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What Is Anxiety ... And 5 Reasons Why It's Useful!

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How often in a day do you hear the media, family, colleagues or friends talk about feelings of anxiety (“I’m so anxious right now, I can’t even think” “I was so stressed I had a panic attack” “I’m anxious *all the time*”)? Sometimes we hear these words, or even use these words, but we may not know their true meaning. And sometimes we fight against these feelings, not wanting or not realising that they can actually be useful. Following is some information about anxiety, and why it might be useful (in the right doses, of course).

What is anxiety?

We often feel stressed or anxious when we’re in a difficult situation (such as flying or public speaking), and for most of us, these feelings subside after we’ve left the situation. However, sometimes people experience anxiety all the time or about multiple topics, or their feelings of anxiety stop them from doing things.

Anxious thoughts can include “What if ...”, “Something bad will happen”, “I’ll die”, “People will think I’m silly”, “People will laugh at me”.

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Anxious feelings can include worry and being unable to stop worrying, irritability, restlessness, edginess, or even feeling detached from yourself and your surroundings.

Anxious behaviours may involve avoiding people or situations, not engaging in enjoyable activities, finding it difficult to concentrate, or doing the same activity repeatedly/precisely/the same to avoid something bad happening or to feel less anxious.

And physically you may have hot and cold flushes, sweaty palms, a racing heart, a tightening in your chest, muscle pain or headaches, dizziness, shortness of breath, nauseous, numbness, or disturbances in your appetite and sleep.

What causes it?

It's often a combination of things. Genetics, ongoing stressful events, personality, physical health problems, trauma exposure, thinking styles, behavioural styles, and/or substance use can all contribute to feelings of anxiety.

However, anxiety does have its plusses ("That's not possible", I hear you say).

Anxiety can ...

1. **It can make us more alert** – like when we're walking down a dark street, or sitting an exam – mild levels of anxiety help us to concentrate and even help us perform better.
2. **It can signal impending danger** – like if we were to hear an alarm go off while at work, or if we were to step out into traffic – our anxious response alerts us

to potential danger.

3. **It can be a motivator** – like finishing a task, or tidying up before people come over – anxiety about consequences can push us to complete tasks.
4. **It can help us prepare** – like preparing for that public talk, or preparing for a job interview – anxiety can help us to focus on the tasks so that we do them well.
5. **It helps us to talk about what's going on** – anxiety can be that nudge that helps us to tell those around us how we're feeling, which often means by sharing our challenges we feel heard or we seek assistance.

But know that for some people, feeling anxious can be addictive. Because anxiety is a state they've always known, when they feel calm they may get bored, feel empty, or it may make them anxious again.

To experience occasional stress or anxiety in our everyday life is normal. And generally it often goes away by itself; or can be managed by keeping a routine, having people you can talk to, using relaxation strategies, and sleeping, eating and exercising well. However, if your anxiety is having a negative impact on your life, seeking professional assistance could be useful.

If you would like help in managing your thoughts, feelings or behaviours, please feel free to contact us on 0488 954 195, amanda@awakenpsychology.com.au or [click here](#)

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