



Why Learn about Fear & Anxiety? ^[1]

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Fear and anxiety are natural emotional responses to life situations. They have both positive and negative effects on our daily lives, and should be approached with curiosity and openness.

"You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You must do the thing which you think you cannot do."

—*Eleanor Roosevelt*

Fear is a primary ingredient of life; to feel fear is to feel life itself.

Fear keeps us safe from danger, motivates us to achieve, puts a wrench in our best-laid plans, and brings in billions of dollars per year in movie sales ^[3]. Depending on the circumstance, a sense of fear may save your life or convince you to botch an opportunity. Fear's close cousin, anxiety, also has a long history of helping and hindering the human race.

It goes without saying not everyone enjoys feeling scared or anxious. These are emotions, after all, which convince us things are horribly wrong, or at the very least have a high probability of going very wrong. They prime us to take action, to protect ourselves and our interests. They convince us that stakes are always sky high, life-and-death.

Besides, who wants to show compassion toward an emotion that sets our heart racing, our palms drenching, and sets off a mental hurricane of "What ifs?"

What you may not realize is that there are many benefits to their alarms having a hand in our lives, just as there are many inconveniences. When anxiety and fear take over, it can be immensely difficult to recognize their positive aspects, the opportunities they give us to learn about what scares us, and the window to react to anxiety-inducing situations with stronger purpose and understanding.

The modern age is beset with high anxiety and fear. Our interconnected world has the potential to bring doom to the doorsteps of countries and peoples on a massive scale and quicker than you can imagine. Ecological disasters and extremist behavior have never been so close to everyone on Earth. It can almost feel like the human race has a gun against its head!

Take some of these stats, for instance. They illustrate how anxious and fearful people around the world are today:

- Anxiety disorders are the most common [4] mental disorders in the world [5]. One study shows 7.3% of all people on earth [5] (520 million people) suffer from an anxiety disorder.
- As of 2015, the World Health Organization (WHO [6]) is in the midst of collecting anxiety data from 26 countries. In all but 1 of the first 14 countries surveyed [7], anxiety disorders are routinely more prevalent than mood disorders and incidents of substance abuse.
- In the United States, the average onset age for anxiety disorders is 11 years old [8], with 30% of 18 to 29-year olds and 35% of people aged 30-44 suffering from some condition. 40 million United States adults [9] suffer from some form of anxiety and only 1/3 of them get treatment.
- The UK reports 1 in 6 people [10] experience either an anxiety or depressive disorder each year, affecting 3.3% of children and young adults. 1/5th of UK citizens with anxiety do nothing to help themselves.

These numbers may surprise you, probably even frighten you. This is exactly why learning about anxiety and fear—how they work, what conditions they spawn, and ways to cope and accept them—is so vital. Our interconnectedness demands a nuanced and educated view of the best and worst of what anxiety and fear have to offer our species. And the truth is, despite the apocalyptic scenarios we imagine so easily, these emotions have a lot to add. Their praises have gone unsung in a world rattled by global threats and everyday cries of destruction, and their most extreme aspects have overshadowed rational debate or curiosity about what they help us achieve.

Plus, as a person well-acquainted with how fear and anxiety influence your personal thoughts and behaviors, you'll give yourself chance after chance to respect how these emotions protect what matters most and how living alongside them fuels some of your best aspects.

Furthermore, a wide knowledge of fear and anxiety disorders helps you empathize with the thousands of people diagnosed with these conditions every year. And investigating the untapped power of the unknown may inspire you to think of fear and anxiety as the complex tools they are—tools that you can cope with and use all throughout your life.

The goal of this course is to look at anxiety and fear from a number of biological and psychological perspectives. We'll look at the difference between anxiety and fear [11], their pros and cons [12], and the theories which explain how these emotions developed [13]. From there

we'll explore the biological mechanisms ^[14] driving them and the risks of prolonged fear and anxiety ^[15]. To learn the full scope of anxiety, we'll next discuss the most common anxiety disorders ^[16]—from Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) ^[17] to PTSD ^[18] and test anxiety ^[19]. The final parts of the course look at how best to treat ^[20] and cope with anxiety ^[21] in your life (offline ^[22] and online therapies ^[23]) as well as the many reasons to be appreciative ^[24] for the positive things these feelings allow you to do ^[25].

The world is a scary place, but fearing fear is no cure for anxiety. Learning about the theories, science, conditions, and treatments behind anxiety gives you tremendous insight and power over the things that scare you and make you anxious.

No matter your culture or heritage, we're all citizens of anxiety and fear. The more we know about these unsettling lands, the better we can cope with their pitfalls and dangers, and the better we can use their resources to our advantage.

Let's begin!

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