



## Anxiety & Fear, Body & Mind <sup>[1]</sup>

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Like all emotions, anxiety and fear are the products of physiological and psychological processes working together.

It's easy to forget that anxiety and fear are internal things, not external things. After all, we feel scared at events that happen outside of our minds, and things we become anxious about feel like physical places and events that our minds make real.

The truth to remember is that fear and anxiety are the products of our internal biological and psychological assessments of things both inside and outside of our control. We may fear the wolf that lunges toward us behind its cage at the zoo or become anxious about an upcoming job interview in similar physiological ways.

Learning about the internal mechanisms, the chemicals and patterns of thought, that lead to a fearful or anxious response can give you a wider perspective on these emotions at work.

Some people don't like acknowledging that the things they "feel" are the outcome of various biological and chemical signals spurring them into action or defense. Feelings, some may argue, should be divorced from the scientific ways they manifest themselves, as if understanding the amazing processes that allow us to feel these things somehow undermines the feelings themselves.

You are free to feel this way yourself, but this perspective has its limits. For starters, if you constantly find yourself anxious about a certain situation—maybe walking in the woods and imagining all the ways you could get lost—you externalize your own part in the design of these emotions. You may even come to think of yourself as "just this way" and not try to actively understand why you react as you do or what your body and mind are telling you about these scenarios.

Although it may seem dry on the surface, the basic functions of our emotions and their interplay of chemical messengers and physiological arousals give us a great chance to introspect, to probe what ails us and go forward with plans to help alleviate our own fears and anxieties. The truth is fear, as a response, is largely out of our conscious control. It has evolved over millions of years of evolution to automatically trigger us to fight, flee, or freeze in the face of dangerous odds or events.

Knowledge that this automatic response is also a *feeling*, a very powerful one at that, puts the entire process into greater relief. Instead of resigning yourself to "always being afraid" or "always being anxious" of certain situations, even a cursory understanding of how these

emotions affect your body and mind gives you many more avenues of thought and self-compassion to travel down. You don't have to be a passive observer of your feelings or be scared of why you're scared. Instead, you realize that your responses are natural, that everyone experiences them through the same chemical processes, and therefore feeling ashamed or embarrassed by anxious or fearful reactions won't stop them from happening.

Knowing exactly how fear and anxiety "happen" in the mind won't itself stop these feeling in their tracks, but it will give you greater perspective on how and why you may be reacting and feeling a certain way, to see patterns in your own thinking and behavior that you can work on and learn to cope with better.

In this section, we'll look at the neurological processes behind anxiety and fear. How do these emotions manifest in our bodies and minds [3], and how do these manifestations guide our behavior and thinking? What are the risks of continuous anxiety [4], and what role does genetics play [5]?

Along the way, you'll find that there is a grand evolutionary design behind these often troublesome emotions that connects you to every other human on the planet. And you'll be able to use what you learn here to increase your self-awareness and take the first steps you need to approach what situations, real or imagined, put fear in your heart or anxiety in your future.

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