



22 Action Steps for Anxiety

An ebook designed for those suffering from anxiety and panic attacks, which can be read and immediately implemented. It is not a replacement for professional care and advice. If symptoms persist, please consult your health care provider.

First Edition

© Dr Neil Bossenger 2012



www.spinewave.co.nz

1. Have faith

Faith is the antidote to failure. You have to believe everything is going to be okay. Actually, everything *is* going to be okay. The universe provides. One door closes; another one opens. You've heard it all before. But the fact is you don't believe it anymore. Somewhere along the line tiny increments of faith were nipped out of your heart by the piranhas of life while you weren't even looking. Now you're left with a void of anxiety. What's next? It's just one big mess and you don't know where to start. Have faith. Everything is going to be okay.

2. Stop predicting the future

The opposite of faith is doubt. And once faith has left your heart, it's filled with doubt. Doubt starts sowing the seeds of anxiety. Doubt takes us away from the here and now that we're so desperately trying to



stay in touch with, and if we're not living in the present, we're predicting the future. The unfortunate thing about anxiety is that it doesn't often paint a rosy picture. The picture is a variety of greys, and the story usually has a bad ending. When someone wishes you, "Happy New Year! This is going to be your best year ever!" You think, *yeah right*. But honestly, how do you know? It could be your best; it could be your worst. You don't know – that's the thing. No one can predict the future. As Steve Jobs said, "You can only connect the dots looking back, not by looking forward." Life can change on a dime – you know that – for better or for worse. For now though, stop predicting the future.

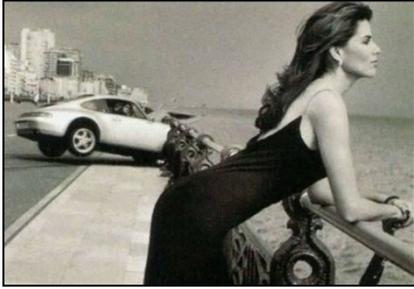
3. Just keep turning up



Woody Allen said once that 80% of success is just showing up. So just keep turning up! Something will change eventually. Anxiety takes the puff out of your sail and one can become extremely unmotivated, paralysed even, to take any productive steps. However any step is productive, honestly. You think you're in a place where there's nothing left to try – and you may be right. Just keep turning up anyway. Something will give: you simply don't know what or when. We often look to the horizon, waiting for our ship to come in. Yet seldom realise that we've been building the very ship we want, the ship that's going to take us away, right beneath our feet all this time with every tiny action step we take. Anxiety often doesn't allow us the pleasure of taking a bird's eye view on the situation though. It just makes us want to quit. Don't.



4. Distraction



Look, over there! A shiny thing! Yes, like a small child, the mind can switch its focus and you can change your state. Anxiety is an aberration of mental flow. The stream of consciousness in one's mind used to be a pleasant bubbling brook but now there are whirlpools of particular thoughts that circle the drain over and over and over because we never let go, and let them

get sucked out. The damage this can create to oneself and loved ones is immense. Distraction is not the best option but it can at least ameliorate the symptoms for a moment and bring temporary relief. The trick is to break the cycle before the anxiety escalates. If you're prone to panic attacks, you have roughly 30 seconds to create a new series of thoughts before the runaway train gains momentum.

5. Avoidance

Like distraction, this is not a long term solution. But when you can't see the wood for the trees, and your anxiety train has hit full steam in the wrong direction, there's very little that makes you feel better. So it's best to get to grips with the triggers in your environment which cause the anxiety. Pinpoint them – perhaps write them down – then avoid them for the time being until you can source the underlying cause(s) of your anxiety. This will simply buy you time to breathe and set up support structures for a longer term solution to recovery. Down the track, once you've done the necessary personal development and feel strong in yourself again, it will be easier to deal with the triggers of anxiety.



6. Walk through a doorway



Walking through a doorway is an easy distraction of sorts. Its meaning can be as simple as physiologically creating a change in body position: getting up out of your chair, walking through a doorway and taking a deep breath. Or it could have a slightly deeper meaning of resetting the mind like a switch. The doorway serves as a reboot to begin a new thought pattern.



7. Ask for help



Probably one of the most important action steps. You're not alone. You're not the only one to have experienced anxiety. And there are plenty people right now going through the same thing. Counsellors, or those who have dealt with anxiety before, can help. It's okay to tell friends or family members but they may not understand if they haven't experienced anxiety. Being told to "suck it up" or "get over it" is not an appropriate strategy, so don't take that to heart. Anxiety is oftentimes an irrational response to seemingly benign situations that most people would not understand unless they've been through it themselves. Keep looking for someone whom you can talk to and will understand you.

8. Breathe

It only takes a few minutes to drown and anxiety can feel like that. Oxygen is critical to our survival and the brain depends on good oxygenation. When we panic, we stop breathing. The diaphragm becomes stunted and goes into spasm. This state of stress sets off the anxiety steam train, making things worse, and we start making poor choices. Stop; place one hand on your belly; breathe in to the count of one, out to the count of one; in to the count of two, out to the count of two; in to the count of three, out to the count of three... all the way to ten until you feel slightly calmer.



9. Go for a walk

Once the anxiety steam train is in full motion it can take a lot to derail it. Changing your physiological state is one of the quickest ways to do this, as so many of these strategies suggest. This is because *a change of physiology is faster than anything you can think yourself into* – remember that! Breathe, or get your body moving, and it will initiate changes in your brain, shifting focus away from the present pain. Walk quickly in a timely manner: Left hand, right foot; right hand, right foot. Be amongst nature if possible and look up into the distance (your future), not your feet (the present). Walk for as long it takes the thoughts to subside and you feel a sense of peace return.



10. Phone a friend

Phoning a friend is not about you, it's about *them*. If you're feeling anxious, call a friend up and jump into *their* space. Ask how *they* are doing; what's going on with



their day. People love to talk about themselves so shoot the breeze with one of your mates and be a listening ear for them. There's an expression which goes something to the effect of: If you put everybody's problems into one pile and you had a good look at them all, you'd quickly take yours back realising you're not too bad off after all! And in being a listening ear for your friend, you may find yourself providing advice for them that not only makes you feel better and useful as a person, but which you can implement yourself. Deep inside, we always know what the answer is – anxiety just hides it from us.

11. Make a cup of tea

Or a cup of coffee. This is an exercise in “being in the moment”. Too often we get caught up in our “stuff”, which are like rocks in a backpack we choose to continually carry around. One rock is labelled work; another relationship; another mother or father or sister-in-law; another money. The list goes on and your backpack ever heavier. Put the backpack down for a moment and make a cup of tea. Be in the moment of turning on the kettle, stirring the tea bag, watching the steam, holding the cup with both hands and gently sipping from its lip. Think about each of these actions – not thinking about all your rocks. You can choose to pick up your backpack of rocks again when your hot drink is finished. Or not.



12. Form a routine

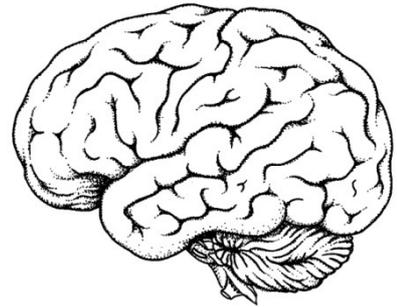


Anxiety can come from a lack of structure. When life seems to be in disarray, so too is the mind. Bringing some kind of order to one's environment can sometimes help this. There is comfort in predictability. Knowing what comes next provides less opportunity for panic. So schedule all weekly events and tasks on paper, hour by hour. Know when you have to do what; and what you'd like to do. Schedule must-do tasks as well as fun tasks.



13. Get adjusted

The chiropractic adjustment is a powerful stimulus for the frontal cortex. Anxiety is a result of a frontal cortex that continually blows its fuses because it's over worked and under paid. The brain cannot cope with the stimulus in its environment and chooses to shut down. One manifestation of this is anxiety. The trick is though not to allow this conditioning to become hardwired in the nervous system. Because then panic becomes an automatic response instead of a justified response to any given situation. Look after the brain-body connection by visiting a good chiropractor and getting your spine checked for interference to function.



14. Manage expectations

Somewhere between reality (what is actually occurring), and what we expect our reality to be, is a void, which opens to frustration and anxiety. Anxiety is based largely in the realm of irrationality and the illogical – but it's real to the person who experiences it. The world continues to turn but for the anxious mind, it stops. The

world pauses and the imagination takes over in that gap, wreaking havoc with the monsters under the bed it creates.



Part of the problem is that the world is turning faster than it used to. And as it spins it opens holes we think need to be filled, creating a sense of

lack in our lives: We're not good enough; we don't have enough; we're not achieving enough; we will never be enough; or just that it's all going to come crashing down. From the lack come the triggers for the anxious mind – the thoughts and behaviours which set it off on a path of neurological hardwiring.

Anxiety opens these holes and our wholeness is never realised. The rift between desire and lack gets bigger. Problems become insurmountable and soon any activity of daily living in work or relationships can become triggers when they never used to be. Managing expectations of what one's reality "should be" is very important to keep life in check. So where you are now, are you actually okay? Probably.



15. Have a nap



Anxiety wears the brain out. Constantly over thinking everything and worrying about everything fatigues the frontal cortex – our decision making centre of the brain. Sometimes it can be a blur between being anxious or just being incredibly tired. You don't have to wait till bedtime later tonight, have a nap now. Einstein did it. Edison did it. If it's good enough for them, it's good enough for you! Research shows that naps of up to 60 minutes can contain enough "slow wave sleep" and "rapid eye movement" sleep to equal an 8 hour night.

16. Mirror notes

This exercise is a cross between reminders and positive affirmations. Most people understand the concept of affirming a positive outlook through encouraging statements that are written down and read on a daily basis. This is a variation on a theme where you write down hard times that you have successfully moved through before. Or extreme situations you have dealt with in the past. Or major things you have achieved in the past that initially you didn't think were possible. Write each one down on a Post It note in bold, black pen and place them around your bathroom mirror. Each time you brush your teeth you will be reminded that what you are experiencing is the season of winter: Cold, barren, seemingly unending. But know that it is just a season. And spring will come soon. You have been through many winters before and all these Post It notes are there to remind you of that.



17. Medication

There is no right or wrong answer here. Some forms of anxiety can be debilitating, leading into depression. It is important to understand the criteria for starting a serious medication and to discuss all the options with your health care provider thoroughly. Sometimes, after trying many different "natural" options, medication can be an appropriate solution to short circuit the anxiety and normalise brain chemistry. It should not be the *first* option though in the very beginning.



18. End the reel

Once the anxiety steam train is in full motion, it becomes difficult to stop the flood of invasive thoughts pouring through. One way is to simply “end the movie reel”. Imagine that the anxiety-inducing thoughts are streaming across the screen of your mind one after the other, and see them for what they are: just thoughts on a screen. And you can choose to end that movie. Imagine the movie reel upstairs snaps, the screen goes white with bright light, and the wheel is left spinning with a bit of ticker tape flicking round and round. There is nothing left to see, and nothing left to panic about.



19. Play a different video



So you ended the reel of the last story – start a new video on the screen of your mind. Have a selection of two or three of your favourite moments in time. Perhaps it was a beach holiday you had when you were younger? Stop and take yourself back to that time. It’s an easy form of meditation. Remember the sun on your face; the waves breaking on the shoreline; what the sea air smelled like. Take a walk on that dream boulevard for two minutes and then stop. Open your eyes and refocus on the here and now. The trick is not to do it for too long. Just enough to create a shift in energy, and short circuit the anxiety train. If later in the day you begin to feel panicky again, start the video again from where you left off last time. Make the imaginative process as vivid as possible to really spark new neurochemistry in your brain.

20. Bomb it

Another action step amongst the imaginative ones is “bombing” the anxious thoughts. *Worry, worry, worry, worry... STOP! Bomb it!* With an enormous atomic bomb in your mind and see all the anxious thoughts and feelings dissipate into a cloud of dust and debris all over the horizon. Start fresh with a set of new, positive thoughts.



21. Do something you enjoy

After a bout of anxiety or a panic attack, start simply: Start with a cup of tea as suggested. Then build with little things you are good at. If you like a clean and tidy house, start by vacuuming or cleaning the shower. If you like to read, pick up a novel and read a few chapters. If you have an artistic streak, sketch a few things. If you like

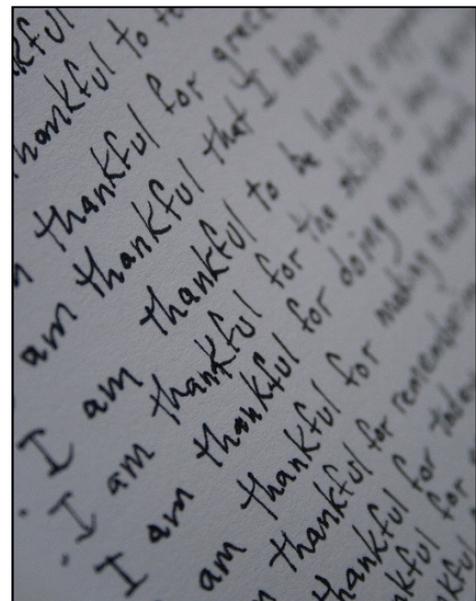


to cook, make something. The point is, firstly, finding immediate comfort in familiarity with a mundane task that the brain can freewheel with and not have to consume too much energy trying to process. The mind needs to anchor to that which it knows because anxiety severs the chain and your mental ship gets sent

out into rough seas quickly. Secondly, doing a few little things you are good at rebuilds confidence one baby step at a time. As previously mentioned, anxiety wears the mind down. Pretty soon people start believing they're not good at anything, and good for nothing. Perpetuate this feeling long enough and it leads to major depression. Anchor to the good things.

22. Write down 3 wins

At the end of each day write down either 3 things you are grateful for or 3 "wins". The wins don't have to be big or complex. Just sharing a good laugh with someone can count as a win – write it down. Make it easy for you to win each and every day. Be kind to yourself. Learn to love yourself. Look in the mirror and be proud of what you are creating; that each day you are proactive and always seeking the best in yourself and others; that you are a kind, loving person with an enormous amount of wealth to share with your friends and the world. You are valued and it will be easy to notice when you start looking back on your long list of wins.



Post script:

Remember, anxiety usually troubles the most brilliant of minds, which operate at speeds too fast even for themselves to keep up. The hottest stars burn brightest – but they also burn out quickly. So don't be too hard on yourself. As Baz Lurhmann's *Sunscreen Song* goes: The race is long – and in the end – it's only with yourself.

Life is not meant to be difficult, so hopefully these *22 Action Steps for Anxiety* will bring you some relief.

spinewave.co.nz



- Depression or anxiety
- Moodiness or anger
- Chronic worrying
- Feeling disconnected
- Chemical imbalance
- Poor concentration
- ADD or ADHD

MENTAL • WELLNESS

For more information,
please contact:

Dr Neil Bossenger

Chiropractor

Spinewave Wellness Centre

Suite 1, 102 Remuera Road

Auckland, NZ

09 522 0025

neil@spinewave.co.nz

www.spinewave.co.nz

