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Overcoming Anxiety

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DUMMIES®

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- Cope with situations that cause anxiety
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Charles H. Elliott, PhD

Laura L. Smith, PhD

*Authors of Depression For Dummies
and Anxiety & Depression Workbook
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***Overcoming
Anxiety***
FOR
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**by Charles H. Elliott, PhD, and
Laura L. Smith, PhD**



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Dedication

We dedicate this book to our growing, changing families — Brian, Alli, Sara, and Trevor. And of course to our grandchildren: Cade, Carter, Alaina, and Lauren. Thanks for the excitement — of course, *enough is enough* sometimes!

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Introduction

The idea of a self-help book on anxiety in the *For Dummies* series germinated in the summer of 2001. At the time, we wondered how the audience would react to a book with a title like *Overcoming Anxiety For Dummies*. Would potential readers feel turned off or insulted by the title? Would they think such a book would be condescending and “dummied down?”

A few people did respond negatively, and a couple of e-mails made us a tad anxious. Like most folks, we find that criticism stings. But we were surprised and gratified at the overwhelmingly positive responses we got from the majority of readers who contacted us.

People all over the world e-mailed us to say that they had found this book to be one of the most comprehensive and accessible books on anxiety they had ever read. Some told us that for the first time in their lives, anxiety no longer dominated their lives. We were also thrilled to discover that many counselors, therapists, and psychologists reported using the book as a supplement to psychotherapy sessions for their anxious patients.

When our editors approached us about updating *Overcoming Anxiety For Dummies*, we took some time to think about what had happened in the world since we wrote the first edition. As we reflected on this issue, we realized that the world has changed a lot in the nine years since the first edition appeared on bookshelves. We have more to worry about than ever. Because of these growing, emerging sources of worry, we felt a need to include information in this book that addresses them.

For example, some airport security areas now have equipment that takes a *virtual naked* picture of you as you enter. We’ve suffered through what’s currently called the Great Recession, and at the time of this writing, it’s unclear where the world economy is headed. People worry about getting jobs, keeping jobs, and fragile dreams of retirement. The globalization of economies and travel have made the spread of pandemics faster and potentially more deadly than ever. Environmental worries have escalated; the viciousness of Mother Nature has frequently flashed across our computer and TV screens. The spread of nuclear weapons continues, and worries abound about war, crime, and terror. Children are frightened by stories about abuse and violence on the Internet and TV, while their worried parents increasingly restrict their lives.

So today's world gives us plenty to worry about, as it always has. But just as we don't want to become victims of terror, we can't let ourselves become victims of anxiety. Anxiety clouds our thinking and weakens our resolve to live life to the fullest. We realize that some anxiety is realistic and inescapable; yet, we can keep it from dominating our lives. Even under duress, we can preserve a degree of serenity; we can hold onto our humanity, vigor, and zest for life. We can love and laugh.

Because we believe in our collective resilience, we take a humorous, and at times irreverent, approach to conquering anxiety. Our message is based on sound, scientifically proven methods. But we don't bore you with the scientific details. Instead, we present a clear, rapid-fire set of strategies for beating back anxiety and winning the war against worry.

About This Book

We have three goals in writing this book. First, we want you to understand just what anxiety is and the different forms it can take. Second, we think that knowing what's good about anxiety and what's bad about it is good for you. Finally, we cover what you're probably most interested in — discovering the latest techniques for overcoming your anxiety and helping someone else who has anxiety.

Unlike most books, you don't have to start on page 1 and read straight through. Use the extensive table of contents to pick and choose what you want to read. Don't worry about reading parts in any particular order. For example, if you really don't want much information about the who, what, when, where, and why of anxiety and whether you have it, go ahead and skip Part I. However, we encourage you to at least skim Part I, because it contains fascinating facts and information as well as ideas for getting started.

An Important Message to Our Readers

Since the first edition of *Overcoming Anxiety For Dummies*, we've made a point of commenting on our use of humor in these books. Although topics like anxiety, depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and borderline personality disorder are serious, painful subjects, we believe that laughter, like a little sugar, helps the medicine go down and the message come through. We hope you agree.

This book is meant to be a guide to overcoming a mental state or disorder called anxiety. It should be used to give support and information to our readers. Everyone alive suffers from anxiety from time to time. However, if your anxiety greatly interferes with your day-to-day life, restricts your activities, and robs you of pleasure, we urge you to seek professional mental healthcare.

Conventions Used in This Book

We use a lot of case examples to illustrate our points throughout this book. Please realize that these examples represent composites of people with various types of anxiety disorders. None of the examples is about real people we've seen or known. Any resemblance to a particular person is entirely coincidental. We **bold** the names of people in our examples to indicate that a case example is starting.

Psychologists use lots of jargon and acronyms. We try our best to keep these to a minimum, but sometimes we can't avoid them. When we do use a new term, we *italicize* and define it.

We also use **boldface** text to indicate keywords in a bulleted list or to highlight action parts of numbered steps. Finally, when we direct you to a Web site for additional information, it's printed in `monofont`.

What You're Not to Read

Not only do you not have to read each and every chapter in order (or at all, for that matter), you don't have to read each and every icon or sidebar (the text in the gray boxes). We try to give you plenty of current information and facts about anxiety. Some may not interest you — so don't get too anxious about skipping around.

Foolish Assumptions

Who might pick up this book? We assume, probably foolishly, that you or someone you love suffers from some type of problem with anxiety or worry. But it's also possible that you simply find the topic of anxiety interesting. We imagine that you may be curious about a variety of helpful strategies to choose from that can fit your lifestyle and personality. Finally, you may be a mental-health professional who's interested in finding a friendly resource for your clients who suffer from anxiety or worry.

How This Book Is Organized

Overcoming Anxiety For Dummies is organized into 6 parts and 23 chapters. Right now, we tell you a little about each part.

Part I: Detecting and Exposing Anxiety

In the first two chapters, you find out a great deal about anxiety — from who gets it to why people become anxious. We explain the different kinds of anxiety disorders — they're not all the same — and we tell you who is most susceptible and why.

In Chapter 3, we review the biological aspects of anxiety disorders — from the toll they take on the body to the underlying biochemical processes involved.

Chapter 4 helps you clear the roadblocks to change. You discover the most common reasons that people resist working on their anxiety and what to do if you find yourself stuck.

Part II: Battling Anxiety

In Part II, we give you an array of proven, specific strategies for battling and overcoming anxiety. We show you strategies for transforming anxious thoughts into calm thoughts. And you discover how the words that you use can increase anxiety and how simply changing your vocabulary decreases anxiety.

One of the best ways to tackle anxiety is by taking action. No wimps here. We show you how to stare your fears in the face and conquer them. In addition, we take a look at how medication can sometimes alleviate anxiety disorders. We also review the most recent biological alternatives for reducing anxiety.

Part III: Letting Go of the Battle

These chapters take a look at ways of dealing with anxiety indirectly. Changes in lifestyle such as staying connected with others, exercising, getting enough sleep, and maintaining a proper diet all help. Learning to relax through breathing exercises, muscle exercises, or conjuring up calm images can relieve anxiety passively.

Chapter 13 takes a mindful approach to managing anxiety. Mindfulness has emerged as a highly popular as well as empirically supported approach to improving emotional well-being.

Part IV: Zeroing in on Specific Worries

Part IV is a brand new part in this edition of *Overcoming Anxiety For Dummies*. The chapters in this part focus on anxieties about finances, terrorism, natural disasters, and health. You can't live a meaningful life without having some concern about issues such as these. This part gives you ways of preparing for unexpected calamities and ideas about how to accept uncertainty in an uncertain world.

Part V: Helping Others with Anxiety

What do you do when someone you love worries too much? First, we look at how you can help a significant adult in your life with anxiety. As a coach or simply a cheerleader, you can help your friend or family member conquer anxiety. In this new, expanded portion of the book, we also give you the tools to understand the differences between normal fear and anxiety in children. We also provide some simple guidelines to help out anxious kids. In addition, we talk about who to go to for help with your child and what to expect.

Part VI: The Part of Tens

If you're looking for a quick fix or a simple review, take a look at these helpful lists. You can read about ten ways to stop anxiety in its tracks, ten ways to handle relapse, and ten signs that professional help is in order.

Finally, the appendix lists books and Web sites for obtaining more information about the topics we cover in this book.

Icons Used in This Book

For Dummies books use little pictures, called *icons*, in the margins to get your attention. Here's what they mean:



The Anxiety Ax icon represents a particular action you can take to help get rid of anxiety.



The Remember icon appears when we want your attention. Please read the text associated with it for critical information.



The Tip icon alerts you to important insights or clarifications.



Warning icons appear when you need to be careful or seek professional help.

Where to Go from Here

Overcoming Anxiety For Dummies offers you the best, most up-to-date advice based on scientific research on anxiety disorders. If you want help controlling your negative thoughts, turn to Chapters 5, 6, and 7. You say you just want to relax? Try the techniques in Chapter 11. Or if you're worried about your job and finances, in Chapter 14 we provide tips for finding your next job and pinching pennies. If you practice the techniques and strategies provided throughout, you're likely to feel calmer. For many people, this book should be a complete guide to fighting frenzy and fear.

However, some stubborn forms of anxiety need more care and attention. If your anxiety and worry significantly get in the way of work or play, get help. Start with your family doctor to rule out physical causes. Then consult with a mental-health professional. Anxiety can be conquered; don't give up.

Part I

Detecting and Exposing Anxiety

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



"I think she's getting better. She bought three 'Life is Good' T-shirts yesterday."

W ***In this part . . .***

we explore the ins and outs of anxiety, discussing the anxiety epidemic that's going around and showing how anxiety affects the entire body. In this part, you can find all the major categories of anxiety disorders, along with an overview of what you can do to reduce anxiety. You discover how you can easily get stuck tackling your anxiety, and we tell you how to keep that from happening.

Chapter 1

Analyzing and Attacking Anxiety

In This Chapter

- ▶ Growing by leaps and bounds: Anxiety's proliferation
 - ▶ Paying the tab for anxiety
 - ▶ Understanding anxiety symptoms
 - ▶ Getting the help you need
-

Stroll down the street and about one in four of the people you walk by either has an anxiety disorder or will at some point in their lives experience one. And almost half of the people you encounter will struggle with anxiety to one degree or another, although they may not have a full-blown anxiety disorder. The rate of anxiety disorders has climbed for many decades, and no end is in sight.

The world watches in fear as disasters, terrorism, financial collapse, pandemics, crime, and war threaten the security of home and family. Anxiety creates havoc in the home, destroys relationships, causes employees to lose time from work, and prevents people from living full, productive lives.

In this chapter, you find out how to recognize the symptoms of anxiety. We clarify the costs of anxiety — both personal and societal. We provide a brief overview of the treatments presented in greater detail in later chapters. You also get a glimpse of how to help if someone you care about or your child has anxiety. If you worry too much or care for someone who has serious problems with anxiety, this book is here to help!

Anxiety: Everybody's Doing It

Anxiety involves feelings of uneasiness, worry, apprehension, and/or fear, and it's the most common of all the so-called mental disorders. In other words, you definitely aren't alone if you have unwanted anxiety. And the numbers have grown over the years. At no time in history has anxiety tormented more people than it does today. Why?

Life has never been as complicated as it is today. The workweek has grown longer rather than shorter. Broken and blended families create increased stresses to manage. Computer screens and television news bring the latest horrors into your living room in real time. Newspapers, blogs, tweets, and magazines chronicle crime, war, and corruption. Terrorism has crossed the globe and escalated to new heights. The media's portrayal of these modern plagues includes full-color images with unprecedented, graphic detail. Let's face it, fear sells.

Unfortunately, as stressful and anxiety-arousing as the world is today, only a minority of those suffering from anxiety seek treatment. That's a problem, because anxiety causes not only emotional pain and distress but also physical strain and even death, given that anxiety extracts a serious toll on the body and sometimes even contributes to suicide. Furthermore, anxiety costs society as a whole, to the tune of billions of dollars.

When people talk about what anxiety feels like, you may hear any or all of the following descriptions:

- ✔ When my panic attacks begin, I feel tightness in my chest. It's as though I'm drowning or suffocating, and I begin to sweat; the fear is overwhelming. I feel like I'm going to die, and I have to sit down because I may faint.
- ✔ I've always been painfully shy. I want friends, but I'm too embarrassed to call anyone. I guess I feel like anyone I call will think I'm not worth talking to.
- ✔ I wake with worry every day, even on the weekends. Ever since I lost my job, I worry all the time. Sometimes, when it's really bad, I think about going to sleep and never waking up.
- ✔ Ever since my accident, I have nightmares and constant images racing through my mind about glass breaking, tires screeching, and passengers screaming. I'm so jumpy and irritable that I can barely get through the day.
- ✔ I'm so afraid of flying that I can't travel, even though I'd like to.
- ✔ I worry about germs and contamination so much that I wash my hands about 30 times a day — my hands are raw and bleeding. I just can't stop.

As you can see, anxiety results in all sorts of thoughts, behaviors, and feelings. When your anxiety begins to interfere with day-to-day life, you need to find ways to put your fears and worries at ease.

Tabulating the Costs of Anxiety

Anxiety costs. It costs the sufferer in emotional, physical, and financial terms. But it doesn't stop there. Anxiety also incurs a financial burden for everyone. Stress, worry, and anxiety disrupt relationships, work, and family.

The heartbreak of anxiety

Two studies have found a critical relationship between anxiety and heart disease. One investigation at Duke University divided cardiac patients into three groups: an exercise group, a stress management group, and a care-as-usual group. After five years, the stress management group had fewer additional heart-related problems than the other two groups. Although this

was a small study, one researcher concluded that managing stress and anxiety is one of the most powerful tools in fighting heart disease. The other study, published in the January 2002 issue of the journal *Stroke*, found that men who suffer from anxiety and depression are much more likely to die from strokes than those without these psychological problems.

What does anxiety cost you?

Obviously, if you have a problem with anxiety, you experience the cost of distressed, anxious feelings. Anxiety feels lousy. You don't need to read a book to know that. But did you know that untreated anxiety runs up a tab in other ways as well? These costs include

- ✔ **A physical toll:** Higher blood pressure, tension headaches, and gastrointestinal symptoms can affect your body. In fact, recent research found that certain types of chronic anxiety disorders change the makeup of your brain's structures.
- ✔ **A toll on your kids:** Parents with anxiety more often have anxious children. This is due in part to genetics, but it's also because kids learn from observation. Anxious kids may be so stressed that they can't pay attention in school.
- ✔ **Fat!** Anxiety and stress increase the stress hormone known as cortisol. *Cortisol* causes fat storage in the abdominal area, thus increasing the risk of heart disease and stroke. Stress also leads to increased eating.
- ✔ **More trips to the doctor:** That's because those with anxiety frequently experience worrisome physical symptoms. In addition, anxious people often worry a great deal about their health.
- ✔ **Relationship problems:** People with anxiety frequently feel irritable. Sometimes, they withdraw emotionally or do the opposite and dependently cling to their partners.
- ✔ **Downtime:** Those with anxiety disorders miss work more often than other people, usually as an effort to temporarily quell their distress.

Adding up the cost to society

Anxiety costs many billions of dollars worldwide. A U.S. government report says that anxiety costs more than depression, schizophrenia, or any other emotional problem. The annual tab is estimated at more than \$65 billion. The United Kingdom spent 32 billion pounds (approximately \$53 billion) on mental healthcare in 2002, a huge portion of which was spent on anxiety-related problems. Even countries that spend little on mental healthcare incur substantial costs from anxiety disorders. These costs include

- ✓ Decreased productivity
- ✓ Healthcare costs
- ✓ Medications

Decreased productivity is sometimes due to health problems made worse by anxiety. But the financial loss from downtime and healthcare costs doesn't include the dollars lost to substance abuse, which many of those with anxiety disorders turn to in order to deal with their anxiety. Thus, directly and indirectly, anxiety extracts a colossal toll on both the person who experiences it and society at large.

Recognizing the Symptoms of Anxiety

You may not know if you suffer from anxiety or an anxiety disorder. That's because anxiety involves a wide range of symptoms. Each person experiences a slightly different constellation of these symptoms. And your specific constellation determines what kind of anxiety disorder you may have. We discuss the various types of anxiety disorders in detail in Chapter 2.

For now, you should know that some signs of anxiety appear in the form of thoughts or beliefs. Other indications of anxiety manifest themselves in bodily sensations. Still other symptoms show up in various kinds of anxious behaviors. Some people experience anxiety signs in all three ways, while others only perceive their anxiety in one or two areas.

Thinking anxiously

Folks with anxiety generally think in ways that differ from the ways that other people think. You're probably thinking anxiously if you experience

- ✓ **Approval addiction:** If you're an approval addict, you worry a great deal about what other people think about you.