

# HOW TO EMBRACE FEAR FREE LIVING WITHOUT THE BURDEN OF HEALTH ANXIETY



AMY CALDWELL  
BREAST CANCER SURVIVOR &  
MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCATE

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**BY AMY CALDWELL**

**CANCER SURVIVOR AND EX-HEALTH ANXIETY SUFFERER**

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## INTRODUCTION

Hi! My name is Amy, I am a cancer survivor, ex health anxiety sufferer and now mental health advocate. After battling for years with my own health anxiety I finally found fear free living, but it wasn't easy, and it wasn't quick. Health anxiety plagued by life, making every day a mental torment, and it meant that I questioned my very self, right to the core.

I now want to share my journey to enlightenment with you, in the hope that you will be able to take some snippets of advice from here, and fundamentally for you to understand that you are not alone with your own health anxiety, in fact you are amongst a large proportion of the world, it's just that health anxiety is particularly hard to diagnose and often goes either misdiagnosed or it's just not recognised enough.

I now consider myself a guru of all things' health anxiety – this was never my plan or my desire in life, but fate had its say, and in 2018 at the age of 39 I was diagnosed with breast cancer. I had no lump. I also had a young family, and I had no family history of breast cancer either. Cancer took me by surprise, it tore my world upside down and very nearly took my mental health with it.

*This may sound triggering for you, but I want you to know that what I had was extremely rare and not something that many people of my age group experience. I also want you to know that this story does have a happy ending, so please do not feel heightened by reading about my situation.*

No one told me that my biggest battle would not in fact be the one with my body, but indeed one with my mind. Once I was physically well again, everyone around me just expected me to 'pick up where I left off' and resume life just as before, except it wasn't as easy as that.

I found that I was frightened and fearful. I was left living in a world that I no longer understood, with a body that I no longer trusted.

When I was diagnosed, the oncologist asked if I had any family of breast cancer, to which I replied "no". His next sentence will stay with me forever, he said "well, your results really surprised us". My heart sank and I don't remember much more from that day, other than thinking things would never be the same again.

After my surgery and treatment, I remember coming home to a barrage of well-wishers, flowers, cards, and endless visitors (which was totally lovely, but totally overwhelming at the same time). I knew at this point that the old me had disappeared for a while. Amongst the tubes and drains that I carried with me for the weeks afterwards, I

remember searching for her in the mirror, trying to be that upbeat carefree friend in return, but what I saw wasn't the me that had stepped onto the operating table weeks earlier. The person staring back at me looked shattered, stressed, and grey, she was fearful. The anxiety kicked in. Over the weeks and months to come, I just couldn't find me, she had been replaced with a hypochondriac, a fearful and frightened mess.

I remember one of my lowest points was when I was doing the housework a few months after my treatment had finished, I stood at the top of our wooden stairs and willed myself to throw myself down. Placed at the bottom of the stairs were my son's small shoes, so I didn't. It was like a big black cloud had descended upon me, and I couldn't see the world for it. Whilst I felt totally grateful and beyond privileged to even still be here, to be alive, I couldn't help but feel extremely guilty, sad, and confused. Life had changed. I had changed.

No-one knew. I hid it well. My husband remarked one day when I tried to explain my feelings "what are you worrying about? The cancer has gone. Everything is fine now."

At this point, I think the realisation struck me. Not once had anyone warned me about the battle with my head. I had people tell me about the treatment, about how my body might respond, about the aftereffects, and potential further treatment, but not one person had ever said 'this is just the beginning'. Maybe they didn't know, maybe they did. Either way, it became something that I needed to figure out myself.

Things had gone a bit crazy! I recall one afternoon a routine trip to the optician ended in disaster. I sat in the chair, gazing at the lights as you do. The optician stepped to the side, turned the lights back on, and remarked "Ah I can see your cells have changed in this eye". Well, 'cells', 'changed', to a person suffering from severe health anxiety only meant one thing to me. I was going blind! She continued to speak but I couldn't hear her words, her mouth was moving but I couldn't hear her, I had gone into utter panic.

I made my excuses, grabbed my bag, and fled to my car, crying all the way home. Upon arriving home in floods of tears, I tried between exasperated breaths to explain to my husband what the matter was. He did what any husband with a blubbing mess of a wife would do in this situation. He called the opticians. I could hear him through the crack in the door "my wife is extremely upset that she's been told her cells have changed, she thinks she's losing her sight".... "Ah, just an eye infection" he proclaimed shortly afterwards!

Indeed, I was not going blind, but merely an eye infection. I felt so silly. My brain had switched off when I heard the word 'cells' and after that Mrs Hypochondria rocked up and that was that. This is how my life was to continue. I was a quivering worry box.

The doctors were quick to prescribe anti-depressants, then it was over to me. Anti-depressants seemed to be my only choice. Taking them felt like fraud, however. I wasn't depressed, I was anxious, but I didn't know that I had health anxiety – no one had labelled me with this. If someone had of said 'Amy, you've got health anxiety' it would have been much easier. If they had said 'its normal, you are going to be fine' then I could have coped better. But no one did.

I was fearful and lost. At no point did anyone ever mention PTSD to me. It was only years later upon reading about the symptoms of PTSD, that I even stopped to think that this may in fact be what I had been experiencing all along.

*Did you know that 1 in 4 cancer survivors go on to experience PTSD\* (however I think that this figure is far greater!).*

After the stair's incident, I made a pact with myself that I needed to do everything in my power to find the old me (the old new me). I was exhausted, too tired to carry on the way I had. It was affecting not only me but my family and my relationships, it was like watching a car crash in slow motion. I couldn't let it reach the point of impact.

I worked tirelessly researching techniques and methods and retraining my brain to think in a different way. I studied course after course (I now have qualifications in Anxiety!) I eventually developed my own unique coping and healing strategies which have helped me enormously. I can now say, hand on heart, that I live fear free. Even saying that out loud is a huge momentous thing – when I think where I was, and where I am now.

I went from strength to strength, reaching targets and crossing barriers that even the old me would have struggled with. One of my greatest achievements in 2022 was running the London Marathon in five hours 7 minutes. I must add that I have never been a runner, nor particularly sporty, so this is something that I would have previously never have thought possible. It taught me that the brain is our most powerful resource, and we can literally turn things around by knowing how to harness it.

It is now my upmost mission to share my knowledge this with you. If you are experiencing health-related anxiety, health trauma or the fear of having a health trauma, then I want you to know that you will be able to find your inner peace again and ultimately trust your body again.

I want to help you find your way again.

## **ABOUT FEAR**

A basic human emotion, fear, is an instinctual reaction to perceived threats or difficulties. As societal expectations, individual desires, and various responsibilities in the family and society collide, this emotional landscape frequently has distinctive and complicated layers. The journey to embracing fear and letting go of anxiety becomes a potent story of empowerment in a world where you can experience countless pressures, both internal and external. It is crucial to acknowledge the complexity of experiences to fully comprehend how they might make their way through this journey. Fear of failing, of not having enough money, of not being good enough, of not being a good mum, of not being successful enough, a good enough partner, sister, friend. These are all fears that we put ourselves under every day, often without even realising.

And so, these fears can often materialise and impair our mental, emotional, and physical health, and when they do, they present anxiety. It's how we work as the human species.

Self-awareness is the first step in embracing fear. Let me tell you that advice is some of the most important you will ever hear. If you are aware of your reactions and your emotions, then you are already making progress. Denial is the worst.

I was in denial for a long time. Not only denial that cancer had found me (I mean I was young, fit, non-smoker – I looked after myself) why would cancer choose me? But in denial that my symptoms (all hundreds of them) were anything other than real actual things that could potentially kill me.

The first step in overcoming anxiety and dread is to recognise its origins. How did you get to be here? Was there an initial trigger? Even if you can't remember what the actual trigger was, chances are that there was one. We aren't born anxious, so we develop these anxieties after life events and experiences. In my case, my trigger was obvious, but even before cancer, if I look back now, I will say that I did have some anxious tendencies.

It took me a long time to truly find me, and I guess if I look at me before cancer and me after cancer, I certainly see two different people. The one before accepted societal norms but the me before also didn't realise that these so called 'norms' do not determine a person's value.

Me now, knows not to aim for conformity, but rather appreciate the strength of individuality and celebrating diversity. Accepting vulnerability as a source of great strength rather than as a sign of weakness is another aspect of embracing fear.

I would also like to share that to empower myself, I had to actively look for help, and not just the normal off the shelf help – because, when I was at my lowest point that sort of help didn't exist. I was seeking extraordinary help – the kind that wasn't available at the time (or at least I couldn't find it). It's crazy really, given the wealth of knowledge and information that is at our fingertips each day, but I couldn't find anyone or anything that was specifically for my health anxiety. I wanted someone to wave a huge banner 'Over here Amy, look this way!'

It is safe to say that my salvation was aided by finding and developing a strong network of others who shared in my difficulties and troubles. Such a support network offers affirmation, inspiration, and a secure setting for exchanging experiences, thereby lightening the burden of anxiety. This is the key. Don't keep this stuff to yourself. Once you find others that are in the 'same boat' as you, the burden is lifted quickly. What's the old saying? A problem shared is a problem halved?

Self-care and self-compassion practices are essential on this journey. Self-care is not a selfish activity, but rather something that you must learn to prioritise to maintain your mental and emotional well-being.

By facing fear as a force for good in this changing society, you can live your life free of anxiety by facing and embracing anxieties, getting help, and cultivating self-compassion.

This is a voyage of self-determination, fortitude, and, ultimately, liberation from the chains of fear that have kept you imprisoned for far too long.

You might begin to rethink your relationship with fear after awareness has been achieved. It is possible to consider fear as a partner on the path to personal development rather than as an adversary that must be vanquished. You can embrace the power of fear and utilise it as a catalyst for change thanks to this perspective change. As I've discovered over the years, it's all about perspective. Glass half full or glass half empty? It's the same amount of water, it just depends on your view.

Fear turns into a signpost for potential areas for personal development and change. I know it probably doesn't feel like it right now, but you will look back on this time as a stronger, more resilient, and worldly wise, better version of you. It's not a case of if, it's a case of when. Trust it. Say it. Believe it.

The process's basic component is empowerment. By gaining the tools and techniques to deal with anxiety-provoking circumstances will enable you to not only face your fears, but to tackle them head on.

## CHAPTER ONE: UNDERSTANDING HEALTH ANXIETY

Health anxiety is also known as 'disease anxiety' 'illness anxiety' or 'hypochondria'. The word 'hypochondria' used to be used a lot of years ago. I remember people saying 'oh don't be such a hypochondriac' when perhaps I complained about an ailment, however its use almost become derogatory or pejorative, and perhaps overused, which is why it has been replaced by other names.

Women are more likely to experience health anxiety than males, but that doesn't mean that men don't and can't experience it too. I have had several male clients each with the same fears and worries as a woman. Health anxiety affects about 5% of the population.

The onset of health anxiety can come at any age, however it's more common to start in young adults or adolescence. Not everyone has the same experience of health anxiety, it depends on several factors including your lifestyle and where you live.

It is probable that hormonal changes brought on by the menstrual cycle, pregnancy, and menopause might make a females anxiety symptom worse. Numerous indicators of health anxiety include frequent doctor appointments, intensive medical testing, and a compulsive need to check online for symptoms. The constant need for reassurance can be exhausting both physically and mentally.

For me, it was having my children which made my health anxiety as extreme as it was. Without children I don't think that I would have become half as bad. The worry and anxiety of your own mortality means that you constantly ask yourself 'what if I'm no longer around?' or 'what if I die tomorrow?' 'Who will look after the children then'? As my mum says, us women are the glue; we hold everything together! We just get on with it because we must. We are accustomed to juggling multiple spinning plates, keeping everything going, whilst sorting out the washing, ironing, cooking, cleaning, looking

after the children and often holding down a job too. And whilst I appreciate that that is a sexist and sweeping remark, especially in the days of equality, I do have to add a caveat that men do this too (it's just that women are still in the majority in this regard).

So, when we worry about our health and have this increased concern for it, it becomes like precious crown jewels. We need to preserve it, to protect it. We need to be there for our children, not only to help them as they grow, but to see them grow up into the people they are destined to be. We can't imagine that this won't happen, and if we do, the mere thought of it alone is enough to send you down that path to panic.

Health anxiety doesn't just affect your mental health, it can affect relationships, and quality of life too. Those who battle with health anxiety frequently experience paralysing fear and dread because they think that even seemingly insignificant symptoms can signal major illnesses. It becomes a viscous circle as those thoughts then present themselves as physical symptoms. For example, you may develop digestion issues, which in turn leads you to worry for your digestive health, which in turn makes the physical symptoms worse. And so on. It's a never-ending cycle, and it's exhausting.

To move forward you must recognise that health anxiety is a genuine and upsetting ailment and that assistance from medical professionals, close friends, and family is crucial. This is not a place where you can be alone. Sharing is caring (as my daughter says!) and you need to ensure that you are open and honest with your feelings, letting others know how you feel fundamentally help you (even if you feel silly, or if you feel like they won't understand).

The more we talk about health anxiety, the more society can better address this problem and help people who are struggling with it so they can enjoy healthier and happier lives by raising awareness and understanding of health anxiety.

## **WHAT IS HEALTH ANXIETY?**

Health anxiety is defined by extreme worry and dread of having or developing a serious medical illness, even when there are no or only minor symptoms. It is the preoccupation with having a serious illness, despite medical reassurance that this is not the case. The worry is fundamentally about your own health but can also extend to concern about your loved one's health too.

Even when testing and assessments from doctors show otherwise, you may become fixated on the notion that you have a serious illness, you may find that you don't trust the medical profession and you constantly question their opinion.

This obsession may cause severe distress and impairment in day-to-day functioning. Perhaps you frequently visit the doctor, ask for various medical opinions, and undertake extensive research on the ailments you believe you have.

Your concern may increase if you have intensified body sensations and interpret them as signs of a serious illness. You may also struggle to take the medical profession's opinion, which can often lead to numerous appointments and reassurance seeking behaviors.

The physical sensations you experience are very real. Don't ever let anyone tell you that your symptoms are imagined or in your head. Some sensations like dizziness or tiredness are also associated with 'normal health', however you may misinterpret them as evidence of a severe illness. Therefore, it's so easy for the headache that is caused by tension to get misinterpreted by you as something more sinister such as a brain tumor.

The underlying reasons for health anxiety are multifaceted and may include a combination of environmental, genetic, and psychological elements. The onset of this disorder may be influenced by traumatic events, a family history of anxiety or sickness, and a predisposition to anxiety. The persistent worry and obsession with health issues can cause increased stress, social isolation, and impairment in everyday functioning, which can have a considerable negative influence on quality of life.

### **Symptoms of Health Anxiety**

Excessive worry about developing a major medical condition is a symptom of health anxiety. The following are some typical signs of symptoms that you may have health anxiety – you may find that you:

- Have excessive worry about health, and you frequently anticipate the worst-case situation. Constantly scan your body for any potential illness-related symptoms.
- Regularly visit the doctor to get assurances about your health. Even when there is no immediate visible medical condition, you may find that you will frequently request medical tests and consultations.
- Have numerous physical symptoms such as headaches, muscle tension, a quick heartbeat, stomach/digestive issues, twitching, and more. The list of ailments is far greater than google will ever tell you. Each of them is unique to you and how your body responds to anxiety. The physical symptoms may come and go, or they may persist, either way they will bring with them a heightened state of mind, which in turn exasperates them.
- Search for symptoms online. Health anxiety requires us to gain reassurance, and to do this we need to learn more about whatever it is that is worrying us. So, you may find that you spend hours asking 'Doctor Google' or that you follow someone online avidly and convince yourself that you have what they have or similar. This in turn makes us feel more anxious because you may come across information that might not be factual or applicable to your circumstances.
- Exhibit avoidance behaviors, by steering clear of circumstances or pursuits you believe could be harmful to your health. However, a lower quality of life and social isolation may result from this.
- Interpret physical symptoms by tending to misinterpret your regular physical symptoms and mistake them for symptoms of a serious illness.

## How to Tell If You Have Health Anxiety

Here are some indicators that you may be experiencing it:

**Excessive Worry:** You may find that you have unreasonable and excessive worries about your health. Even in the absence of proof, you could persistently worry that you are suffering from a serious illness.

**Frequent Doctor Visits:** Health anxiety may be present if you frequently make appointments with your doctor for unimportant or fictitious health problems. When I say it frequently, you may even find that you are asking doctors for assurance daily. You may misinterpret typical physical symptoms like exhaustion, aches in the stomach, or headaches as indicators of a serious illness.

**Online research:** Constantly looking up symptoms, illnesses, and medical disorders on the internet can be an indication of health concerns. Perhaps you spend hours reading about health issues, which frequently makes you more anxious. Health anxiety can result in avoidance behaviors, such as avoiding locations or circumstances that bring up health-related concerns. For instance, some might steer clear of hospitals or clinics because they make them feel anxious.

**Physical Symptoms:** Health anxiety can cause symptoms including a racing heart, perspiration, and tense muscles, which are comparable to those of a panic attack.

**Impact on Daily Life:** It could be time to get help if your Health anxiety is interfering with your relationships, employment, or daily activities. Those who suffer from acute health anxiety may find it difficult to perform daily tasks because of their anxieties. Health anxiety may be more likely to develop in people with a family history of anxiety disorders or health issues, but in saying that, there's no reason why you need to have a family history in order to experience it – I didn't.

The initial step in treating health anxiety is recognising these symptoms, and then secondly accepting them. It's important to keep in mind that Health anxiety is treatable and that with the correct support, you can learn to control your anxieties and recover control of your life.

## The Impact of Health Anxiety

Health anxiety can have a crippling emotional impact. The ongoing tension, worry, and anxiety that you can suffer from as a result can cause mood swings, panic attacks, and despair. Daily life can be disturbed by the constant anxiety of being sick, and this becomes a viscous circle as we worry about our ailments which in turn makes us panic and heightens our physical symptoms, which in turn provides more to worry about! I know!!

See, I told you it was frustrating!

I know that my relationships suffered as my family struggled to understand why I couldn't get back to the old version of me, and they couldn't work out why.

If you are constantly worried about getting sick you may find that you could overdo your health-seeking habits, such as seeing the doctor too often or getting too many tests, which can result in inflated medical bills (if you go privately in the UK, or if you live overseas) and even possible injury from overexposure to medical treatments. Life's social and professional facets are also impacted. You may find that you cancel social or professional commitments because of your worries or ongoing concern with symptoms. This may impede professional growth and sour friendships and family and friends.

Overall, your quality of life may suffer because of health worries. Getting support can help manage it and offer coping mechanisms for the crippling fear of getting sick. You may reclaim control over your life and lessen the detrimental effects that health anxiety has on your well-being by addressing the emotional, physical, and social ramifications.

Health trauma is a type of trauma that can have a profound impact on your mental and emotional health. It can lead to a variety of mental health problems, including PTSD, anxiety, depression, guilt, shame, anger, difficulty coping with stress, relationship problems, and substance abuse. Health anxiety can send you off on a path that you never thought you would be on. I certainly felt this way, which is why I had to change paths quickly or else I knew that my path would be one of destruction.

Neglecting these mental health issues can impact your ability to recover. For the sake of fostering general well-being, it is imperative to address the mental health component of health trauma.

Whilst we can all think 'it will get better with time' or 'ill just wait a few more weeks, I'm bound to feel better by then', the reality is that nothing will change until you make a change.

### **Intrusive Thoughts & Worry**

Part of the process of health anxiety is having intrusive thoughts. These thoughts will come at any point in time and may be thoughts about yourself becoming seriously ill, dying, or going mad. Your mind tends to think of all the possible bad things that could occur. This is called catastrophizing. Your mind will want to know for certain or have a guarantee that you will not die or suffer from a severe illness.

This leads to worrying about how to solve nonexistent problems and to control as much of your bodily functions or to plan to deal with problems that do not arise.

Try to remember that thoughts about your health are just that – thoughts and not reality.

I also experienced intrusive thoughts about other people's health and would often unwillingly think of something horrible almost as a barrier to prevent it happening. It was like if I think this thought then it will never happen.

Some people cope with health anxiety by trying to control their thoughts or suppressing them. These are normally in the form of 'what if ...' questions. 'What if I get cancer' or 'What if I have heart disease?'

## **CHAPTER TWO: OVERCOMING FEAR AND ANXIETY**

Anyone can experience fear and worry. These are common human feelings. However, Health Anxiety amplifies any worries or fears and makes them far worse than they potentially could be.

There are so many societal pressures, stereotypes, and expectations in our world today, often looming large, you must learn how to handle your worries and concerns. First and foremost, understand that it's acceptable to have dread and anxiety. These feelings are common reactions to diverse circumstances, but they do not reflect a person's abilities or character. Self-acceptance is frequently the first step on the path to overcoming fear and anxiety. People may be more able to face their concerns by realising that vulnerability is a strength rather than a weakness.

I mentioned earlier about the moment that things changed in your life, and whilst it may be hard to pinpoint the exact moment (often things just progress over time) it's important to recognise that at some point, there was a 'switch'. For me, mine is easy to pinpoint. I know exactly when and where I was when my brain made the switch – it was in the hospital room when I received my cancer diagnosis. However, for you, it might be harder to define an exact moment in time.

So, let's just investigate how 'the switch' happens and why.

You are merrily carrying on with your life, and then one day you wake up and realise that things aren't in fact so merry. Your anxiety is sky high, and you are dealing with several physical symptoms as a result. This is because, at some pinpoint unbeknown to you, your brain has made the 'switch'. It has slipped over to normal everyday levels of anxiety to complete overload, extreme levels. The switch often occurs when we aren't paying attention, but its impact is life changing. Your brain has switched because it is fearful, and it is fearful because it thinks there is perceived danger imminent.

Now that your brain feels that your body is in a dangerous situation, it starts to put coping mechanisms in place. This means that for it to run your body effectively, it must make a choice – to shut down the parts of your body that it no longer deems as necessary for survival. So, when this happens, you will lose function in particular areas of your body. Mine was my digestive system, which was hounded by my mind, and shut down very quickly. As a result, I suffered for years with suspected IBS and digestive issues – when really, the real problem was my anxiety.

So, why does this happen? Well, it all stems from when we were hunter gatherers out in the field, trying to catch our prey. Our bodies would need to be in peak performance to run, catch and kill our prey, to hunt. So, when we were suddenly required to escape from a predator that would threaten our ability to hunt, we would go into what is termed today as 'fight or flight mode'. This mode meant that certain areas of our body would be required over others, for example our eyesight and our ability to run. Therefore, our bodies became so clever that they shut down the parts that aren't required (my digestion in my case).

The reason that this still happens today is that this is what we are programmed to do, this is how our bodies are programmed to react when confronted by fear. Except that our bodies/minds aren't aware that we are not in the stone age anymore. So, we continue to go through 'fight or flight' when confronted by perceived danger (i.e. that lump that you found on your neck yesterday) instead of the actual danger that was there to physically see.

This in a nutshell is why you feel like you do.

I have often talked about 'glimmers', these are the opposite to 'triggers. We all know all too well about triggers and how they can heighten our anxiety – we try to avoid them where possible, but sometimes it's not possible. However, glimmers are the opposite to triggers, they are those moments throughout the day when you feel joy, happiness, peace, and gratitude. If you can train your brain so that it is constantly on the lookout for glimmers instead of triggers, then you are well on the way to making that switch in your brain.

You can regain control of your life by setting attainable goals and breaking them down into doable steps. By doing this you can increase your self-esteem and self-confidence by concentrating on your accomplishments, which will progressively lessen the influence of dread and worry. Use your voice to speak up for yourself in a variety of settings, including the workplace and close relationships. Breaking free from the chains of fear and worry can be made possible by arming oneself with knowledge and confidence.

You will find that you can overcome fear and anxiety by accepting your vulnerability, establishing a solid support network, engaging in self-care, creating achievable objectives, and advocating for themselves. These are the rules that I still live with each day and are ones that will empower your life.

## **THE NEUROSCIENCE OF FEAR AND ANXIETY**

Understanding how these strong emotions are produced and processed requires a deep understanding of the inner workings of the human brain, which is the focus of the complicated and intriguing area of neuroscience of fear and anxiety.

Anxiety and fear are fundamental aspects of the human experience and frequently act as adaptive reactions to stressors or possible threats. However, when these feelings persist or get out of control, they can cause crippling conditions. The amygdala, a tiny, almond-shaped region buried deep within the brain, is at the center of the neuroscience of fear and anxiety. Processing emotional cues and invoking the "fight or flight" response are both major functions of the amygdala.

These hormones prime the body to respond quickly to the apprehension of danger by speeding up the heartbeat, widening the pupils, and directing blood to the muscles. The prefrontal cortex, a major brain region implicated in anxiety and dread, is also in charge of higher-order cognitive processes like impulse control and decision-making. Amygdala over-activity and prefrontal cortex under-activity are frequently out of balance in anxiety disorders, which causes excessive and unreasonable fear responses. Gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA), a neurotransmitter, as well as serotonin, plays important roles in the control of fear and anxiety. Anxiety can arise because of disturbances in the delicate balance of these substances, which can result in mood problems.

Numerous therapeutic approaches have been developed because of our growing understanding of the neurological bases of fear and anxiety. Medications that target neurotransmitter imbalances are frequently used to treat anxiety disorders. However, I am not condoning that you use them. Don't get me wrong, I have taken anti-depressants in the height of my struggles, and they certainly helped take the edge off and rewire the way in which my brain was working, but I don't see anti-depressants as a long-term solution, nor do I see them as the first step to living a fear free life.

If you are currently taking antidepressants and they are working for you right now, then I would suggest sticking with them. You can concentrate on other aspects of building a fear free life whilst you are taking them, and then you can look to gradually decrease your intake once you have mastered some coping techniques.

### **How to Challenge Negative Thoughts and Beliefs**

It's essential to challenge unfavorable views and beliefs to promote empowerment, self-worth, and mental health. Spend some time identifying your negative thoughts and the circumstances that bring them about. When you see yourself thinking badly, stop and consider whether those beliefs are true. Are they founded on actual data or suppositions? Do they consider the expectations of society or the past? These queries can assist you in gaining a clearer perspective.

**Positive affirmations:** Use them to counteract negative thinking. Make affirmations to yourself like, "I am capable," "I am strong," and "I deserve respect." By saying these affirmations again and over, you can change the way you think.

**Seek Support:** Discuss your unfavorable beliefs with friends, family, or someone who has been there and knows what you are going through. Sharing your emotions with others can be a great way to gain insight and support.

**Confront Stereotypes:** Recognise the gender norms and stereotypes that can influence ideas. Know that adherence to these norms does not determine your value. Challenge the way society defines success and happiness by redefining success. Measure your accomplishments considering your ideals and ambitions rather than what others anticipate of you.

**Develop Self-Compassion:** Treat yourself well. Treating oneself with the same compassion and understanding you would extend to a friend, going through similar experiences is important.

**Celebrate Your Successes:** Recognise your successes, no matter how modest they may seem. Celebrating your accomplishments might help you maintain self-confidence.

**Education:** Learn about the accomplishments of those who have faced hardship and broken norms. It can be empowering to gain knowledge from other people's experiences. Meditation and mindfulness exercises can help you stay in the moment and distance yourself from unfavorable ideas. These methods could help one feel in control and at peace inside. If you haven't already discovered the wonders of meditation, then I seriously suggest you give it a go right now. In fact, stop reading and for the only time ever. I'm going to ask you to GOOGLE! Google meditation and see what you find. Even if you only have 5 minutes spare each day, it is five minutes well spent. YouTube has a plethora of videos. What's stopping you? Even if you feel a bit silly doing it initially, trust me the results are worth it!

**Set Boundaries:** Don't be hesitant to establish boundaries with individuals or circumstances that support unfavorable viewpoints. It's critical to safeguard your emotional health.

Challenging unfavorable attitudes and beliefs is a continuous process that calls for commitment and self-compassion. By putting these tactics into practice, you may start to transform your self-perception, increase your self-esteem, and develop a more upbeat, powerful mentality that enables you to flourish and realise your full potential. Keep in mind that you have the power to choose your route and write your own story.

## **How To Manage Physical Symptoms of Anxiety**

I'm a big fan of the holistic approach to managing physical symptoms of anxiety. These consider lifestyle modifications and coping mechanisms specific to your needs. Physical symptoms of anxiety can interfere with your general health. Here are some crucial pointers to assist you in successfully managing these symptoms:

**Regular Exercise:** Exercising regularly is a highly effective technique to lower anxiety. Endorphins are naturally uplifting chemicals released during exercise. You can benefit greatly from activities like yoga, swimming, jogging, or anything that raises your heart rate. I love high intensity workouts and there are so many free ones on YouTube – you will be spoilt for choice.

**Diet:** Eating a balanced diet can have a big impact on anxiety. Consuming too many sweets and caffeine will make anxiety symptoms worse. Emphasise healthy meals, fruits, vegetables, and lean proteins to supply your body and mind with the nutrients they require. Get the recommended amount of sleep. Lack of sleep can dramatically exacerbate anxiety symptoms. Spend 7-9 hours each night getting a good night's sleep. Practices like mindfulness and meditation can make you more conscious of your bodily sensations and how they relate to worry. Better symptom management and emotional control may result from this. Personally, I use a meditation app at bedtime, it literally is just 5 minutes. You put in how you are feeling, and it produces a tailored meditation just for you.

**Professional Support:** When we have toothache we visit the dentist, so why is there still a stigma around seeking mental health support? If you need it – do it. There's so many people out there willing and able to help. I for one am one of them (but I'm not here to advertise my services – but know that I do help people just like you). Spend time with loved ones, indulge in hobbies, and unwind. Physical symptoms of anxiety can be positively impacted by reducing stress in your life.

It's crucial to keep in mind that anxiety management is a continuous effort. It's important to test out various techniques and, where required, seek professional advice because what works for one person might not work for another. You can successfully manage the physical symptoms of anxiety and enhance your general well-being by using a holistic strategy that combines self-care and, if necessary, professional support.

### **Relaxation Techniques and Mindfulness Exercises**

People seeking balance and inner serenity in their fast-paced lives will find relaxation techniques and mindfulness exercises to be helpful tools. The pressures of modern life, which frequently involve balancing work, family, and social obligations, can be too much to handle. Thankfully, these techniques offer a haven for you to rediscover yourself, lower your stress levels, and improve your general well-being.

You can concentrate on the present moment by practising mindfulness since these activities assist people to be present now. Mindful breathing is a popular method that involves taking slow, deep breaths while paying particular attention to the sensations of each inhalation and exhalation. This can aid in calming the mind and reducing anxiety. Another technique that promotes self-awareness and acceptance is mindful meditation, which helps people better understand themselves.

Yoga is an age-old discipline that incorporates breathing exercises, bodily postures, and meditation. Yoga is a popular relaxation practice because it increases flexibility, lowers stress, and fosters a solid mind-body connection. Additionally, frequent exercise, such as brisk walking or swimming, is a great method to release endorphins, which have been shown to have mood-enhancing effects.

Physical stress can be efficiently reduced by using a technique called progressive muscle relaxation (PMR), which involves methodically tensing and releasing different muscle groups. You can learn to identify and manage stress-related symptoms including headaches, muscle discomfort, and weariness by becoming more aware of your body.

It can be transformational to incorporate these practices into daily activities. Creating a calm environment, engaging in deep breathing exercises, and practising meditation can provide a haven from the stress of daily life. These methods, whether they involve mindfulness or physical activity, will enable you to put self-care first, find peace of mind, and lead a more balanced life. You will find that you will be able to better confront life's obstacles with poise and resilience by taking care of your mental and physical well-being, which will ultimately result in happier and healthier living.

### **Seeking Professional Help**

As I mentioned before, you shouldn't feel bad or a failure because you are seeking support. Often it is the first step in addressing the special demands of mental, emotional, and physical health.

In a culture where people are frequently held to unattainable norms, professionals can help you develop resilience, self-worth, and self-esteem. Take it, it's there for you.

### **CHAPTER THREE: BUILDING A FEAR-FREE LIFE**

As I've discussed, health anxiety can be debilitating. So, how do you start the journey towards fear free living? This is the golden question, and for anyone who has already accepted their health anxiety, this is the ultimate step.

If you are ready to claim the next step, here's a few actions you can take to get you on that path;

- **Challenge your negative thoughts.** When you have a negative thought about your health, ask yourself if there is any evidence to support it. If there is no evidence, or if the evidence is weak, challenge the thought and replace it with a more realistic one.

Negative thoughts are often at the root of health anxiety. People with health anxiety may have thoughts such as:

- "I'm going to get sick and die."
- "I have a serious illness, even though the doctor said I'm fine."
- "I can't trust my body."
- "I'm going to lose control."

Challenging negative thoughts can help to reduce anxiety symptoms and improve quality of life. When you challenge your negative thoughts, you are asking yourself if there is any evidence to support them. If there is no evidence, or if the evidence is weak, you can replace the negative thought with a more realistic one.

For example, if you have the thought, "I'm going to get sick and die," you can ask yourself:

- Is there any evidence to support this thought?
- What are the chances that I will get sick and die?
- What are the chances that I will live a long and healthy life?

Once you have considered the evidence, you can replace the negative thought with a more realistic one, such as:

- "I am healthy and well today."
- "I am taking care of myself by eating healthy, exercising regularly, and getting enough sleep."
- "I have a good doctor who I can trust to help me if I do get sick."

Challenging negative thoughts can be difficult at first, but it is a skill that can be learned with practice. The more you challenge your negative thoughts, the easier it will become.

Here are some tips for challenging negative thoughts:

- Identify your negative thoughts. The first step is to identify the negative thoughts that you have about your health. Once you are aware of your negative thoughts, you can start to challenge them.
- Ask yourself if there is any evidence to support your negative thoughts. If there is no evidence, or if the evidence is weak, you can replace the negative thought with a more realistic one.
- Consider the consequences of your negative thoughts. How do your negative thoughts make you feel? How do they affect your behaviour? Realising the negative consequences of your negative thoughts can help you to motivate yourself to change them.
- Replace your negative thoughts with more realistic ones. Once you have challenged your negative thoughts, you can replace them with more realistic ones. Be sure to choose thoughts that are balanced and fair.
- Be patient and persistent. It takes time and effort to learn how to challenge negative thoughts. Don't get discouraged if you don't see results immediately. Just keep practicing and you will eventually see improvement.

### **Expose yourself to your fears.**

One of the best ways to overcome your fears is to expose yourself to them in a controlled way. This is called exposure therapy. Exposure therapy is a type of cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) that has been shown to be effective for a variety of anxiety disorders, including health anxiety.

The idea behind exposure therapy is that by gradually exposing yourself to your feared situations or objects, you can learn to tolerate them and reduce your anxiety. At first, exposure therapy may be difficult, but it is important to stick with it. The more you expose yourself to your fears, the less scary they will become.

Here are some tips for exposing yourself to your fears:

- Start with small steps. Don't try to expose yourself to your biggest fear right away. Start with something that is less scary and gradually work your way up to more challenging situations.
- Make a plan. Once you have chosen a situation to expose yourself to, plan for how you are going to do it. What will you do if you start to feel anxious? How long will you expose yourself to the situation?
- Expose yourself gradually. Don't try to expose yourself to your fear for too long at once. Start with a short amount of time and gradually increase the amount of time you expose yourself.
- Reward yourself. When you expose yourself to your fear, reward yourself for your accomplishment. This will help you to stay motivated and to continue exposing yourself. My reward was always a large lump of dark chocolate!

Here are some examples of how you can expose yourself to your fears if you have health anxiety:

- If you are afraid of going to the doctor, start by going for a routine checkup. Once you have done that, you can gradually expose yourself to more challenging situations, such as having a blood test or getting a physical exam.
- If you are afraid of getting sick, start by reading about different illnesses and the symptoms associated with them. Once you have a better understanding of illnesses, you can start to expose yourself to situations that may trigger your anxiety, such as being around someone who is sick or watching a medical documentary.
- If you are afraid of dying, start by thinking about your own mortality. What does it mean to die? What happens to people after they die? Once you have a better understanding of death, you can start to expose yourself to situations that may trigger your anxiety, such as visiting a cemetery or watching a movie about death.

**Practice relaxation techniques.** Relaxation techniques can be helpful by reducing stress and anxiety symptoms. When you are relaxed, your body releases hormones that have a calming effect. This can help to reduce your heart rate, blood pressure, and breathing rate.

Here are a few of my favourite techniques:

- **Deep breathing:** Deep breathing is a simple but effective relaxation technique. To do deep breathing, sit or lie down in a comfortable position. Place one hand on your chest and the other hand on your stomach. Breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose. As you breathe in, your stomach should rise. Breathe out slowly through your mouth. As you breathe out, your stomach should fall. Continue breathing deeply and slowly for 5-10 minutes.
- **Meditation:** Meditation is a practice that involves focusing your attention on the present moment. There are many different types of meditation, but they all involve focusing your attention on your breath, your body sensations, or a mantra.
- **Progressive muscle relaxation:** Progressive muscle relaxation is a technique that involves tensing and relaxing different muscle groups in your body. To do progressive muscle relaxation, start by tensing the muscles in your toes. Hold the tension for 5 seconds and then relax the muscles for 30 seconds. Continue tensing and relaxing the muscles in your body, working your way up to your neck and head.
- **Visualisation:** Visualisation is a technique that involves using your imagination to create relaxing images. To do visualisation, close your eyes and imagine yourself in a peaceful and relaxing place. This could be a beach, a forest, or a mountaintop. Pay attention to all the details of the scene, such as the sights, sounds, smells, and sensations.

You can practice relaxation techniques at any time, but it is especially helpful to practice them when you are feeling anxious. You can also practice relaxation techniques before bed to help you to fall asleep more easily.

Here are some tips for practicing relaxation techniques:

- Find a quiet and comfortable place where you will not be disturbed.
- Close your eyes and focus on your breath.
- Take slow and deep breaths.
- If your mind wanders, gently bring it back to your breath.
- Don't judge yourself if your mind wanders. It is normal for your mind to wander during relaxation. Just gently bring it back to your breath.
- Be patient. It takes time and practice to learn how to relax. Don't get discouraged if you don't feel relaxed right away. Just keep practicing and you will eventually see improvement.

Here are some additional tips that may be helpful:

- Find a support group. There are many support groups available for people with health anxiety. Joining a support group can be a great way to connect with others

who understand what you are going through and to learn from each other's experiences.

- If you aren't already a member of my Facebook community '**Overcoming Health Anxiety Together**' -This group is unique and amazing! Its not your regular Facebook community group where people post their problems and others scramble around answering them as best they can – all in aid of trying to help that person feel better – My group is a place to be empowered – to learn, to develop and to move forwards. Take as much from it as you would like – get involved as much or as little as you like. Its designed just for you!
- Read self-help books. There are several self-help books available on the topic of health anxiety. These books can provide you with information and advice on how to manage your anxiety. Here are a few I have read and can recommend:
- Mind What You Think by Dr Karen Graham
- Why Has Nobody Told Me This Before? by Dr Julie Smith
- How To Stop Overthinking by Chase Hill
- Self Help For Your Nerves – by Claire Weeks

## **IDENTIFYING YOUR FEARS AND TRIGGERS**

There are several reasons why it is important to identify your fears and triggers.

- To understand your condition. Identifying your fears and triggers can help you to better understand your condition and how it affects them. This knowledge can be empowering and can help you to feel more in control of your anxiety.
- Once people know what triggers your anxiety, you can start to develop coping strategies to manage your symptoms. For example, if you find that reading news stories about health problems triggers your anxiety, try avoiding reading these stories.

Here are some specific examples of how identifying fears and triggers can be helpful:

- You may be afraid of going to the doctor because you are worried about being diagnosed with a serious illness. If you can identify this fear as a trigger, you can start to develop coping strategies, such as bringing a friend or family member to the appointment or asking the doctor to explain the results of any tests in detail.
- You may be triggered by seeing or hearing about other people's illnesses. If you can identify this trigger, you can avoid watching or reading news stories about health problems, and you can also ask your friends and family to avoid talking about their own health problems in front of you.
- You may be triggered by certain physical sensations, such as a headache or a stomach-ache. If you can identify these triggers, you can develop coping

strategies, such as practicing relaxation techniques or reminding yourself that these sensations are normal and do not necessarily indicate a serious illness.

- Journal each day and be specific. The more specific you can be about your triggers, the better. For example, instead of just writing "going to the doctor" as a trigger, write "seeing a white coat" or "hearing the sound of a blood pressure cuff."
- Be honest. It can be difficult to admit to yourself and others what your triggers are, but it is important to be honest. The more you understand your triggers, the better you can manage your anxiety.

Here are some additional tips for identifying health anxiety triggers:

- Pay attention to your physical symptoms. Any physical symptom, such as a headache, stomach-ache, or chest pain, can also be a trigger for health anxiety.
- Think about your recent stressors. Stressful life events, such as a job loss, a death in the family, or a major change in your life, can also be triggers for health anxiety.
- Consider your media consumption. How much news do you watch or read? Do you follow health-related accounts on social media? Exposure to negative news and health-related stories can trigger health anxiety.
- Be mindful of your conversations with others. Talking to friends or family members about health problems can trigger your own anxiety. If you find yourself getting anxious after talking about health problems, try to limit these conversations.

## **Developing Coping Mechanisms**

Coping mechanisms are important because they help us to manage stress, deal with difficult emotions, and solve problems. When we have effective coping mechanisms, we are better able to adapt to change, and live happier and healthier lives.

It is important to note that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to coping. What works for one person may not work for another. It is important to find coping mechanisms that work for you and that you feel comfortable using.

## **Setting Realistic Goals**

Setting realistic goals and being kind to yourself are important aspects of combating health anxiety.

Realistic goals are more achievable. When you set unrealistic goals, you are setting yourself up for failure. This can lead to disappointment, frustration, and increased

anxiety. Achievable goals boost your confidence. When you achieve your goals, it boosts your confidence and self-esteem. This can help you to feel more in control of your health anxiety and improve your overall well-being. Being kind to yourself helps you to stay motivated. When you are kind to yourself, you are more likely to stick to your goals and keep moving forward.

Start small. Don't try to change everything all at once. Start by setting small, achievable goals, such as going for a walk for 30 minutes each day or eating one healthy meal per day. Be specific. When you set a goal, be as specific as possible. For example, instead of saying "I want to reduce my anxiety," say "I want to reduce the number of times I have a panic attack to once per week."

Be flexible. Things don't always go according to plan. If you have a setback, don't beat yourself up about it. Just pick yourself up and keep going. Celebrate your successes. When you achieve a goal, take the time to celebrate your success. This will help you to stay motivated and keep moving forward. Be kind to yourself. Remember that you are not alone. Health anxiety is a common condition. Be patient with yourself and give yourself the time and space you need to heal.

Here are some specific examples of realistic goals and acts of self-kindness that may be helpful for people with health anxiety:

- Realistic goal: I will go for a 30-minute walk three times per week.
- Act of self-kindness: I will give myself a break from social media if I find it triggering my anxiety.
- Realistic goal: I will eat one healthy meal per day.
- Act of self-kindness: I will take a relaxing bath or shower when I am feeling anxious.
- Realistic goal: I will ask my doctor for a referral to a therapist.
- Act of self-kindness: I will forgive myself if I have a setback.

## **Taking Small Steps Forward**

When seeking personal development, achieving objectives, or overcoming obstacles in life, taking tiny steps ahead is frequently the most effective strategy. This approach places a strong emphasis on consistency, patience, and sustainable improvement even though it might not produce quick, noticeable benefits. The purpose of doing this is to make it simpler to stay motivated and keep moving forward by breaking down larger, frightening goals into smaller, doable activities. Even if they may appear insignificant, even small accomplishments can feel rewarding. Every activity finished gives you a psychological lift, supporting your conviction that you can make progress.

These comparatively insignificant successes might add up over time and result in important life changes. Making incremental progress can be the key to success when beginning a new exercise regimen, learning a new skill, or working on a challenging assignment. Additionally, making modest changes enables adaptability. Considering that the investment is not too large, it is simpler to change course when necessary and bounce back from failures. This adaptability lowers failure anxiety and promotes a growth mentality. People who take baby steps perceive setbacks as opportunities to learn and advance rather than as insurmountable hurdles.

The growth of discipline is another benefit of this strategy. Individuals develop the ability to prioritise work, efficiently manage their time, and cultivate the endurance required to overcome hurdles by continuously taking little steps toward a goal. This discipline has benefits that transcend beyond the short-term objective and can improve many facets of life. A practical and long-lasting strategy for goal achievement and personal development is to move forward incrementally. It promotes tenacity, flexibility, self-control, and optimism. No matter how big or little your goals are, adopting this approach can help you make progress that lasts.

### **Celebrating Your Successes**

Celebrating your accomplishments is crucial for both personal development and well-being. It's a meaningful representation of your achievements, not just a transient moment of satisfaction. When you celebrate your victories, you recognise your effort and commitment and show yourself the respect and admiration you deserve.

An effective motivator is a celebration. It serves as confirmation that your efforts have paid off and can increase your self-assurance, motivating you to set new objectives and take on greater difficulties. It serves as a reminder that change is possible and that you can realise your goals.

Appreciating your achievements might improve your mental and emotional well-being in general. As your attention is drawn away from the daily grind and toward the pleasant aspects of your life, it can help to lessen tension and worry. It promotes optimism and might help you feel appreciative of your accomplishments. Celebrating victories can improve your connections and foster a sense of community. By recognising your successes, you excite and inspire others by demonstrating to them the power of perseverance and hard effort.

There are many ways to celebrate, from intimate rituals to large-scale gatherings. Simple examples are going out to eat at your favourite restaurant or taking the day off to unwind. Alternatively, they can entail planning an event, having a party, or posting about your successes online. The secret is to pick a celebration that speaks to you and is in line with the importance of your achievement. Celebrating your accomplishments is essential to your well-being and personal development. It encourages motivation, reduces stress, and promotes thankfulness and wholesome connections. It serves as a reminder that your efforts have been worthwhile and that you still have room for growth.

## CHAPTER FOUR: SELF-CARE

Self-care is the practice of taking care of your physical, mental, and emotional health. It is important for everyone, but it is especially important for people with health anxiety.

Self-care can help you to manage stress, reduce anxiety, and improve your overall well-being. When you are taking care of yourself, you are better able to cope with difficult emotions, solve problems, and make healthy choices.

Here are some of the benefits of self-care:

Self-care can help to reduce stress by helping you to relax, calm down, and think more clearly. Self-care can also improve your physical health by reducing stress, improving sleep quality, and boosting your immune system. You will also find that self-care increases your productivity by helping you to focus better and managing your time more effectively.

Self-care can help to improve your relationships by helping you to be more present and engaged with others, and by reducing stress and conflict. It also gives a greater sense of purpose by helping you to connect with your values and goals, and by living a more authentic life.

Self-care is not selfish. It is essential for your overall well-being. When you take care of yourself, you are better able to take care of others and to live a fulfilling life.

Here are some examples of self-care activities:

- Eating a healthy diet, getting enough sleep, exercising regularly, and getting regular medical checkups.
- Practicing relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, meditation, and yoga; spending time in nature; and engaging in activities that you enjoy.
- Setting boundaries, saying no, expressing your feelings, and spending time with loved ones.
- Set realistic goals. Don't try to change everything all at once. Start by setting small, achievable goals, such as going for a walk for 30 minutes each day or eating one healthy meal per day.
- Be kind to yourself. Remember that you are not alone. Health anxiety is a common condition. Be patient with yourself and give yourself the time and space you need to heal.

Self-care is an ongoing journey. There will be times when you are better at taking care of yourself than others. That's okay. Just keep trying and you will eventually find a self-care routine that works for you.

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-CARE**

It's so easy for us to forget and avoid our own self-care. In the hustle and bustle of everyday life, self-care is a vital component of a woman's life that frequently goes unnoticed. It goes beyond occasionally treating yourself to a spa day or indulging in a box of chocolates. Self-care is a holistic strategy for promoting your physical, mental, and emotional well-being. The many roles that we frequently juggle is one of the main reasons why self-care is so important.

Self-care can prevent burnout and a decline in general quality of life. With self-care you can recharge, restore vitality, and keep giving your best efforts in all facets of your life.

### **Dr. Google:**

I'll be the first to admit: I used to love "Doctor Google." Previously, I've believed I've had as many as six impossible health conditions at once!

I'll also be the first to admit that this behaviour is not ideal. Engaging in this activity isn't healthy. It doesn't make me feel better. It probably doesn't make anyone else who's doing it feel much better, either.

### **Why Mental Health Self-Diagnosis is Dangerous**

I spent hour upon hour, day after day on the internet, seeking advice and reassurance. Doctor Google became my best friend. Whilst it is great to get immediate information at the tip of your fingertips, Doctor Google is a slippery slope.

Due to the complexity in many diagnoses along with misinformation on the internet, you can simply look up a few keywords and think that you have a health diagnosis that may not be accurate. It can quickly spiral into a vast array of either first person experiences, or unreliable sources, which can lead to more confusion."

Googling can cause your thoughts to spiral into catastrophic thinking, worst case scenarios, and a vicious cycle of anxiety. Once you're in the cycle, it can really be hard to stop. Even though you might originally find it soothing to look into your symptoms and find "answers," it soon backfires and can make you more scared.

Remember that many mental and physical health conditions have overlapping symptoms. And health conditions are not black and white. Reading about symptoms that are more general than specific can easily lead someone to believe they have a particular health condition.

While it's hard to break the habit, and you might not even *want* to break the habit, it's not healthy to continue. The longer you look for health answers online, the harder it'll be to break the cycle later.

One thing to try to help yourself break this habit is actively limit the time you spend Googling symptoms. If you are finding that you are frequently getting lost on the internet Googling symptoms or trying to self-diagnose, I would suggest practicing using a timer. Setting a timer to begin to set limits on how long you are spending time Googling symptoms is a way to take back control.

Stick to time limits and try to completely avoid researching outside of that dedicated limited time. As days go by, you can continue to wean down the amount of time you spend online.

Another technique to keep you from self-diagnosing is distraction. When you feel like doing some Googling distract yourself by doing something else — going for a run, calling up a friend, watching some funny videos, whatever will get you out of your habit.

## CHAPTER FIVE: LIVING A FEAR-FREE LIFE

A profound desire that cuts beyond decades, cultures, and geographic boundaries is to live fearlessly as a woman. For women to negotiate life with confidence and resilience, overcoming fear is a necessary step toward personal development and empowerment. Women nowadays confront a variety of difficulties, such as gender-based violence and discrimination, as well as societal norms and prejudices. Women must release these restrictions and develop inner strength and self-assurance if they want to live a life free from fear. This approach frequently starts with accepting oneself and one's individuality, realizing that each woman has her journey and shouldn't ever be defined by outside norms.

Knowledge and education are effective methods for overcoming fear. Women can find chances and become less susceptible to frightening situations if they are encouraged to pursue education and acquire skills. A safety net where women can rely on one another for support and encouragement can also be created through establishing a feeling of community and mutual aid. A fear-free life can only be attained through self-care and mental health. Anxiety and stress can be managed by engaging in mindfulness practices, meditation, and when required, seeking professional assistance. Additionally, being physically strong and healthy can give women confidence in their bodies and a sense of empowerment.

A life free from fear requires promoting women's rights and gender equality. Promoting equal chances and dismantling gender-based preconceptions and biases helps to build a society where women can prosper without having to worry about injustice or discrimination. It takes time, perseverance, and support to live a life free from fear as a woman. The fact that women continue to fight for a world where fear is replaced with confidence and where women may realize their dreams without reservation or reluctance is a credit to their tenacity and tenacity.

### **How To Let Go Of Perfectionism**

Perfectionism is a common mentality that can limit happiness and personal development. One must start a journey of self-awareness and self-compassion if they are to let go of perfectionism. Instead of aiming for perfection, concentrate on making progress and accepting flaws. Realizing that no one is flawless and that's okay is the first step in doing this. Setting reasonable expectations and goals is one way to break free from perfectionism. Recognize that failure is not a result of making mistakes and facing setbacks; rather, it is a natural part of life. Perfectionism frequently feeds on impossibly high standards, so it's imperative to reevaluate and modify your objectives to be more realistic.

By being nice and understanding to yourself, cultivate self-compassion. Instead of being hard on yourself, encourage yourself. Mindfulness is another powerful tactic. Instead of ruminating over the past or fretting about the future, be present in the moment. You can better enjoy the journey and the lessons you learn along the way by practising mindfulness. Be in the company of encouraging people who accept you for who you are, flaws and all. If perfectionism is adversely affecting your well-being, get advice from close friends, relatives, or experts.

Finally, be flexible and open to change. Accept life's uncertainty and unpredictability because it can bring about new chances and personal development. Although letting up of perfectionism is a lifelong effort, it frees you from the limitations of unreachable standards and enables you to live life more fully.

### **How To Embrace Uncertainty**

A skill that can promote resilience and personal growth is learning to embrace ambiguity. It entails a basic mental shift that makes it easier for people to deal with life's uncertainties. People who welcome uncertainty

See it as a chance for exploration and learning rather than something to be feared. They recognize that since life is essentially unpredictable, trying to control every part of it is pointless and can even make people stressed and anxious. It is necessary to practice mindfulness and self-awareness to accept ambiguity.

This entails acknowledging rather than repressing your worries and anxiety about the future. You can start to let go of the requirement for complete assurance and control by becoming aware of and accepting these emotions.

Reframing uncertainty as an opportunity for growth is a crucial part of embracing uncertainty. Uncertainty frequently ushers in fresh challenges and experiences that can advance one's character. People who accept it are more likely to adjust to and gain wisdom from unforeseen circumstances, which can ultimately result in increased resilience. Accepting uncertainty entails letting go of the notion that fulfilment and success depend on a preset plan. More spontaneity and the capacity to take advantage of chances that might not have been in the original plan are made possible as a result.

People may accept uncertainty by being patient, having reasonable expectations, and concentrating on the here and now rather than worrying excessively about the future.

Adopting these methods can help people feel more empowered and liberated in the face of life's inherent volatility.

### **How To Live in The Present Moment**

Being mindfully present in the moment calls for a conscious effort and a change in perspective. It entails putting all of one's attention into the present moment rather than worrying about the past or the future. One must practice mindfulness, a discipline based on awareness, acceptance, and appreciation of the present moment, to genuinely live in the now. Letting go of the past is a crucial component of living in the present. This entails putting the weight of regret and shame behind the past and forgiving oneself. It's about choosing to concentrate on the potential of the present and realizing that the past cannot be changed.

One of the most effective methods for being present in the moment is mindfulness meditation. It nudges us to keep an objective eye on our ideas and feelings. By doing this, we can gain a deeper understanding of our thought processes and choose consciously to stay in the present moment. Immersion in the task or activity at hand is another smart tactic. This can be as easy as fully engaged in a conversation, enjoying a meal without interruptions, or working on a creative endeavour. We become more engaged in the event when we give the task at hand our full concentration.

Additionally, cultivating thankfulness is essential for staying in the present. We may appreciate the present moment rather than take it for granted by thinking back on the good things in life.

Living in the present now entails accepting the past, letting go of worry about the future, engaging in current activities, practising mindfulness, and cultivating thankfulness. It involves appreciating the richness of the present and discovering contentment there. We can live a fuller, more meaningful life by doing this.

### **How To Find Your Purpose and Meaning In Life**

Finding your life's meaning and purpose requires a lot of introspection and is not something that can be broken down into a simple process or checklist. It's a journey that calls for introspection, exploration, and a readiness to accept change. To help you on your contemplative journey, consider the following unlisted insights:

**Soul-searching:** Asking oneself difficult questions is frequently the first step in discovering your purpose. Investigate your deepest passions, values, and aspirations. What pursuits cause you to become time-disoriented? What stirs up your soul? Self-analysis is crucial.

**Accept ambiguity:** Life's purpose can change over time and is not always clear-cut. It's acceptable to not have a firm response right away. As you learn and develop, remain adaptable and open to change.

**Mentorship:** Seek out mentors, friends, or role models who may impart their life experiences and perspectives as sources of inspiration and direction. Learning from others can offer insightful information and new perspectives to consider. Don't wait for

your purpose to be completely disclosed before acting; just do it. Start by pursuing your passions and taking part in pursuits that are consistent with your ideals. Finding your mission in life is frequently best done by experiencing it.

**Contribute:** A source of purpose frequently having a beneficial impact on the world. Think about how your passions and skills may benefit others or a bigger cause.

**Overcome difficulties:** Obstacles and failures are a necessary part of life's journey. Consider them opportunities to develop, learn, and clarify your mission rather than obstacles.

Develop self-awareness by regularly engaging in mindfulness and introspection. You can better comprehend your desires and intentions by using these ways to communicate with your inner self. Keep an open mind because purpose sometimes shows up in unexpected situations or through unexpected experiences. Be receptive to chances and seize chances as they come your way.

**Engage your intuition:** it often holds the secret to your life's purpose. Pay attention to your gut instincts and follow them. Celebrate the journey because discovering your mission is a never-ending process.

Accept the challenge, acknowledge your successes, and have patience with yourself as you keep in mind that your search for meaning, and purpose is an individual and individual path. Your journey might not resemble anyone else's, and that is just acceptable. Accept the learning, development, and fulfillment that discovering your purpose may bring to your life.

AND FINALLY...

I am hopeful for a world without health anxiety. I hope that one day, everyone will understand this condition and be able to access the support they need to overcome it. I hope that people with health anxiety will feel empowered to speak out about their experiences and challenge the stigma that surrounds this condition.

I am also hopeful for the future of us all. I believe that we can all become empowered to take charge of our own mental health. We can learn to identify and challenge our negative thoughts and develop coping mechanisms to deal with anxiety and stress. We can also support each other and build a community of understanding and acceptance.

If you are struggling with health anxiety, please know that you are not alone. There are people who care about you and want to help. This very much includes me – reach out should you need my help.

As always, be kind to yourself

Amyx