

## Anxiety

Anxiety is a basic emotion warning us for potential life-threatening situations. It is connected to the fight-flight response. Therefore anxiety is accompanied by for example elevated heart rate, blood pressure and respiration. Anxiety is always caused by a trigger, but the exact trigger is sometimes unclear. That's why we separate anxiety from fear. Fear is caused by a clearly identifiable cue, while for anxiety the exact cause is often unclear.

Many different things can cause us to be anxious or fearful. Examples include social situations, dogs, spiders, heights, thoughts of traumatic experiences, flying and fear of failure. Sometimes we even fear the thought of becoming fearful (panic). Anxious feelings can also arise during or after exercise, exhaustion, use of drugs, etcetera. This form of anxiety seems to be induced by a misinterpretation of physical warning signs and resembles panic.

Anxiety usually results in avoidance of the feared situation(s), which generally has an enhancing effect on these feelings. It results in a vicious circle, as you'll never get to experience the feared situation doesn't pose as much of a life-threatening threat as you initially fear it will. After all, spiders don't bite, but the idea of the spider biting you will prevent you from picking up the spider and see for yourself that the spider indeed doesn't bite you. Instead you will flee the scene and most likely think to yourself how lucky you are to have come out of that situation unharmed!

### QuickScan

- Are you experiencing elevated heartrate, sweating, shaking and/or feelings of choking?
- Do you avoid situations inducing stress or do you end up not doing things out of fear (like studying)?
- Do anxious or stressed feelings prevent you from studying efficiently?
- Is anxiety starting to rule over your life, even though what you fear isn't life-threatening?
- Are these anxious feelings ruling over your thoughts?

### Approach

#### What can you do yourself?

You could map out what exactly causes your anxiety and reflect whether or not this cue is life-threatening. If it's not life-threatening, it's recommended to face the situation or object despite your fears. Exposure to the feared situation can reduce your anxiety the next time you're faced with the same situation.

#### What can we do for you?

Anxiety problems can be treated very effectively with cognitive and behavioural therapy. We offer both short-term individual consultation and courses (e.g. Mindfulness). Visit <http://psychologists.tudelft.nl>.

### More information

- <http://www.webmd.com/anxiety-panic>
- <http://www.helpguide.org/articles/anxiety/anxiety-attacks-and-anxiety-disorders.htm>
- <http://www.anxietycoach.com/anxietytrick.html>
- Calm beneath the waves (Bill O' Hanlon), ISBN13: 9780982357323
- Status Anxiety (Alain the Botton), ISBN13: 9780141014869
- Triumph over fear (Jerilyn Ross), ISBN13: 9780553374445
- Change your brain change your life (Daniel G. Amen), ISBN13: 9780812929980