

A Simple Cure For Anxiety And Depression

By Saleen Rana

Our innate desire is to be happy, and when we move away from it, we experience fear. This fear is actually millions of years old, for it arises from the biological programming of our species. While we may not have to contend with a saber-toothed tiger on any given day, we still use those very reactions to deal with events looming ahead.

We think, "Will I be fired for making that mistake at work?" or "Will I be able to meet the mortgage after I fix the car?" or "Will my health continue to decline?" or "Will my relationship fall apart after that argument we just fell into?" Running questions with this type of urgency and helplessness trains our brains to prepare now for future danger by loading our bodies up with the stress hormone Cortisol.

Anxiety is our anticipation of a dangerous future. We imagine having even less of the little that we have today. This anxiety does not help us in any way to meet the future any better. In fact, it weakens and exhausts us. We usually worry most about things that we can't even control. Worrying about your dental visit, for example, will not make the visit better. Anxiety, in fact, is a silent killer. It is enervating, and it drains you of purpose and hope, faith and initiative. It fogs up your thinking. And it makes the body susceptible to illness.

When anxiety—a fear of an event in the future—is high enough then you feel a deep sense of helplessness. This, in turn, translates into depression. You even begin to view the past as disappointing. Caught between a miserable past and a frightening future you create a pattern of emotions that can lead to a variety of mood disorders, including manic-depression.

How do we escape from this vicious cycle?

Here is what I did 20 years ago and I have never since suffered from any serious mood disorder. I started to cultivate my awareness of my mood swings—from elation to black despair. I did this by basically watching myself when I was manic, and watching myself when I was depressed, and watching what I did to turn on these states. For example to get depressed, I used my love of literature to focus on dark, morbid, and unhappy stories about life. And to get elated, I would talk a lot, move very quickly, and do things in a dramatic way.

An interesting thing happened when I made my unconscious behavior conscious. I could not take my mood shifts seriously. This is what I learned from that experience: when you are able to observe yourself over the course of a few weeks, you develop a curious detachment. A paradoxical situation developed for me: I found it difficult to stay anxious and depressed when I was observing myself feeling anxious and depressed.

Ultimately, anxiety and depression are culturally-induced patterns of thinking that can be overcome through a deliberate cultivation of awareness. When you become your own observer, you weed out the unconscious habits that afflict you. Despite the billions of dollars spent to heal anxiety and depression, and all the mood disorders and behavioral anomalies that arise from them, the cure is simple, quick, and free.

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