can achieve full recovery.

### **Will my anxiety return?**

Somebody once asked me if anxiety would return once it had left them. Anxiety does not pick on certain people and it's not something that can come back out of the blue. It is not an illness, but a condition created by ourselves. If we recover and then fall back into the habit of worrying and stressing about everything once more, then, yes, of course, we could feel anxious once again. But the anxiety has not come back; we are the ones who have recreated it.

This is why it is so important to change your whole outlook on life and make some changes. This is what anxiety is; it is a message to change. It is teaching you that all this stress and worry is not good for you. So many people who come through anxiety now say that it was a blessing; that it helped them make so many changes in their life for the better and that they truly saw the message within their suffering.

The person most unlikely to suffer again is someone who has suffered in the past. I know what brought me to that terrible place and I know I could never go there again. My whole outlook on life has changed and I always put my health and well-being before anything else; nothing is more important. I am also far more laid back than I was before. I understand that worry is the most useless and pointless activity that we can partake in and I just tend to live life for today and worry about nothing past or present. I now go with the ups and downs of life, rather than complain about them. My life is a lot richer due to my suffering and it has put a lot of things into perspective and changed me as a person.

## **Medication**

A lot of people ask about medication, and as I am not a doctor, I cannot comment on any particular medication that anyone is taking.

I do believe though that medication is thrown at anxiety sufferers far too easily because of ignorance on the subject. Some doctors appear to have a lack of understanding of the condition and therefore, the only solution they know is to throw medication at it. I'm not saying this happens in all cases, but I feel I was just given medication because the doctor knew no better. I was given tablets to slow my heart rate down when all I suffered from was anxiety, and so these tablets did nothing for me at all. I was then put on anti-depressants that just made me feel spaced out and certainly had no effect on reducing my anxiety.

The side effects weren't pleasant and neither did me any good so I came off them gradually and felt better for it. However, I do accept that in some cases, there may be a need for medication to take the edge off anxiety/panic to give people the motivation and freedom to start the recovery process.

Each individual is different, and you may have a different opinion on the subject. If you're taking sedatives or any other medication and it helps in some way, that's fine. As long as you don't keep searching for that magic pill that's going to make it all go away. This is why some people may find themselves coming off medication only to go back on, or continually changing their prescription.

In every case, I believe that the underlying problems of anxiety need to be addressed for recovery to begin and unfortunately, medication cannot achieve this. I am not a doctor and don't pretend to be. These are just my views. You must talk to your doctor about how you feel and let him advise you. If you are taking medication that has been prescribed for you and you

think you are having more problems than before, then please return to your doctor and talk it through with them.

## **Diet and Fitness**

Exercise can also be a great help to people who suffer from anxiety. Exercise produces endorphins that lift your mood and give you a sense of well-being, it also burns off the chemicals produced by stress and worry and re-absorbs that adrenalin that has built up. Exercise has many benefits and is excellent for maintaining a healthy body and mind, so if you are in a position to take up some form of exercise, I would suggest that you do so.

A good diet can be helpful too and I would suggest eating healthily, with plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables. If you go to my website, you will see a list of foods to avoid and foods that are good for you. I believe that a good diet is nature's medicine and can give you everything medication can without the side effects and other problems.

When I changed my diet, I was not perfect, so you don't have to get too hung up about what you do and don't eat. Don't think one cup of coffee will set you up for an anxious day. The more changes you make to your lifestyle through diet and exercise, the better for your overall well-being.

## **Alcohol**

There is nothing wrong with drinking alcohol in moderation to help you unwind or socialise, as long as you don't start turning to alcohol to relieve your anxiety. In the short term, you may find some relief, but all alcohol does is dehydrate the brain and body, leaving you feeling more anxious than ever when you wake. If you feel unable to give up altogether, then just try to drink in moderation.

I spent a great deal of time drinking alcohol to block out my

feelings of anxiety until I realised that it was just another form of suppression and by doing this, I was just making the problem worse. It was another way of not facing myself or how I was feeling and of course, as we know, this never works. Whatever you try and suppress will just keep coming back, you can only suppress an emotion for so long before something gives and you are forced to deal with it.

I didn't give up drinking, as it was a big part of my social life and it was important for me to keep socialising. But I no longer drank to suppress anything and never went beyond my limits of what I could handle without feeling any negative after-effects.

## Chapter 13

### Coming Through Depersonalisation

#### What is 'Depersonalisation'?

Depersonalisation is a mental and emotional disorder in which the sufferer may feel like they have lost touch with reality and who they are. They also experience feelings of detachment from their surroundings, as well as the sensation of one's environment, looking or feeling strange and unusual.

Depersonalisation is one step beyond mental exhaustion and a rarer, but understandable offshoot of the anxiety condition. I can also tell you that it is in no way a mental illness. It is not serious or harmful in any way and has an entirely logical explanation. It is temporary and, with patience and understanding, eventually passes like any other symptom.

These feelings of unreality occur when your brain can no longer cope with all the stress, worry, overthinking and constant introspection about how you feel. When you push it beyond what it was built to handle and it reaches overload, it has its own internal trip switch which has the ability to shut down a part of the brain in order to protect you and itself from the onslaught of worry and deep thinking.

The key to recovering from this strange feeling of detachment is to surrender to it. Pay it no respect and realise it is just the product of an over-exhausted brain, fatigued by your constant worry, stress, deep thinking and the constant checking in on how you feel. The trouble is, due to the fear of these new symptoms, most sufferers usually end up doing the opposite of this advice and so end up in another cycle of deep thinking, worrying and obsessing, which only serves to keep this condition alive.

When people are caught up in the worry/fear cycle, they begin to think deeply for a prolonged period. They study themselves from within, checking in and focusing on their symptoms. They may even wake in the morning only to continue this habit, “How do I feel this morning? I wonder if I will be able to get through today. What’s this new sensation I feel?” This may go on all day, exhausting their already tired brain further. This constant checking in and constant assessing of their symptoms also becomes a habit they find hard to break.

All this continuous worry and deep thinking is bound to make your brain feel dull and unresponsive. You are so concerned about how you feel that you are letting nothing else into your day. Is it any wonder you have come to feel so detached from your surroundings and others? Is it any wonder you find it so hard to concentrate? When people are studying for exams for hours on end, they reach the point where they can no longer take in any more information, so they take a break and carry on when their brain is refreshed. For you, there are no breaks and no timeouts.

As mentioned earlier, your brain has a safety mechanism that is designed to protect itself from all this worry and deep thinking. It takes a step back from this onslaught and shuts your emotions down. Just like a computer that can go into safe mode, it can still function but only at a very basic level, which is the same principle. This mental safe mode can then go on to produce your feelings of detachment and unreality. The world around you may become hazy or out of focus and you feel empty, like a walking shell of your former self. Again, this is your brain saying enough is enough. I am not built to take on all this stress, worry, deep thinking and questioning and so if you won’t do it, I will take my own break.

Once you understand that you are not going crazy and these symptoms are being caused by an overworked brain, exhausted through constant worry and introspection, it makes sense. Once it finally starts to make sense to the sufferer on a

deep level, then the worrying and obsession about how they are feeling may begin to cease and so the deep thinking and worry cycle is broken and a process of healing can take place.

When I finally recognised and understood what was causing me to feel this way and how I was caught in a cycle, I then learnt to live alongside this feeling and no longer worry or obsess about it. I wasn't doing this as some form of technique to get rid of this feeling; I just knew that this was the only way that my brain would finally get the break it needed to heal. When I realised that I was responsible for this overworked and exhausted brain of mine, I apologised to it and promised I would never put it through it again.

### **Learning to live alongside how you feel**

One lady emailed me recently after I had been helping her with this symptom and she said to me: "Paul, I did a lot better today. I simply did not care how weird, not with it or disconnected I felt and it made the day much easier".

This is precisely what I wanted her to achieve. Because she stopped worrying and concerning herself all day with how she felt, her brain got the break it needed. Her awareness then started to shift more towards the outside rather than constantly towards her inner state, helping her to feel more at one with her surroundings.

A short statement below that came from another lady, which I believe is relevant to all aspects of anxiety:

*"Paul, on a positive note, I'm fine now! I got through a lot of depersonalisation and other aspects of my anxiety by starting to 'engage' with the real world and stopped constantly focusing on how weird I felt'.*

This is why I always say 'Live your life'. Don't worry or concern yourself with how you are feeling. I used to go about my day

feeling odd, weird, anxious and not with it, but I had to learn to be OK with it all, as this was the only way I could break the cycle of obsessively monitoring and ruminating about how I felt.

You can decide to walk around questioning it all, worrying about it, fighting it, while getting frustrated by it, if you wish, but which approach will give your brain the break it so desperately needs? I took this option for nine years and just got worse, only when I did the opposite did things begin to improve.

Below, I include an article that I wrote some time ago, which goes deeper into the subject and speaks more of how I overcame it, entitled:

### **‘Recovery from Depersonalisation/Derealisation’**

Depersonalisation is not just a symptom of anxiety. It can also affect those who have been through a traumatic episode, like war or abuse of some kind. There are also cases of people having a bad experience with a drug and those that have lost a loved one can also suffer temporarily from it.

The person who has been to war and seen things that he would rather forget may suffer. The DP is his mind’s way of shutting down and protecting himself from these harrowing memories. This is the same as someone having been through some trauma or abuse of some kind; the DP can be present to protect them from these past painful memories.

As stated, those who have recently lost a loved one can also suffer from temporary DP and usually have that blank look, as though they are somewhere else. Again, it is the mind’s way of protecting them from all the pain, shock and worry of their recent loss; it becomes a coping mechanism for them. Once the pain and trauma of the loss begin to weaken, then they tend to revert to their old selves again.



## **Why do some people with anxiety go on to experience depersonalisation?**

I suffered from anxiety for about two years before I developed any symptoms of DP. It first developed due to my excessive worry and concern over how I was feeling. I would spend hours thinking deeply about my condition, continually trying to find a way out of my predicament.

This deep thinking and concern went on for months until I began to feel more and more detached from the world around me. Then one day I was stroking the family pet when I just had this out-of-body experience, it was like I was snatched from reality and was now part of some dream, the action of stroking my dog no longer seemed real.

What happened that day was my brain saying, 'Enough is enough, I cannot take this worry and deep thinking anymore and to protect me, and you, I have to shut your emotions down and take a mental break'. And it did, I could no longer feel any emotions, there was no happiness, no joy, I just felt empty. The whole world also appeared grey and lifeless and I felt no part of it.

## **Understanding is the key to recovery**

If I had known at the time what was going on, I would have heeded the warning, stopped worrying and would have taken the mental break I needed. But as I was clueless as to why I was feeling this way I just took on these new symptoms as something else to worry about, figure out and defeat and because of this I fell deeper into the condition.

The deeper I fell and the more severe my symptoms became, the more worry and concern was present and so I entered even further into the Depersonalisation cycle. Everything I was doing to try and get better were the very things that had

brought these feelings on in the first place, talk about being blind!!

If I had been more educated on DP before I suffered, then I would have known the reason why it was happening. I would then not have wasted years trying to figure a way out while constantly worrying about it daily.

So, the above explains why people with anxiety can go on to develop depersonalisation. It is all the concern and deep thinking about the initial anxiety that can lead to the first signs of depersonalisation and then they can spend years sinking further due to them now worrying and thinking deeply about the DP itself.

### **So how did I overcome my Depersonalisation?**

Well, before I give a list of things that helped me through, I will be honest with people and say that it did take a while for me to recover and that there are no quick fixes.

I finally realised that recovery would only occur when I stopped all the worry and deep thinking over how I felt and so that is the approach I now took. The symptoms, although scary, no longer had my constant concern and attention and so my mind started to get a break.

It was the constant barrage of concern and worry that had put me in this position in the first place, so it made total sense to me now that if I wanted to recover, then this had to cease and only then could a process of healing begin. While I was in the previous cycle, nothing was going to change. While I continued to worry and obsess about my predicament, then my brain would carry on protecting me, and no progress would be made. Allowing the presence of these symptoms is easier said than done, particularly when all you have done is spend years worrying and battling with them. So, to suddenly step

back and do nothing is like having an itch and no longer being able to scratch it.

But the whole process of recovery now made sense to me, I knew what was needed, and so I had to accept that I would feel like this for a while and to heal I would have to be OK with it. I would have to allow its presence and live alongside it the best I could.

### **Recovery takes time**

What I had learnt was not going to eliminate it straight away, there was still a process of healing that I needed to go through, and I had to allow that process to happen with as little fear and concern as possible. I would have to accept that things would still feel like a dream, that I would feel very few emotions and that the world would continue to appear grey and one-dimensional until my brain healed enough to turn this protection off and clarity returned.

Initially, through a habit of constant self-concern, my attention was still continually on me, and the symptoms of DP were still extreme, but I decided, and I mean from the pit of my stomach to live with this for the time being and no longer try and worry or think my way out of it. The last thing my brain needed now was more deep thinking and concern.

With all the knowledge I had now gained, all the previous actions that were keeping the condition alive soon ceased. I TRULY accepted this feeling and fully understood that I had no power over it. I finally realised that I had no control over its presence and it was going to be there for now whether I liked it or not, so this constant battle to defeat it was not only pointless but also counterproductive.

## **Don't be impatient**

It is due to impatience and the need to step straight out of this condition that a lot of people may allow themselves to feel this way for a short period but then become frustrated with it and fall back into the cycle of questioning and fighting its presence once again.

Once my attitude and approach to it changed, I never even thought about recovery, I just gave up the whole battle with it, allowed its presence without any concern and then improvement came to me. I didn't DO anything; it was the non-doing that brought about my recovery, as it was the non-doing that finally gave the brain the breaks it needed to heal.

Below is a list of other things that helped me recover.

## **Exercise and the outdoors**

Exercise is an excellent way of clearing the cobwebs and giving you another focus to your day. Exercise, especially when done outdoors is also very good for healing the mind, so try having a real dose of nature.

When you first start venturing out, the world may still seem distant and flat, but don't let this put you off. It is also vital at this time to look after your mind and body and be kind to yourself. See each day in which you allow yourself to feel this way as another step nearer to your mind healing.

## **Keeping away from forums and studying the subject daily.**

I run a blog because I like to think the advice is helpful and people do need that initial guidance and support. I will be honest though and say that I am not a fan of forums, as people on there tend to drown themselves in the subject, logging on day after day asking more questions and seeking more

reassurance while constantly trying to find that miracle cure. Many of them can then end up feeling worse as the subject becomes them and they feel like they can think of nothing else. For many, it can become their identity.

Forums also tend to be full of negative stories and people struggling for years without any real progress. Reading all these stories can lead to a negative mindset and have the sufferer feeling more bewildered than ever, as recovery seems so far away for other members and so they begin to lose hope themselves. I remember going on one many years ago to support people and found I had to come off. I just found the whole experience very depressing and draining and saw a lot of poor advice being given out by others who were still suffering themselves.

For me, once you understand the process and what's needed to recover, then you don't need to be logging on to forums talking about your symptoms and predicament each day. The best course of action is just to let go of the subject and go back out there and live again. I knew to begin to feel like my old self again then I had to pack in as much normal living as possible. Doing everyday things helps you to feel part of the outside world again and helps get you out of your head.

### **Stop obsessing/worrying and trust in yourself.**

Learn to pay this feeling no mind, and this means to just get on with your day; however you feel. Realise you are not going crazy and that this feeling is not harmful and will go away when your brain heals and no longer needs to protect you or itself from this constant barrage of worry and overthinking.

When the whole obsession, worry and deep-thinking cease, then the brain will begin the healing process. This process can be a slow and frustrating one and there will

be days where you feel you are really making strides and days where you feel engulfed again.

It is very important to allow this up and down process to occur without being too impressed by it. Don't ever gauge progress by how you feel. If you have a few good days and then suddenly feel worse than ever, don't think anything has gone wrong. This back and forth is all part and parcel of recovery and something you have to accept. Progress is gauged on how allowing you are and not on how you feel. So, don't get too excited on the good days and don't get too disheartened on the bad ones.

No matter how long you have suffered from this condition, when you apply the above and be patient, then full recovery is there for everyone. Just have faith in your mind and body's natural healing system to do its job, the best healing system in the world, when left alone, knows precisely what to do. It is all the 'doing' and constant need to try and manipulate your inner state that is the problem. It is the continual doing that exhausts your mind further as you try to think and fight your way out of this condition. Hopefully, this is now beginning to sink in. There is no 'DO' to get out of this condition; it is only when the doing stops that a process of healing can take place.

Also, remember that what you have been through has done you no long-term harm. My depersonalisation was so extreme that I could not even hold a conversation and completely lost who I was. For years life just felt like one constant dream that I was no part of and yet I came through without a single symptom present.

### **Recovery is there for everyone**

We all work and heal the same. The only ones that find themselves still stuck are those that don't understand the condition and so they stay in a constant cycle of recreating it.

Then there are those who have some understanding but refuse to be patient and want a quick fix, so end up falling back into fighting this condition and continue to stay in a cycle.

Someone once emailed me and said 'I have read your book, but my depersonalisation is still there' I mean did they read the same book that told them it would take time? No, again they wanted the quick answer, the miracle cure that does not exist. Recovery requires an understanding of what is happening and a good amount of patience so the brain can recover. If you have both, then recovery is inevitable.

Below is a post from Steven from my blog who accepted and understood what I said and he was eventually able to come through his DP.

*Over the past few days, I have let this feeling be there and not questioned it. I have felt better and done so much in the past couple of days. I even played golf today, and even though I was thinking about my condition a bit, I didn't care and I actually enjoyed the round of golf. I understand that I will feel strange talking to people for a while and that's fine. It's amazing how much more I have been able to connect with my family, girlfriend and friends just in the past couple of days since reading your info. I am at Uni now and I'm going to watch the football in my local pub tonight and again I really couldn't care less how I feel! The thing I now know I did wrong was if the feelings were still there, then I thought I was failing myself and I had to find a way to get rid of them. I now know just how much this held me back and I am now just getting on with my life.*

My reply was:

Never has a truer word been said, Steven. Don't expect miracles, just live alongside the strangeness for as long as it takes and in time the old you will re-surface all by itself.

## Shaun's story

*Just a few words on my own experience with DP – I had it for nearly a year, but I managed to learn to live with it. At first, it was terrifying, but after all the advice from Paul, I realised it didn't stop me from doing anything. Nobody knew I felt odd etc, so I just carried on. I spent months feeling spaced out and detached, but I managed to carry on regardless.*

*We moved house just over a year ago and it was a bit like a dream; it didn't really feel as though it was happening. I remember tidying up the garden, totally focused on anxiety, and I was depressed because of how I felt, wishing life would just get back to normal. But, over time, after taking on board all the advice offered here, I thought, "What does it really matter? If I feel spaced out, dizzy, depressed, so what?" Of course, nothing happened overnight, but over time and with practice, I found I could live my life despite feeling odd, depressed etc. My attitude was: "OK, I feel rubbish but so what? I can live my life like this."*

*Most of my more acute anxiety symptoms had really settled, but DP was something that lingered almost to the very end for me. I knew it was getting better when I had the odd day and I realised I had not had the spaced out, dizzy, detached feeling. I didn't grab for this – my attitude was: "OK, I feel better today, but if I feel bad tomorrow, so what?" And at first, this was how it was, but then I started to have a few days feeling "normal", which then turned into a week and then a few weeks, until, eventually, the DP just disappeared altogether.*

*I would say that for me, the most difficult symptoms were the DP and the constant 24/7 focus on me with an inability to focus on anything else. But now I am recovered, the advice here is absolutely spot on. I did nothing to try and overcome these symptoms other than just learn to live with them. I lived each day as though I was fine and I don't mean "ignore it and it will go" - I could never ignore it - but it eventually just*



*stopped being a problem because of my attitude of “so what?” and I really meant the “so what?” attitude – it wasn’t just words I was saying. And even when my ‘so what’ attitude was ingrained and came naturally, it still took time, as Paul has said many times, there really is no overnight fix.*

### **Tarmo’s story**

*For all my life, I had considered myself a happy person. I came from an idyllic family, I had friends, and passionate hobbies and even girls were always interested in me. It wasn’t until I was 24 years old that I realised that all my life I had been worrying a lot. I came to this realisation because I noticed that I had started feeling anxious and depressed, which was very surprising to me. I felt there was nothing wrong with my life, but still, something wasn’t quite right.*

*Music has always been a very important channel for me to express myself and to release strong emotions. I was scared to realise that I had come to a point in my life where music was actually the only thing that prevented me from sinking. I was in a relationship with a wonderful girl and all I could feel was confusion and anxiety. I had great friends with whom I felt I couldn’t get any real contact with. My parents felt really distant from me and I felt that I couldn’t be myself with them. Everywhere I went, I felt I was wearing a mask. I didn’t want to fake anything, but I couldn’t do anything about it.*

*It felt impossible to explain how I was feeling to anyone. My girlfriend was the first one I spoke to and all I could say was that I felt “kind of foggy”. I kept living on wishing it would go away, but at the same time, I observed myself constantly. I had a constant “is it still there?” question in my mind; “it” referring to the unknown monster or the shadow that was preventing me from living a happy life. I concluded that it had to be my relationship that was poisoning my mind, so I ended it, well actually, my girlfriend ended it for me because I didn’t have the courage to say the words myself.*

*So, I continued observing my feelings and waiting for the salvation to come, but instead, I found myself sinking even deeper. It was free-falling now and I was terrified to lose the last sign of life inside myself. I quit all the bands I was in because I only got anxious trying to play. I just couldn't enjoy it any more. What used to be my driving force now had become an enemy. Even looking at the guitar made me feel I couldn't breathe.*

*What scared me even more, was this new feeling of unreality. The foggy feeling I mentioned earlier had multiplied, turning into 24/7 unreality where I felt I was not present in the moment at all. It was like I was outside myself all the time, watching a movie. I observed myself talking to people and nobody seemed to notice anything weird about me, but I felt that it wasn't me talking - although I was able to control the words that came out of my mouth. At this point explaining, this to anyone felt impossible. It was just the new world I was forced into.*

*I finally made the effort to get some help and I started going to talk therapy once a week. I learned there how important it actually was for me to open myself up. This was an entirely new skill for me and I started a long journey inside myself. Therapy was helping, but the confusion about the feelings of unreality remained. I tried to explain how I felt to my therapist, but no matter how professional she was in helping me open other knots, she couldn't really give me any explanation to why I felt so weird. So, I continued worrying and observing – and waiting for the day that I'd get rid of this awful feeling. It was in my mind all day and sometimes I felt that I was going to lose my mind at any minute. I was living in constant fear, and I started believing that this was going to be me for the rest of my life.*

*Every now and then I sought some help from the internet, but most anxiety/depression forums were so uninspiring and*

*depressing that I avoided getting too much into them. However, one day, I started googling answers for the feelings of unreality and I found my way to Paul's site. For me, this was a remarkable moment. For the first time, someone explained to me what my feelings of unreality were about, and I even got a name to the cage of my mind: 'Depersonalisation'. And what was even more amazing was that Paul actually noted it was OK to feel this way; that it was just the brain's natural response to constant stress.*

*It all made sense to me and I could do nothing but read the words again and again. This new knowledge gave my heart a lot of peace, although it seemed that I constantly forgot everything I had learned, so I had to re-read Paul's words over and over again.*

*Time went on and I felt I was progressing, but I felt that my depression was already so deep that this information alone couldn't get me back on my feet. So, I decided to give a chance to one more anti-depression pill (I had tried a few and they had done nothing for me) and this time I found a suitable one. I want to emphasise that I'm not pro-medicine in any way, but in my case, this one particular medicine helped me to get to the level where I was able to start working with myself. I ate the pills for a year and then I realised that if I really wanted to get to the root of my problems, I had to get rid of them because the medication was preventing me from getting in touch with my real feelings, but at the same time it was soothing the way.*

*I lowered the dose gradually and got "clean" and this was when the real healing started for me. I also found a great new therapist who I felt really connected to and talk therapy has been vital to me. At the same time, I kept Paul's advice with me all the time and, eventually, it became automatic.*

*After about two years from first stumbling upon Paul's site, I could honestly say that I was not depressed nor*

*depersonalised any more. The new reality came gradually and there were lots of ups and downs along the way. For example, I had to force myself to get to work, no matter how anxious and disconnected I felt. To my great surprise, the daily routine at work began helping after a while (previously, I had thought that I needed to fix myself first and then get to work).*

*My first real sign of healing was when I found myself playing the guitar and enjoying it without even thinking about it. The last thing to go was depersonalisation. One day I just realised it hadn't been there for a while. It may sound weird that I hadn't even noticed it go, but there's a simple explanation: I hadn't been paying any attention to it any more. I had started living my life instead of worrying about it. At this point, I also realised that this experience had made me know myself better than ever before and I now appreciate the difficult road I was forced to pave - to the point that I wouldn't trade it for anything.*

*I'm writing this text because I want everyone who's struggling with a locked-up mind to know that there is a way out no matter how bad you feel at the moment. It won't happen overnight, but I can assure you that it will be worth the time and effort. I was a total wreck and I'm now living a full, enjoyable life. I KNOW that you can too.*

Tarmo from Finland

To finish, here was someone seeking help with D.P. on my blog and then my reply. It seemed very popular with everyone reading it so I thought it important to add.

*Paul, I need help. I have had this condition for 15 years. It came over me like a dark cloud one night before falling asleep. I had immediate feelings of intense fear and doom, like I was transferred into a different universe and ever since that night, I have not been able to act/feel/think the same. Just the thought of having this condition and all the feelings/thoughts that I have to deal with on a minute-to-minute basis fills me with*

*complete dread, hopelessness and helplessness. Every thought I have is clouded with this feeling of utter doom. I don't enjoy anything. I can't get the ambition to do anything, because all I do is think about how long I have felt this way.*

*I cry about it several times a day. I can't enjoy the little things because it all comes back to this feeling. I can go and do something, the whole time thinking what is the point? I will think about how awful I will feel later on that night. Even if I were to get a moment or so of feeling good, it doesn't matter because I will have to come back to me and know that I still have to deal with these feelings/thoughts. I think about how this is going to ruin my life and my family that I am letting down because I just can't do the normal everyday things with them because it is clouded with this feeling of doom. The thoughts of unreality also come every day, all day.*

*I look at my sweet innocent little six-year-old daughter and can't understand why I can't just be happy. Then I will get feelings of unbelievable sadness for her. I will look at pictures she drew throughout the day, or think about things we did, and just feel utterly depressed that I did not enjoy them, nor will I ever. She deserves a father who enjoys her and can teach her and mould her, and I know that I will never be that person because all I do is worry about how I feel. I feel like I am doomed and no matter what I try, it won't matter because now that I know this feeling, I will never be able to just live and function normally.*

*I feel that I am trapped with this feeling forever and will never truly enjoy inner peace or happiness again. It's like I can't escape my mind; I'm a prisoner to myself. It's like I felt like this last week, I felt like this last month, I felt like this last year, so what makes me think anything will change by just accepting it and doing nothing?*

*I was on medication for it and it seemed to maybe take the edge off of some of the feelings, but never really made me feel*

*like the old me. When I get the thought that I have felt this awful for so long and that there is no sign of light at the end of the tunnel, it is the most awful, gross, depressing, helpless feeling. I don't know how I have dealt with it for so long, and don't think that I can handle much more of feeling this way. Then I will think I will have to end my life to end the feeling, and I want to live more than anything. How could I do this to my children, leave them without a father?*

*It seems to me that if I have this ultimate thought, maybe I need to be committed and that I have a serious mental illness. Why else would I get to that point of thinking? I have been practising these techniques for four months and nothing has changed, nor does it look like it ever will. How do I go about my day with these thoughts/feelings coming seemingly every other minute, and not worry about them, because they are so irrational, but yet they are so powerful and real? Just thinking of having to deal with these for another second throws me into utter despair and helplessness, knowing that it will never get any better. I want to love my life, not fear it, analysing every thought and action I do.*

*Please help, Richard*

My reply was:

I will be blunt with you here Richard

Your story perfectly mirrors mine and if I had not changed my attitude - wised up if you like - I would still be stuck in the same dreadful hole you find yourself in. Trust me, I was all you described and more; I did not think I could take another minute of feeling this way. What you have is DP, no doubt about that. The anxiety I could handle to a degree, but the DP robbed me of everything. I was a walking shell who could enjoy nothing.

I will tell you now that, in order to recover, I had to understand why these feelings were there. (You must have read an

explanation on my main site and links to DP on this blog). I then had to decide to just live alongside these feelings without question. That meant that if I had to look at my own daughter and the experience of it felt unreal, then that was fine. I understood I would feel this way. If I felt lost and disconnected while out with friends and if I felt so utterly depressed and hopeless, then that was fine also. It was awful, but it was normal in the circumstances, so I may as well soldier on.

The only way you will ever come through this is to stop caring, stop watching and stop analysing how you feel on a daily basis. Just accept how you feel without question. Learn to go everywhere and do everything without feeling much emotion and without enjoying it, but keep doing it anyway with little to no self-pity. You have never willingly lived alongside these feelings, not for one minute. Your post is full of self-pity, worry, watching yourself, analysing things and wishing it all away, trying this and that to get rid of it when the only answer is to finally admit defeat and live alongside it; HOWEVER, you feel.

**Look at your statements below:**

*"I don't enjoy anything. I can't get the ambition to do anything because all I do is think about how I have felt for so long."*

You can do anything you want; it is just your attitude towards how you are feeling that is stopping you. I had to bloody drag myself out at times, but no way was this feeling winning. The more normal living I packed in, the better I began to feel.

Stop obsessing about how long you have had this condition and quit feeling sorry for yourself. Again, you have decided not to accept this is you for the time being and are just filling yourself with constant self-pity. If you came out of hospital with anything else wrong with you - say a broken foot - and just punished yourself each day about how you felt because you refused to accept it, you would probably feel as lost and

depressed as you do now. You are creating so much extra suffering due to your non-acceptance of your current state.

**You also say:** *I can't enjoy the little things because it all comes back to this feeling. I can go and do something and the whole time I'm thinking, what is the point? I will only end up thinking about how awful I will feel later on that night.*

Again, you are not listening to what I have already explained. Everything I have said, everything others have said, you are doing the opposite. 'What's the point? I will feel bad later'. Thinking about you and how you feel 24/7 is keeping you in the cycle. Please, please listen and take on board what I am saying. You are bound to stay in the cycle and feel worse with this attitude - all day long pounding your tired mind with more worry and deep thinking. You **MUST** begin to change this habit; no one else can do this for you. Please don't think you can wish and moan it away and one day you will be fine or skip past advice on here waiting for someone to come up with that miracle answer to make it all go away.

Richard, I only speak harshly to get my point across. You have been here a long time and have seen the advice first hand. I can only advise; I can't make you take it on board and implement it. I am telling you now that I felt as bad, if not worse than you and today here I am back to my old self. I have no symptoms left at all, but only because, after nine years of doing what you are doing now and getting worse, I started doing what I advise above. And, yes, it was bloody awful at times and there were many times when I did not want to be in certain places feeling so lost, detached and miserable, but I looked at the long-term picture instead of feeling sorry for myself each day and wishing it all away.

**You Say:** *She deserves a father who enjoys her and can teach her and mould her, and I know that I will never be that person because all I do is worry about how I feel.*



Again - worry, worry, worry. You will be that person one day if you stop this constant cycle of worry. Look at her and think "One day Daddy will be back".

You are putting so much pressure on yourself to be a certain person today. STOP doing this and today accept that you have DP, caused by stress, worry, deep thinking and constant introspection. Your mind is protecting you from all this; It can't take it all, it was not designed to and adding more of this is precisely what is keeping this condition alive.

This is why you feel so one-dimensional, lost, detached and emotionless. That is the only reason. Your mind is just waiting for a break so it can heal and then release that switch. Trust me on this Richard. I know because it worked for me, although I still had to live alongside these feelings for a while until I started to feel better. Initially, I may feel an hour of normality, then a day, then a week, then down to the odd bad day, but I honestly did not care. Yes, it was awful when it returned, but I knew it was only a matter of time before I was fully over it.

**You say:** *I feel that I am trapped with this feeling forever and will never truly enjoy inner peace or happiness again. It's like I can't escape my mind; I'm a prisoner to myself. It's like I felt like this last week, I felt like this last month, I felt like this last year, so what makes me think anything will change by just accepting it and doing nothing?*

Again, you have ignored the advice on here and not even tried it. You have had it for days, weeks, and years because you are doing everything you should not do and have not even tried a different approach. If something is making you feel worse, then why not try the opposite? Your mind will never heal if you keep watching yourself, worrying about it and tuning in to how you feel while counting the years, days and months since you have felt this way. It will never get the break it so craves while you continue in this manner. You feel so trapped because you have worn yourself out and not allowed

anything else into your day but the subject of you and how you are feeling.

### **You Say:**

*How do I go about my day with these thoughts/feelings coming every other minute and not worry about them, because they are so irrational/nonsensical, yet they are so powerful and real? Just thinking of having to deal with these for another second throws me into utter despair and helplessness, knowing that it will never get any better. I want to love my life, not fear it, analysing every thought and action I do.*

You go about your day, not through gritted teeth, but with a sense of abandonment and surrender to however you feel, just allow yourself for one day to feel this way. It is not nonsensical that you continue to feel this way, as I have explained. Again, without meaning to be harsh, you have posted here in the past, people have advised, and yet you have just come back with the same or similar questions. It is like you want the quick fix, not the longer road that will see you home. So, you just dismiss what you don't want to hear and that which might take some time and come back for some advice that will make it go away today.

Please don't let these words fall on deaf ears. If you want some peace in the future, then please take them on board. If you want the quick, easy answer, then, sorry, but you will continue to stay in the cycle and get nowhere. This advice does not come from me reading a book or second-hand knowledge; this comes from me coming through this condition and helping many others do so. You think it will never go because you have had it for so long, not understanding that you have been keeping yourself in a loop and never given yourself a chance to recover.

Good luck Richard

# Chapter 14

## Social Anxiety

### What is Social Anxiety?

Social anxiety is a fear of social situations and interactions. The fear is mainly caused by people worrying about what others think of them and how they are being perceived. People who suffer from social anxiety tend to worry about how they are coming across or that people are noticing their anxiety and judging them.

This can then make the person feel overly aware of themselves and their actions while being sensitive to the other person's perception of them. It also makes the conversation very uncomfortable, as not only do they have to endure the feelings of anxiety, but they also end up feeling no part of it due to their constant preoccupation with how they are feeling and performing.

This form of anxiety can become such a problem that people will end up trying to avoid all social interactions. They may cross the road when they see someone they know or start making excuses not to go out in case they have to interact with others. Although this approach may take away the anxiety short term, it is counterproductive long-term. Avoiding the situation just strengthens their mind's belief that interactions are in some way dangerous and so the mind's fear response increases, this, in turn, leads to more avoidance alongside feelings of failure and isolation.

### My own story

Before I suffered from anxiety, I was a very happy and confident person; social situations never bothered me in the slightest. I will not say I could talk in front of a thousand

people, but, generally, I was pretty confident and had little trouble with social interactions.

When anxiety first hit me, I worried continuously about what was causing these feelings. I was in deep thought, day in, day out, trying to figure a way out of my personal hell. With this extra worry and stress on my already tired mind and body, I began to feel more anxious than ever. Not only that but by being so concerned about myself daily, I was also starting to feel detached from my surroundings.

This feeling of detachment made it very hard for me to hold a conversation and I became very self-aware and felt quite distant and odd. I would hardly be listening to or engaging in a conversation and felt quite disconnected from it, which usually led to me babbling on as I tried to hide how I was feeling. I would also avoid eye contact and feel the need to escape all interactions due to how much I struggled with them.

So, my initial avoidance of people had nothing to do with me fearing others; it was all due to how awful I was feeling at the time. I was mentally and emotionally spent and because of this, I struggled to hold a conversation. It was like my brain wouldn't work properly and so it was just easier to avoid talking with others altogether.

At the time, I just thought "When I feel better, I will start socialising with people again". Unbeknown to me at the time, it was this very avoidance of people that was teaching my mind that others were to be feared. My avoidance of others was creating this false belief in my mind that there was danger around people. So now, not only did I have anxiety, but through my actions of avoidance, I eventually developed social anxiety.

My mind was not at fault here; it was working as per design. It just concluded that if I was avoiding something, then there must be a real threat there, and so every time I went towards

what I had previously avoided, my brain would kick in the fight or flight response. Because I didn't understand what was happening at the time, I chose flight and began to avoid people even more. I truly believed they were the reason for my fear and so the right course of action was to keep avoiding them. My mind took on board this continued avoidance behaviour and so my fear of interacting with others increased. I was again stuck in another cycle of my own making.

Because I now truly believed that people were the cause of my fear, I then started to build my whole life around avoiding interacting with others. My entire thought process also began to change. My mind was always sending me messages to keep me safe "Don't go there you will feel awful", "I wouldn't go there, people will notice how you feel and talk about you", "So and so is there, quick escape". Unfortunately, due to my lack of understanding at the time, this inner voice won every time.

When I had no choice but to interact with others, I would try and act my way through each conversation and waste a tremendous amount of energy trying to come across as normal. My attention was never on the other person; it was always on me and my performance as I tried to keep up some kind of charade. Because of this, I had 90% awareness on myself and only 10% on the conversation. This was the reason I never felt part of it and why it almost always ended up a disaster.

It was at this point I hit rock bottom and realised that I was on the wrong path and that things needed to change. I then started to look into why I was acting the way I did and what was causing me to stay in this cycle.

The first conclusion I came to was that I had caused all this through a process of avoidance and so the only way to teach my brain that I was fine, was to no longer avoid. This was the only language it understood. I realised that it may take time for

my brain to fully get this message and that it would continue to create a fear response until it was sure I was in no danger.

I knew I would have to go through some initial discomfort as I retrained my brain to be comfortable in social situations again. When you do anything new, your brain may kick up a fuss and try to get you to go back to your old habits, your old way of responding. There is nothing wrong when this occurs; it is just how it is designed. It is just that it is programmed to keep you in the familiar, thinking that this is the best thing for you. But don't despair, it will soon adapt to your new way of doing things and turn the fear response down if you stick with it.

What also helped me was understanding that people were never the problem; and that there was no danger in talking to others, otherwise we would all experience the same fear. The conditioned reaction my mind produced was the issue here, not people, and so there was nothing to gain by avoiding others. All I achieved by doing this was to strengthen this false belief in my mind and make it appear more real. Just knowing that others were not the cause of my fear helped in weakening this response.

The next thing I had to see through was my thought patterns before and during social interaction. I would watch my mind go into a frenzy as I started to face what I had previously avoided. It would say things like, 'Stay at home, you know it will be a disaster', 'What if you have to talk to lots of people?'

Before I understood what was happening, I would follow my thought process like a puppet, do as it said and stay at home. In time though, I started to observe the thoughts it was spewing out and saw it as my mind's innocent way of protecting me. I now realised that I no longer needed its protection and so decided to override this inner voice. The more I started to observe this protective voice, the funnier I

found it. I could not believe how much control I had previously given it.

Instead of doing its bidding as before, I now thanked it for trying to keep me safe and for doing its job but told it that in this case, it had got it wrong and that I was going to live the life I wanted and interact with who I wished. If it was still unsure when I first put myself out there and wanted to create some anxiety, then fine, I would deal with it.

The first time I caught my thoughts in action and had a real 'aha' moment during my social anxiety was when I was playing snooker with a friend. We had just about finished the frame when a couple of his friends, who I barely knew, walked in unexpectedly. Straight away, my thoughts kicked in "Oh no, what am I going to do?" I felt really anxious as I knew there was no way out and I'd have to follow him over and talk to them. I then tried to get out of it by asking if he wanted another game, which he declined. I then thought "I'll just sneak out and make some excuse later of why I had to leave".

What was happening then hit me so hard! I thought, "These people aren't the problem here, my thought process is. The reason I am running home has nothing to do with them and all to do with identifying with my faulty thinking". I had never been so clear on anything before and saw exactly what was happening and why I was trying to escape.

Here I was believing these thoughts to be true, following them like a puppet and now, due to my belief in these thoughts, they were controlling my life and killing my enjoyment of it. I then picked up my drink, went over to them and started chatting. It was like I had seen through the silliness of it all and my thoughts no longer held any power over me for the rest of the night.

It was odd how clearly, I had seen this and how different I felt. I realised deeply that the only reason my friend wasn't running

out of the door and was pleased to see them was due to the fact he wasn't having the same thoughts as me. But this fact did not make them real; in fact, it showed me how false they were, otherwise, we would both be having them. My mind was just conditioned to think this way through my past actions and my continued belief in them.

I honestly had very little problem around them that night after seeing what I did. I wouldn't say that was the end of my social anxiety, as it wasn't, but I knew I had seen something huge and it was the start of a big improvement. There was a huge shift in my perception that night and my thoughts held far less power over me from then on.

Finally, I realised that a certain amount of anxiety was present due to the core beliefs I had about myself. Through being so socially poor around others for so long, I had created a negative self-image. This led to me thinking I wasn't as interesting or good as other people and so assumed that others would not like me and became a people pleaser for their acceptance. Due to all these false beliefs I had about myself, I mistakenly thought others were judging me as negatively as I was judging myself.

A lot of my social anxiety came through not being comfortable with who I was and so I thought others viewed me through the same negative filter as I did. Another big part of overcoming my social anxiety was built around seeing through these false beliefs. I also began to drop all the masks and ceased playing a character role I thought would please others and began finding my true self again. It was obvious to me now, that if I viewed myself as I truly was and not through these false, negative beliefs that had built up, then I would not care as much about people's opinions and judgements and would automatically be more comfortable around others.

It took time, but through gaining these insights, I began to see a big change in myself. Nothing had changed on the outside



for me to see these huge improvements; it was all about a change on the inside. Previously I had thought that by manipulating and avoiding the outside I would be OK, when in reality, I just needed a change in perception, some patience and a small amount of courage to keep putting myself in social situations until my mind got comfortable with them.

### **People don't notice like we think they do**

When I finally overcame my social anxiety, I also asked people who knew me and were close to me if they ever noticed my anxiety or thought I came across as strange, and each one of them said, "No, not at all." The only comment I got was that I tended to rush my speech on occasions. I then realised that I did not have a red light on my head saying 'anxiety sufferer' and that everyone was doing their own thing and I must have come across OK. The problem with anxiety is that it causes one to be overly self-aware and when we are in the anxiety bubble, we think everyone else can see our suffering as we experience it. This can then lead to more anxiety and only increases our desire to cover it up and avoid others,

So, the last thing to remember is not to think or presume that people notice how you are feeling or that they are judging you. They are far more likely to be thinking about what they are going to have for lunch or what programme to watch on TV when they get home than caring about you.

# Chapter 15

## Frequently Asked Questions

Below are some common questions I have been asked over the years.

*Q.1 Paul, after suffering for the last six months, I have read your book and totally agree with your stance on anxiety. However, I am having a hard time stopping my constant worrying and thinking about anxiety, like a loop I can't escape from. Have you any tips or wisdom on this? Thanks*

Many people get stuck on this issue and tell me they want to be able to stop ruminating about their anxiety and how they feel but can't seem to do so. This question has a very straightforward and logical answer. The truth is that it's not you who is thinking about your anxiety; it's your mind's habit to continually think about the subject. This is due to months of you previously doing so. This is the reason people say they can't stop thinking about the subject, as they aren't the ones doing so. It is the habit formed in the mind that is doing the thinking/ruminating.

So, it is your continuous brooding and concern about your current state that has created a repetitive habit in your brain and over that, you have no control. The way to be free is just to let the habit run out of its own momentum by allowing the mind to think about the subject of anxiety as much as it wishes, without joining in and adding more thinking about your condition on top of this. If you starve the habit of fuel, then the habit will run out of momentum and eventually disappear.

You cannot beat this habit by trying not to think about you or your anxiety, as the habit in your mind will always win. You can only be free by starving this habit and allowing it to die down of its own accord. Another way to help free yourself of

this habit is to go out and live your life and start putting your awareness and attention towards outside things once again. In doing this, the outside world eventually replaces your old habit of focusing inward.

The same would be true if you thought about some lost love daily for months on end. The thought of your ex would then automatically run around in your brain, as a habit of thinking about them has now been formed. This is why people can say things like "I can't stop thinking about them". The best way to stop thinking about them would be to throw all your old letters/pictures away and direct your focus towards other things.

It is the same with anxiety. When I had gained all the knowledge I needed to recover, I stopped reading up on the subject, stopped visiting websites on the subject, and barely mentioned it to others. I came off all forums; went out and lived my life again and just let the old habit of thinking and obsessing about the subject die down itself.

Finally, the best way to stop thinking about yourself and the subject is to allow yourself to feel how you do. The reason so many continue to obsess about themselves and the subject is the need to escape how they feel or fix themselves. When you relinquish this then so much self-obsessed thinking falls away.

**Q.2** *I now have a lot more knowledge of anxiety, yet I still feel bad. Surely now I should feel great?*

This question arose because a woman left a comment on my Facebook page saying, "I thought I had a handle on this, but yesterday I was wracked with anxiety again". Unfortunately, she is missing the point of what I mean by 'allowing' and trying to use my words as another technique to feel good. This is where so many go wrong.

A lot of people falsely believe that when they have far more knowledge on the subject of anxiety, then they should now be past feeling bad and always feel great and that knowledge alone should free them. I keep telling people that when I truly understood anxiety and the cycle I was in, I understood even more about the recovery process I would have to go through. I had to go through the same healing process as everyone else; knowledge just taught me how; there was no free pass.

Many believe that there is an endpoint where knowledge alone will set them free; that there is a secret answer out there to this puzzle and when found they will be instantly free of suffering. People who believe this are usually the ones who end up searching for the rest of their lives, continually looking for this elusive answer. They move from one book to another, one guru to the next or believe this new retreat or course will work. They are forever searching for the instant ticket to freedom. Sorry to be the bearer of bad news, but that golden ticket to freedom doesn't exist.

Once you truly understand anxiety, then it is just the start of a process you need to go through. You finally recognise that no magic sentence, pill or technique will free you. You understand that you now have to go through a stage of no longer suppressing, fighting or avoiding this anxious energy in order to be free of it.

True knowledge should always lead you towards being more open to how you are feeling, even in your darkest moments. I used to refer to this stage as 'full surrender' or the 'ultimate drop'. This is the stage you reach when the battle with yourself is over and you let go of all your sayings, strategies and techniques to feel different. It is like going from a closed fist to an open palm. It is a relaxing of this grip you have on yourself.

But you also have to understand that releasing all the anxious energy that you have created and suppressed over the years

won't feel great and it may also come up as dark energy as well as anxious/fearful energy, be it intrusive thoughts, sadness, irritation, nausea etc. This anxious energy will release itself in many different forms, but you need to see this as a good thing, not a bad thing. You need to be OK with not feeling OK.

If you are allowing of it, and I mean being fully open to it without trying to find a way to feel good, without trying to suppress it or protect yourself from it, then you now truly understand what the term 'allowing' means. If you are genuinely open to it, then in time it will release itself and you will start to feel more peace. This is because your natural calm state lies beneath all this stuff and why you can't manipulate a peaceful state; this peaceful state arrives when you free yourself of what is covering it up.

The same applies to a drug addict who wants to be free of their addiction. There is no shortcut for them to be their old self again. If they want to be free, then they will have to go through a detox and that detox will be uncomfortable. The detox is their body ridding itself of the toxins within and is vital to their recovery. Without allowing themselves to go through this painful experience, they can't hope to be better. The ones who don't recover are the ones who are not willing to go through this process and just end up back on the drug to avoid the uncomfortable release of these toxins.

So, as you now see, this detox, if allowed to happen, is a good thing and the same principles apply to your anxiety.

Let me explain.....

This anxiety is initially created by the sufferer, mainly through a continued period of stress and worry. This anxious energy then starts to build up within the body and when it goes beyond a threshold, it can begin to create a whole host of

symptoms that feel uncomfortable. So, because your body is designed to look after you, it then tries to release this excess energy to free you and itself of it. The trouble is because this energy feels uncomfortable; the sufferer then uses all their personal will to try and stop this release from happening so nothing is released and the problem continues.

When I finally saw this for myself, it was the moment everything changed. Before I would do everything I could to try NOT to experience this anxious energy. I would attempt to suppress it, run away from it, fight it, avoid it and so, by refusing to feel it, nothing changed. In fact, through worrying and stressing about the anxiety itself it only increased and brought on numerous other symptoms. It was only when I understood what was happening that my attitude shifted and I became open to it as I now knew that this release, although uncomfortable, was a good thing and it was my body just looking after me by trying to free up this energy.

**Q.3** *Paul, I keep wanting to live my life again but feel I need to wait until I feel better, as when I do go out my anxiety tends to increase. Should I wait until I am less anxious or start going out now?*

Let me explain something to you, the outside is not to blame for your anxiety, so avoiding the outside will do nothing but create new problems. To put it bluntly, avoiding the outside is the dumbest thing you can do if you want to recover.

When you do something that makes you feel anxious, then this is just triggering inside what needs to be released, it is not the cause of your anxious feelings. The situation or event is just triggering the release of the anxious energy that is stored within you. The outside event is innocent in all of this. This wrong vision explains why so many people fall into avoidance behaviours. This is because they blame the outside and not the inside for their anxiety; they genuinely think the

outside is the problem and so start avoiding it. If you want to be free of this anxious energy stored within, then you need to realise that these triggers are a good thing.

The only reason I can go where I wish now and do the things I do without being wracked with anxiety is that I am now free of the anxious energy within me. Nothing on the outside can trigger it, as there is nothing left inside to trigger. So, my anxiety did not go away because the outside changed for me; my freedom was the result of me freeing up what was inside.

People miss this vital point and usually do one of two things to avoid this anxious energy being released. They either try to rearrange the outside, so they don't feel it or pretty much avoid going out altogether. In reality, they are not fearful of the outside; they are afraid of the outside triggering the release of this anxious energy within them. Not only does this not release this anxious energy but the avoidance teaches the brain that the outside world is a scary place and so the fear response is pretty much always switched on; looking for threats that don't actually exist. This is the reason why avoiding the outside or trying to rearrange it will never solve the problem.

In saying that, being open and fully allowing towards how you feel is not easy, as, with anything that feels uncomfortable, it is our instinct to try and avoid feeling it. Our natural response is to suppress, avoid or distract ourselves from what we don't like, but this instinct is precisely what keeps us stuck. The only way to be free of anything is to allow yourself to experience it. There is no other way out; no shortcut; no magic pill, sentence or technique. I keep telling people that if there were, then we would all know about it. Good news travels very fast in today's technical world.

True recovery takes time, commitment and a real understanding of the process we need to go through. Anyone who tells you any different either doesn't know what they are

talking about or is just making absurd claims to part you with your money.

Another vital part of recovery is to no longer produce this anxious energy so that you don't keep recreating what you release. Feeling anxious can be a real wake-up call to change your attitude, slow down and look at life differently. If you are a constant worrier, perfectionist or think that life and others should always follow your rules and then get stressed when it doesn't, then a real change is needed.

What I went through changed me immensely. It taught me to look at life differently and no longer worry and stress over things that weren't that important; it taught me to enjoy life rather than regularly stress and worry about it. Life looks and feels entirely different to me now, and many people say how much I've changed. Anxiety taught me so much; it shook me up to make real changes and look at things differently.

#### **Q.4** *Will these feelings ever go away?*

Yes, they will. Once you understand why you feel like you do, you can then start to unmask a lot of the fears you hold about anxiety. There are so many myths about anxiety that it worries me just how many people are misinformed and genuinely think they will never get better and believe that they will just have to live with this condition forever.

Your mind and body have been through so much in the time you have had this condition and why you may now feel so emotionally spent and exhausted. None of this has done you any long-term harm. Just see your mind and body as running at 50% at the moment. Letting your mind and body recover at its own pace is the key. An overnight cure is impossible after what you have been through. What's needed is a process of healing through patience and understanding.



**Understanding anxiety** also takes away so much fear of how we are feeling. With less fear and more understanding, we also lessen the constant worry and deep thinking of our condition, and so we begin to break the cycle. Every stage and symptom has a logical explanation. When we see this, then it helps us realise that we have been the sole creator of our suffering and so we are the ones that can end it too. We have not been picked on and don't have to suffer this way forever; we just have to heed the message our suffering is sending us.

#### **Q.5** *Why did anxiety choose me?*

Anxiety does not choose certain people. It is not something you get like a cold. It is the result of your body and mind being overworked, be it through long hours or stress at work or a problem or collection of issues that you have been worrying about over some time.

If you eat bad food, you will suffer and be sick. If you drink too much alcohol, you will get a hangover and feel bad. These reactions are your body's way of telling you that it's bad for you and not doing you any good. If you feel pain anywhere, it is your body saying there is a problem in that area.

These laws are true for psychological suffering too. It is just your body's way of telling you there is a problem. It is not telling you to get rid of anything; it is not telling you to worry more. It is telling you to change things; to stop doing what is causing you to feel the way you do and then the suffering will begin to ease and finally cease.

You will never fix worrying by worrying more. You will never cure anxiety by being anxious about it. You will never gain clarity in your mind by thinking more. The only way to be free of suffering is to stop doing what is causing that suffering and then go through a period of healing the past suffering that you

have unknowingly created. You need to understand what is keeping you in a cycle to be able to break it.

**Q.6** *Paul, here is something I have wanted to know about you during recovery: When you say, “whatever” to a thought or feeling, do you feel confident when you say it each time or is it a matter of just saying it even if you feel like you’re treading water to stay afloat at that moment?*

I think certain people get too hung up with the idea of allowing how they are and try to make it into some kind of practice. This surrender should be more of an attitude and NOT some saying you have to carry around with you. True allowing doesn’t come through some kind of technique or mantra; it comes when you realise for yourself the science behind what allowing achieves.

You also see clearly that everything you did previously was the cause of so much of your suffering. So, allowing eventually comes naturally because it doesn’t make any sense to battle with your emotions and thoughts anymore; you see how constantly trying to manipulate your inner state has brought you so much extra suffering.

Someone once mentioned that they had to keep reminding themselves of the need to allow themselves to feel and think anything. There is no need to do this and as some people may find, it soon loses its force. I can only assume that people feel the need to remind themselves of some kind of mantra as a way to feel good or use it as some kind of defence mechanism towards feeling bad. If you just allow yourself to experience whatever comes up, then there is no need for any type of mantra, unless again, you are trying to control your experience in some way.

Someone once said to me ‘This allowing worked the first few days and then I was again back to experiencing all this anxious, negative energy. Again, this state of allowing wasn’t

meant to be some technique to stay feeling good; it was there for when you felt like crap too. It is the times when you feel like crap and you allow yourself to experience it that you are making the most progress. I personally looked forward to these intense releases as I wanted this stuff gone.

So, it's not about putting pressure on yourself, expecting a word or a sentence to make you feel better and then getting frustrated when it doesn't. You are then putting your faith in a word when what you should be doing is developing an attitude born out of the practice of living alongside how you feel.

Giving your mind and body a break by surrendering to how you feel is never a 'do', so please don't feel the need to walk around telling yourself daily that you must accept this or that, or reminding yourself of sayings 24/7. This is not the case. It's more of an 'attitude' of surrender, when you just fall into your suffering, instead of continually trying to change it in some way.

Initially, it can be challenging to do this, as your instinct is to try and manipulate your inner state. The trouble is, the more you struggle to rid yourself of these feelings, the more they grow and hang around. Not only that but trying to change something which is normal in the circumstances takes tremendous energy and the reason so many sufferers end up so physically and mentally worn out. Nothing good will ever come through struggle and effort.

**Q.7** *“What does it feel like to be fully recovered and how do you know?”*

I have been asked this question more times than any other. The feeling of full recovery is really special after years of feeling like you were locked in some awful prison. It is like someone coming along with a key, opening your cell door and walking out into the bright sunshine for the first time in years. In saying that, it truly wasn't something I ever aimed for. I was

not desperate to recover initially; just feeling better was my aim.

There was no one day when I woke up and realised it was all behind me. It was just a process of feeling better until I was pretty much free of all my past suffering. Over time I started to feel more engaged with the outside world; old habits fell away; my mind regained its clarity; my anxiety began to ease, and I began enjoying things once again. To be honest, I knew I was on the right track and so just seeing the progress I was making was enough for me. When I started to feel much better, I thought, 'Even if this is it, then I am happy'. So full recovery was never my goal and I think that helped me.

There is only one instance that sticks in my mind, though, and that was the last time I ever experienced anxiety. I had been pretty free of anxiety for a while at this stage. But one morning I woke up with the most horrendous anxiety and was a little freaked out, as even in my bad days it had never been as strong as this.

But I did what I always did and just allowed it to be present and did not try and change my experience in any way. Generally, within an hour or so, the anxiety would ease, but not this time. I went to bed that night and it was still as strong as ever. When I woke up the next morning the anxiety had not eased at all and I was starting to wonder if it ever would, but again I stayed open to it all and carried on with the day the best I could.

It was around late evening when the anxiety just seemed to disappear and I was then left with this immense peace; like I had just had a real inner spring clean. Those two days were seriously the last time I ever felt anxiety for no reason. Looking back, I truly believe my body had one more release to go through to empty out entirely and so freed it up all in one go, and this is why it was so intense.

I still had some mild DP around this time and my thoughts still raced to a degree, so I wasn't over everything. It was around three months after this that I felt pretty much free of everything. But that was the last time I ever felt anxious unless there was a genuine reason to be so.

**Q.8** *You mention a lot about not going in search of that magic tablet or secret cure etc. and just letting recovery come to you. However, you also recommend a few things such as exercise, avoiding alcohol, massage etc. to help with recovery. How do you draw the line between the two and when do these things stop being just aids in our recovery and represent us searching for a quick fix?*

This is an excellent question and, as I have mentioned before, I initially took up running because it helped with my anxiety. But the mistake I made was that my whole run was taken up with 'Hopefully I will feel great when I get back'. My whole run was built around 'ridding myself of anxiety' which was the wrong attitude. If I didn't feel great when I came home, then I would question why and try to run further the next time. I then realised that I had fallen into the trap of doing something to try and rid myself of anxiety. So, from then on, I just started to run for myself and my general well-being. If it helped with my anxiety, then so be it. If it did not, then that was fine also.

When I did other things like walking, cycling and getting out more, I knew it would help shift my attention back to the outside. But I also did these things because I genuinely wanted to do them and I wanted my life back. I always said, 'Do I want to do this?' If the answer was yes, then I would do it and how I felt would not stop me. If the answer was no, then I wouldn't do it.

So, it was more a case of living the life I wanted and not doing what my anxiety said I should or shouldn't do. Some people may hate walking so I wouldn't encourage them to start doing

so. I would advise them to do something else they enjoy. The whole point is about living the life you want again and not letting how you feel stop you.

So, it does not matter what you do or don't do as long as you do it because it's what you want to do and not just as another technique to feel good. It is the same with a monthly massage; I did it for me and not to rid me of anxiety when at first, it was the other way around. I finally realised I had to stop living my whole life trying to feel better and just shift back towards normal living.

**Q.9** *Hi Paul, I wondered if you could answer me about a problem I seem to be stuck on. I can sit in lectures and strange images, past dreams, memories or whatever keep popping up in my mind. I get so distressed, wondering why this is happening and then thinking that I am going mad. Is this anxiety? Because it is making me question my sanity again and it does scare me to the point that I am obsessed with every thought that enters my head. I have searched for this symptom online but can't find anything.*

You have given in to an off-shoot of anxiety and paid it the maximum respect. Rather than just sitting in your lecture with strange images and dreams passing through, you have become distressed and scared of them. You were probably sitting there trying to work it all out and scaring yourself with thoughts of going crazy, etc. Is it any wonder you feel worse? You were also probably thinking about it all the way home, going over why, what and if.

I experienced many strange thoughts and images at random times, especially before I went to sleep, but I just shrugged my shoulders and let the inner show go on without my engagement or concern. When your brain is exhausted, which yours will be with all the worry and stress you are currently putting it under, then it starts playing the odd trick on you. It is

no different to what someone who stays up all night without sleep may experience.

Also, please don't do all the, searching online, looking to unravel all your symptoms; it's a complete waste of time. Don't feel the need to investigate them all; there is no need to obsess and worry about each and every one. All you will manage to do is just go around in circles tiring your brain even further and not giving it the break it so craves.

Paul

**Her reply to the above was:**

Thanks, so much Paul.

I have followed your advice for a while now and most, if not all of my anxiety symptoms have gone, just like you said they would. This is my last remaining symptom and thanks for giving me a much-needed kick up the bum and reminding me not to give it so much importance.

And so what if I get these strange images and feel weird? I now know it's OK and will give myself permission to feel like this, something I have not done in the past with this one remaining symptom and you're right, in not doing so I have just created more exhaustion and worry.

## Chapter 16

### Final points

In this book, I mention the constant battle that so many anxiety sufferers have with themselves. To many, this seems absolutely necessary and something they refuse to give up on.

Unfortunately, many don't even realise that it is this very battle with themselves that creates many of the symptoms they are actually battling with. It is not anxiety that gives you that exhausted, worn-out mind. Anxiety also doesn't make you feel detached from reality. Your anxiety is not responsible for your mind being so chaotic and noisy and it is certainly not the reason for any symptoms of depersonalisation. You may have none, some or all of the above and blame it on your anxiety when in reality, anxiety is not the cause.

#### **Why does this battle even start and why does it continue?**

This whole battle starts due to our non-acceptance, fear and confusion of our anxious state. If we had allowed the anxiety to be present in the first place, then we wouldn't have reached the state we now find ourselves in.

I dug down deep into why I felt the way I did and everything led me back to not wanting to feel anxiety. Why had my life become so restricted? Because I started to avoid going out as I didn't want to feel anxious. Why was my brain so exhausted and worn out? Because I spent all day in my mind trying to find a way to get rid of it. Why did I end up with DP? Because I stressed and worried about my anxiety constantly and would spend all day mentally trying to unravel it all. Why could I think of nothing else but the subject of anxiety? Because I had spent months thinking about the subject, trying to manage it, escape it and make sense of it all.



Why had I bought books, taken medication, seen therapists and tried numerous techniques, pills and potions? Again, it was all to try not to feel anxiety!! Every question I had about my current suffering came back to the same answer and yet, after years of trying to get rid of it, nothing had worked. It was then I realised that the answer to ending so much of my suffering was to let go of this battle and finally allow myself to feel it. All this extra suffering was telling me all along that I was on the wrong path, but I didn't listen.

The deeper I dug, the more obvious this was to me. My anxiety had never been the main problem here; the problem was my desire to get rid of it and not to feel it. I honestly could not believe how I had missed this before. Was it uncomfortable to be open to it and finally allow myself to feel it? Yes, of course, it was, but nowhere near as uncomfortable and damaging as the battle not to feel it had been.

Once I gave up this battle to find ways to manage or get rid of it, I went from having 101 rituals to get through the day to none. I went from 101 things to go over and think about to none. No wonder I felt so much better when this inner war with myself ended.

I also started to see anxiety and fear for what it was, which is just energy; an uncomfortable energy, yes, but just energy all the same. The more I understood anxiety and fear, the more open I was to experiencing its presence.

I don't expect anyone to adopt this attitude instantly. It can take time before we fully understand what it means to allow and be open, for the message to really sink in. The habit of resistance and struggle can also be strong initially, so don't be too hard on yourself if at first, you find it difficult to surrender to how you feel. If you are a little more open than you were yesterday, then that is something to build on. I have had people read this book and completely get what I am trying to

put across instantly and others that take a little more time. We all read and resonate with things differently.

## **Regaining Control**

The main thing you need to do is take back control of your life and not allow anxiety to do life's bidding for you. This is your life and you are still in charge, not anxiety. Behind all this, you are still there, still fine and so you can still make decisions beyond your inappropriate thoughts and feelings. You still have the free will to do whatever you wish.

If my anxiety tried to persuade me not to do something, then I would do it even more. I wanted to regain control and to see what power anxiety held. The truth is it held nothing but a few uncomfortable feelings. I thought to myself, "I have been avoiding feeling you for so long and that's all you have".

The way I was living my life was always to avoid anything that may make me feel uncomfortable. When the truth is that to regain my life, I should have felt it at will. I was just creating far more problems by avoiding as now my life was shrinking into a nothing existence and all because I was trying to rearrange my life to avoid nothing more than a feeling.

If you go towards these feelings and allow yourself to experience them, **then what power do they hold?** If you suffer from fear or anxiety, you must actively go towards your fear centre, the place that seems to hold you back and from which you would rather shy away. I did this instead of just tolerating how I felt. I wanted to free myself and go on to fully recover; to face every fear head-on and see what was at the other side.

All I can say is, I wish I had done this earlier. No unknown, terrible place existed. It was only what my subconscious mind had made me believe. I faced all my fears willingly, despite my

apprehension, and this is what set me on the road to full recovery. If anyone asks me what the primary reason was for me overcoming anxiety and fear, I always say, "I just went out and lived my life fearlessly and allowed whatever needed to arise to come to the surface".

Somebody once stated: "Paul, I just feel like I am putting up with my anxiety and getting nowhere at the moment. I suppose I still hate it and just want it gone and so it is very hard for me to allow it. Am I doing something wrong?"

My reply was:

Well, yes, and I will explain through one of my own life experiences. When I was younger, I had a step-daughter who, as a teenager, caused a lot of problems, to say the least. She infuriated me and her behaviour regularly stressed me out. I let her get to me and went on to develop a total dislike towards her. I finally realised that carrying around all the hatred and anger was doing me no good whatsoever.

One day I sat down with my partner and agreed I would try and accept that she was just a teenager and was probably no worse than anyone else her age. I would accept her for who she was and try to get on better with her. Well, the difference was amazing, and it felt like a big weight had been lifted off my shoulders. I stopped getting angry about her behaviour, stopped stressing myself out over the situation and I felt much more peace.

I am not saying I suddenly liked her, but I now accepted her. In the first instance, I was just putting up with her, letting her get me down, getting angry over her presence and stressing myself out far more than I needed to - that is the difference. It is the same with anxiety. You can carry on letting it dominate your day and allow it to frustrate you and get you down, or you can take the other route, which is just to accept it as part of you for the time being while getting on with your day.

At first, I viewed my anxiety in the same way as I did my step-daughter. I disliked it, got angry with it and allowed it to frustrate me, and so I waged war against it. It was only when I finally surrendered to it and allowed it to be part of my day that things changed. I still didn't like it, but I had finally given in and said: "Anxiety, you win, my war with you is over". That is all it ever wanted; to be acknowledged and felt, so that it could finally leave my inner space.

### **Moving towards recovery**

Recovery comes through knowledge and an application of it. There is no point reading this book and then throwing it to one side. Recovery is all about making changes and in many cases, lifestyle changes, and believing that you can move forward no matter how you are currently feeling or how long you have suffered. I suffered as much as anyone and was able to fully come through.

How did I recover? Am I special? Did I take a magic pill? No! I spent years getting worse until I educated myself. I also trusted in what I had learnt and always kept the faith that I would go on to fully recover. Many people tell me that, having read the book, they feel better instantly. They do not say that they have recovered, as this is very rare to impossible, but that they feel better. The reason for this is that having read about some of their symptoms and having them explained, they have lost their fear of a lot of them and so a lot of resistance and worry falls away. Their symptoms no longer seem as important, and this gives them a new sense of hope. They also tell me how much relief they feel through letting go of so many old battles they were having with themselves.

There is one thing that I feel is very important and I saved it until last because I wanted to get the point across. Certain people are what I call 'information gatherers' (as I was). What I mean by 'information gatherers' is people who drown

themselves in the subject of anxiety and their symptoms. One of the main reasons I managed to move forward is because I moved away from it. I took a step back and filled my life with other things, which took a lot of my focus elsewhere. So many can drown themselves in anxiety, searching for information on every symptom they suffer while going back to the doctor to make sure they have not missed anything. They may join forums, bookmark ten different websites a week and search every symptom under the sun.

So many do this because they have little information and are desperate to find some help and relief, but all this searching does them no good long term. All it does is just reinforce the subject in their mind and continue to remind them of how they feel. I was once the same, I thought, read and studied anxiety 24/7 and could think of nothing else. It was like having a full-time job that did nothing but make me feel worse and mentally wore me out. I am still involved in the subject now and can talk freely about it, but it no longer dominates my life like it did as I have long breaks from it and spend most of my time doing other things.

If you recognise yourself in the above description, then you need to step away from the subject and invite other things into your day. During my recovery, I still looked for information and a little support at times. There is nothing wrong with this, but I had learnt most of what you have read in this book, and I no longer felt the need to run around chasing my tail for answers. Once I took this step back, I gradually noticed that other things began to attract my attention - the subject of anxiety and how I felt no longer dominated my day and so it began to fade into the background.

To finish, I want you to release those chains that are holding you back and start living again. Do everything you would have done before you felt this way and learn to no longer be a prisoner to your feelings. Take a walk, go for a swim or take up a hobby instead of drowning yourself in the subject whilst

constantly looking for a solution. Recovery comes when you stop looking for a solution or a way out, and not the other way around.

Please don't spend all your time trying to manipulate your inner state, just leave it be and in time your mind and body will do the rest and heal themselves. As stated earlier, the main reason that people continue to suffer is because they are always trying 'to do' something about how they feel, day in and day out, trying to figure it all out, constantly worrying, fighting and filling themselves with self-pity. Let the words in this book sink in and realise that you don't need to do any of this. When you allow yourself to feel the way you do, then all that can come to an end and a process of healing can begin.

At the moment, you are currently thrashing around at an enemy that does not exist. Anxiety is not something you can defeat; you will only begin to see improvements when you stop trying to defeat it. Instead of pushing them away, begin to make room for distressing thoughts and emotions, as trying to rid ourselves of distress and discomfort only serves to increase it. Your mind may still feel dull and unresponsive; you may still feel anxious and emotionless for now and that's fine. The old you will begin to resurface with time and patience, don't put a time limit on recovery; just be happy with progress for now.

### **Learn to listen to your body**

People who have suffered a nervous breakdown are mostly people who did not listen to their body and the messages it was sending them. People with high-pressure jobs, such as the medical profession, can take on other people's problems and ignore their own. Long hours and stressful jobs can take their toll on some, and these people may feel stressed for a while before they enter the full anxiety cycle. If only they had learnt to listen to their body and slowed down, they could have saved themselves so much suffering.

This also applies to people who say “I don’t know why I feel like this“. As stated before, I ask if they have been under any stress recently and along comes a list of things, such as, my daughter left home, my husband lost his job, my dog passed away, and my mother is very poorly. These people did not notice the build-up of stress as it happened gradually.

I could never suffer again because I now understand why I felt like this in the first place and what kept me in the cycle. I now take time out to relax and tend not to worry or let things get to me as I did before. I know that worry and stress took me to a place I thought I would never escape from. I now realise how important my health is and it should come before anything else. I have my life back and I want to share what I know with others so they can begin to have a life too.

Your suffering happened for a reason and how you feel will not disappear overnight. So, start to live alongside your anxiety and any other uncomfortable feelings, and no longer see them as the enemy or something to defeat. If you have to live with each other for a while, you may as well get along.

You now have the correct information and motivation to move forward. You have the tools to regain your former self. Finally, and most importantly, begin to change your attitude towards how you feel and don’t let anxiety rule your life or make decisions for you.

## EPILOGUE

I hope this book has finally brought you the answers you have been searching for and can now set you on the road to recovery. I firmly believe that anxiety is one of the most misunderstood conditions out there. I know this because, for nine years, I never received an answer to why I felt like I did.

Eventually, I turned my back on traditional help and went out and found my own answers. Once I did this, the first thing that came to mind was to get my message out there to help others.

As you will have now realised, this book was not written to give you another bunch of methods and techniques that just wear you out mentally or feel like baggage to carry around and implement. It is about dropping all your techniques and mental games. It is about giving up the pointless battle you have with yourself. It is about realising that you were the cause of so much of your own suffering through the process of trying to escape your current state.

As you will now have discovered through reading this book, there are no miracle cures out there. The information I have gathered through years of experience is not a gimmick; it is all based on the way our body works and responds.

Trust me when I say that everyone can recover when given the right information and guidance. I continue to receive some wonderful stories in my inbox from so many people who tell me about their recovery; I hope to hear one from you soon too.

***Paul David***

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'At Last a Life' is now on audiobook. For more details visit <https://anxietynomore.co.uk/at-last-a-life-audio-book/>

If you would like to keep up to date with me on Twitter or Instagram you can follow me at @anxietynomoreuk or on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/anxietynomoreuk>

I have now published a sequel to this book entitled '*At Last A Life and Beyond*' which covers the subject in even more detail and has so far received excellent feedback, with many saying it took them to a whole new level of understanding and was a crucial part of their recovery.

The book is available to order through my website, eBay U.K. and also available on the Kindle store through Amazon. For more details on the book, you can visit the link to my website [https://anxietynomore.co.uk/a\\_life\\_and\\_beyond\\_book](https://anxietynomore.co.uk/a_life_and_beyond_book)

