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Abstract

This short article shows you how to maximize satisfaction, wellness, and fulfillment by reducing or eliminating stress and anxiety, using the science, psychology, skills, and strategies of positive psychology

Maximizing Wellness and Fulfillment by REducing stress and anxiety

Strategies for managing stress and anxiety using a positive psychological framework

Contents

[About the Author, Jim O’Connor. 3](#_Toc41476675)

[Who is this program for? 3](#_Toc41476676)

[What is in the program? 3](#_Toc41476677)

[About Positive Psychology 3](#_Toc41476678)

[Martin Seligman, The Founder of Positive Psychology 4](#_Toc41476679)

[PERMA 4](#_Toc41476680)

[A Major Shift in Emphasis and Direction 4](#_Toc41476681)

[Since Seligman there has been an explosion in positive psychology research. 5](#_Toc41476682)

[Positive Psychology Has Many Applications 5](#_Toc41476683)

[Who Is a Positive Psychology Approach to Life and Living For? 5](#_Toc41476684)

[Shifting Focus and Intent Seems to have Big Advantages in Most Cases 6](#_Toc41476685)

[It Helped Me 6](#_Toc41476686)

[I Hope You Find Something In All This That Will Help You 6](#_Toc41476687)

[Where Can You Find Out More? 6](#_Toc41476688)

[The Science and Psychology of Wellness and Fulfillment 7](#_Toc41476689)

[An introduction to wellness and fulfillment 7](#_Toc41476690)

[Explaining What are Wellness and Fulfillment? 7](#_Toc41476691)

[Wellness, what is it Anyway? 7](#_Toc41476692)

[The Benefits of a Wellness Approach to Life 8](#_Toc41476693)

[Fulfillment 8](#_Toc41476694)

[Foundational Needs and Foundational Wants 9](#_Toc41476695)

[What are the Benefits of Adopting a Fulfillment Approach to Life and Living? 9](#_Toc41476696)

[How Do You Become Fulfilled? 10](#_Toc41476697)

[The Good Source 11](#_Toc41476698)

[Summary 11](#_Toc41476699)

[Obstacles to Wellbeing Fulfillment and Maximizing Life and Living 11](#_Toc41476700)

[Stress and Anxiety What Are They, What Causes Them and How Do You Get Rid of Them? 12](#_Toc41476701)

[Stress and Anxiety What Are They Anyway? 12](#_Toc41476702)

[Stress, what is it? 12](#_Toc41476703)

[Getting the Balance Right 13](#_Toc41476704)

[How do you get mental stress? 14](#_Toc41476705)

[Strategies for eliminating or reducing stress and anxiety 16](#_Toc41476706)

[Anxiety: What is it, How do You Get it and How Do You Get Rid of It. 18](#_Toc41476707)

[Anxiety, what is it? 18](#_Toc41476708)

[How do you get anxiety? 18](#_Toc41476709)

[Fear is normal, Anxiety Can Be a Problem Though? 18](#_Toc41476710)

[How do you get rid of anxiety? 19](#_Toc41476711)

[Perceived cost, probability, and tolerance 20](#_Toc41476712)

[Identifying the root cause of anxiety 21](#_Toc41476713)

[Exercises in eliminating or greatly reducing anxiety 22](#_Toc41476714)

[Socratic Questioning 22](#_Toc41476715)

[In summary: Just a Reminder of the Important Bits 23](#_Toc41476716)

[Resources and Further Support 24](#_Toc41476717)

Maximizing Wellbeing, Satisfaction and Fulfillment by Managing Stress and Anxiety

# About the Author, Jim O’Connor.

Jim O'Connor is a clinical psychotherapist and director of Clear Day Consulting Counselling and Coaching, a company that provides counselling and coaching services to people wishing to overcome the challenges they face in both their personal and professional. Jim helps people understand and adopt the science, the psychology, the skills, and strategies of positive psychology so they can become and optimistic, enthusiastic, and capable person both in and of themselves and in their relationships.

# Who is this program for?

This is an introductory program for people wanting to reduce stress and anxiety and maximize wellness and fulfilment so they can live a satisfying and fulfilling life. If you’re struggling with problems of lethargy, tiredness or fatigue, if you are looking for new ideas that will help you find purpose, meaning and direction, then this short introductory program is for you. If you’re a person who simply wants to enhance their life and get the most out of living then this program will get you started. This program isn’t for people who have serious, complex mental, emotional and physical needs. If you’re looking for help for complex concerns, then you should seek advice from your doctor.

# What is in the program?

This short course provides you with an introduction to wellness, fulfillment and how to manage stress and anxiety using a positive psychology framework. In it I will introduce you to the Positive Psychology Framework and how it can be used to enhance your life. I’ll explain how to achieve wellness and fulfilment. I’ll then go on to show you how you can enhance your wellness and greatly improve your fulfillment power by eliminating and managing stress and anxiety using the science, psychology, skills and strategies of positive psychology.

# About Positive Psychology

Have you ever heard of positive psychology? Perhaps you have perhaps you haven’t? It is a growing area of the vast world of psychology and it has some extremely attractive, and appealing attributes that will help most of us in surprising ways. In this short introduction on positive psychology, I’m going to describe what it is why is it different and how it benefits us.

## Martin Seligman, The Founder of Positive Psychology

Martin Seligman was the head of the American Psychology Association for 9 years and as such was a very eminent psychologist. He was gifted 20 million dollars by an Irish philanthropic group to research whatever he wanted. He decided to research happiness, and, in his research, he discovered a problem with happiness. Not everyone can be happy, because they might be sick, they might have had trauma, or any number of other reasons why happiness is not the most important goal for them. So, he investigated the possibility of wellness as an alternative goal for psychologists working with their clients. Again, he found the same problem. Not everyone can be well. Again, some people have chronic illness. Some people have poor social economic conditions and so their access to health and will be may be limited. Seligman decided to broaden our understanding of how psychologists can help people. This lead him to investigate what happens when we change the focus of psychology from helping people to relieve and overcome suffering to helping people thrive and flourish. His research revealed that empowering people by teaching them how to get create positive approaches to the most important things in our lives was more effective at helping people overcome their concerns than approaches the focused on symptoms and historical causes. The end result, was his PERMA model which was the first positive psychology model and has sparked research around the world into the power of positive psychology.

### PERMA

From that point Seligman decided to broaden his definition of that which is the best of human functioning and came up with the PERMA model. PERMA stands for Positive Emotions, Relationships, Meaning and Achievement. Since that point research into positive psychology has grown and more models have arisen. I would like to summarise the concept of positive psychology in the following way. Positive psychology focuses on helping people maximise the conditions that enabled them to thrive and flourish, by teaching them how to maximize their satisfaction and fulfilment in any given situation.

I know we live in a real world and thriving and flourishing might not be possible for some however the concept of teaching people how to maximize their mental, emotional, physical, and social conditions so they can live a thriving and flourishing life works better in many cases than, merely focusing on traditional symptom management of psychology. Of course, there are cases in which positive psychology does not apply directly, as in the case of life and death situations, chronic disease, seriously distressing events, and other very complex events. In these cases it can still be extremely helpful.

### A Major Shift in Emphasis and Direction

Seligman notes in his book Flourish that when you have large amounts of you can develop very big studies including 10s of thousands of people over decades. What he notes in his book is incredibly significant. People in his positive psych programmes who were previously diagnosed with all manner of conditions such as stress, anxiety, depression, gambling, drug addiction, and even trauma we're getting better at far higher rates of success when engaging in a positive psych programme even though they were not being treated for those conditions. They were not being treated for stress, anxiety, depression, gambling, addiction etc. They were just learning how to maximise their relationships, manage their emotions positively engage in their daily lives, develop purpose and meaning and focus on achievement. Why did this shift in focus seem to work?

The answer is appears to be quite straight forward. It seems the stress, anxiety, depression, gambling, and addiction, are all strategies that people use to manage a lack of fulfilment and satisfaction or fear and anxiety. In other words, their symptoms was a result of not having positive relationships, engagement, purpose, meaning or achievements. By teaching people to focus on getting more out of life and living, in these 5 areas, rather than focusing on trying to make their symptoms go away, they eliminate one of the drivers of their symptoms. That is, they are eliminating the fears, worries and concerns that drive the anxiety stress depression and addiction.

### Since Seligman there has been an explosion in positive psychology research.

Since Seligman first coined the term positive psychology there has been an explosion in research and ideas around the concept. Pennsylvania State University has an entire school of positive psychology. The Happiness institute here in Australia approaches human mental health, wellbeing and fulfillment using a positive psychology model. A simple internet search will show you there are many institutes and researchers around the world discovering benefits of positive psychology.

## Positive Psychology Has Many Applications

The application of a positive psychology framework can be used in all manner of places and situations. It can be used to help people who are struggling with stress anxiety and depression. It can be used to help people who are working to improve the effectiveness of organisations and corporations. It can help groups help boost morale and work together more effectively. It can be used in sport psychology to maximise the performance of athletes. You are only limited in the application of positive psychology by your imagination.

### Who Is a Positive Psychology Approach to Life and Living For?

Personally, I think positive psychology frameworks can help just about anybody improve their situation. In many cases positive psychology is a more effective treatment regime then more traditional models of symptom management. Most people will benefit if they learn the principles skills and strategies a positive psychology. Most people in most situations will be able to lower their stress levels, lower their anxiety levels, create more optimism and eliminate depression simply by adopting the principles skills and strategies in the framework. Needless to say, it is essential that if you want to adopt the principles, skills and strategies of positive psychology you should do so only under the supervision of a highly trained professional therapist.

### Shifting Focus and Intent Seems to have Big Advantages in Most Cases

Let me summarise some of the implications of the positive psychology framework. If you're looking to develop a positive optimistic an enthusiastic engagement with life and living, then you will benefit from adopting a positive psych framework in your everyday life. If on the other hand your life is so difficult or complex that this may not be possible, you still might find some elements of the positive psych approach very helpful.

To sum up the concept of positive psychology it could be said that the intention to develop a positive framework of understanding that is constructive and creative and empowering, around emotional management, relationships, purpose meaning and direction and achievement is in most cases a far more effective, and efficient way of approaching life and living. It is also more likely to enable the people who adopt the principles and strategies, to enjoy a fulfilling and satisfying life.

## It Helped Me

I first become interested in Positive Psychology after going through a very difficult series of challenges, in my 30s when my parents died of cancer within a short space of time, and I lost my career and then my home due to ill health. It helped me maintain a positive optimistic engagement in life and living when things were exceedingly difficult during my 40s because my wife and my son became gravely ill. It is also helped me get through the GFC see and all those crazy business struggles we all experienced. Recently, I continue to use it now during the current Co-vid crisis we all have to confront.

## I Hope You Find Something In All This That Will Help You

With that in mind I hope you get something out of this presentation that will help you in your particular circumstances get through more easily and even overcome your challenges and go on to have the best experience of life you can possibly have. I hope that you can find some ideas that you can adopt that will help you eliminate or manage the stress, anxiety and depression you may be experiencing.

# Where Can You Find Out More?

If you want to find out more about positive psychology and how it might work for you most major Universities have a school of positive psychology in their psychology or social sciences department. You could always read one of Seligman’s books. I would begin with the books “Flourish” or “The Hope Circuit”.

If reading isn't your thing there are heaps of short videos and short articles on YouTube that are excellent and you could simply cherry pick your way through the immense body of work that is out there on positive psychology at your own leisure. Sydney University teaches positive psychology for counselling and coaching. Pennsylvania State University has a whole school of positive psychology. Other major universities around the world also have a Department or school dedicated to positive psychology. Where ever you look you can’t go wrong as long as you make sure that the source, you're reading from is backed by good science and research.

There is a plethora of providers of good research articles about positive psychology and how they may help you. I would like to note that in more serious cases or more complex cases other models are more suitable for helping people overcome their challenges. If this is the case ask your GP your for advice as to the best approach for you. You might need to start with a local, psychologist, or psychotherapist or institutes like Beyond Blue and The Black Dog Institute are able to provide vastly more complex programmes for more difficult situations.

# The Science and Psychology of Wellness and Fulfillment

## An introduction to wellness and fulfillment

Part of the study of positive psychology that I’m fascinated by is the psychology around wellness and fulfilment and satisfaction. You probably innately understand the relationship between positive attitudes and wellness. It seems self-evident that people who have a positive approach to their own life, living and health, are more likely to be healthy and well. What seems to be less evident is the relationship between positive approaches to life and living and fulfilment. This section of this book is going to explain those relationships and how you could use them to overcome your challenges and make life far more engaging and successful. To explain the relationship between positive psychology Wellness and fulfilment let's first define what Wellness is and what fulfilment are.

## Explaining What are Wellness and Fulfillment?

### Wellness, what is it Anyway?

To keep it simple I want to define wellness as the optimal state of mental, emotional physical and social health that a person can achieve. For anybody to maximise their wellness they need to optimise their mental, emotional, physical and social health. Now let's face it, that's a lot to do, and probably none of us are ever going to get it completely right? So, I like the idea of simply improving your wellness every day one little bit at a time.

To each their own of course. Some people want to make their lives all about health and wellness, while others don’t and that is ok. I'm not going to say your right or wrong whatever your approach to your own wellbeing is. But if you’re lacking energy, if you feel lethargic, if you’re head is constantly foggy, or if your insides just don’t feel right it can help to adopt a wellness approach to sort things out. Just as a matter of caution though, you should probably get a check-up with your GP before starting any wellness program. Once you’ve been cleared it can’t hurt to improve your wellness across all those key areas, of mental, emotional, physical, and social wellbeing. All you have to do is decide to improve your mental and emotional wellbeing by adopting a positive psychology framework and applying it to your life one little strategy at a time. You can improve, your physical wellbeing improving your diet, exercise, rest, and recovery strategies one step at a time. Finally, you can top all that off by improving your relationships one day at a time. Any improvements in any of these areas will make you feel better immediately. What’s exciting is the more you work at it the better you will feel.

### The Benefits of a Wellness Approach to Life

What are the benefits for adopting a Wellness model of life and living? Well it's pretty obvious if you want your body to operate well you need to treat it well. Everything from energy levels, skin appearance, repair from injury, repair from sickness, immunity, improves markedly win you adopt a Wellness model for life. There is no doubt, if you want to live longer and live better adopting healthy attitudes towards your wellbeing will make the help enormously.

Knowing this I realise that sometimes it's very difficult to be healthy and well. We have unrelenting stress in our lives. Many of us get catastrophic changes that alter the course of our life and can make focusing on wellness difficult if not impossible. But for those of us who can adopting wellness model for life and living certainly generates big dividends.

### Fulfillment

#### What is fulfillment

You will know that you’re well because you have energy and feel good inside your own body. But have you ever wondered what fulfilment is? Have you ever wondered what the relationship between wellness and fulfilment is? Well let me help by explaining it this way.

Fulfilment at its most basic level is the feeling get when you satisfy your needs or wants. In Simple terms fulfilment is the satisfaction you get when you are able to get what you need or what you want satisfaction. Now this can be lasting, or it can be very short lived. The trick is to get the balance right between short term fulfillment and long-term fulfillment. We know that always giving in to the urge for instant gratification can mean you feel good in the short term but in the long term you lose out. Always eating, beer, and pizza will mean that you don’t get to be thin and healthy. Always, spending money means you get the thrill of having the new thing now but you don’t have that money for later. On the other hand always going without now so you can have later can make living now draconian, and more difficult than it should. It can make life and living now unpleasant. The trick it to get the balance right. To do that we need to learn what it takes to create both short term and long term fulfillment. This process is called maximizing your fulfilment power. The fundamental principle of fulfilment power is this. You know how and you have the capabilities to be fulfilled in any given situation. Now this may at first glance a simple thing to do. In practice it is really a very complex balancing act. To find out more about how to achieve fulfilment you need to know what makes use people thrive. You need to know what our needs are, and what our foundational wants are. Note, I didn’t say your wants, I said your foundational wants. These are your core wants that give you the greatest satisfaction. These are the wants that make you thrive and flourish. They are essential to feeling positive, optimistic and engaged with life and living. They tend not to be the instant gratifications we want that only leave us dependant and out of shape. This short article on fulfilment isn’t long enough for me to go into all the details of fulfillment psychology, so I’ve just put the basics here.

## Foundational Needs and Foundational Wants

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Needs | Score / 10 |
|  | Survival | Food, Water, Clothing, Shelter |  |
|  | Security | Safety, Certainty, Predictability, Reliability |  |
|  | Emotional  | The ability to manage positive and negative emotions. The ability to give and receive positive regard. The ability to turn negative emotions into neutral or positive emotions.  |  |
|  | Social | Community, Belonging, Engagement |  |
|  | Individual Identity | Positive Self Concepts |  |
|  | Self Expression | The ability to express yourself effectively both verbally and creatively |  |
|  | Centre of Control | The ability to control the important things in your life  |  |
|  | Adaptability | The ability to adapt and remain resilient when things change or get out of your control |  |
|  | Purpose, Meaning, Direction | A reason to engage in life and living that is meaningful and adds value and structure to your life |  |
|  | Creativity | The ability to create |  |
|  | Contribution and Care | The ability to contribute to the world around you in ways that a constructive and valued |  |
|  | A sense of Mastery | A thing that you are best at that you believe you do at a very high level |  |
| Wants and Aspirations | Universalisation | Optimism, Faith, Hope, that we are all in life together and together we can create amazing things, that make us want to look forward to the future. |  |

### What are the Benefits of Adopting a Fulfillment Approach to Life and Living?

Seeing fulfilment as a pathway through life rather than a destination gives you a purpose, a meaning, and a direction that is going to be good for you and good for everyone around you. If you simply took the list above and said to yourself I'm going to do all that I can too maximise each of those categories you could. You might not always know what to do or how to do it but you will know what direction you have to head and you will know what things you need to learn. It's kind of like hey really useful framework of understanding life and living without being religious or philosophical. The above list doesn't preclude you from being religious nor does it preclude you from being an atheist. Whatever your particular religious or spiritual bias the above needs and wants table does not compete with your ideas. It's in fact probably going to be complementary to your ideas. I will add that you don't need to achieve these things in order from beginning to end. It does help though to get the foundations sorted early in life food water clothing shelter for example. Safety certainty security, because these things make the rest of your life easier. It is very hard to engage with people socially , to have personal dreams and hopes , when you can't pay the bills. Many a person has gone off to chase their dreams only to find they fail because they didn't attend to the foundations of life food, water, clothing, shelter.

### How Do You Become Fulfilled?

The first step in learning to become fulfilled is to intend to learn what gives you the greatest satisfaction and fulfilment in life. Try seeing life as a series of problems thatall have the same overarching goal or direction. That goal or direction is to learn how to solve your problems with the intention of increasing your satisfaction and decreasing your dissatisfaction. In other words, once you've solved the problem, you're in a better place. Where this idea gets complicated is when we confuse our core needs and wants with our less essential secondary wants and preferences. Think about fulfilment as learning how and satisfy those needs and wants they bring us the greatest happiness, satisfaction, enthusiasm, peace and contentment. Here's the crazy thing. Humans have been asking these questions for as long as humans could think. Scientists and psychologists have been studying this question for at least 60 to 70 years. What's really cool about science and psychology is we found answers to many of the questions about fulfilment. You can find those answers now simply by going to a positive psychology website and looking them up. That's not the hard part. We do have a lot of principles skills and strategies readily available that you can apply today and get much more satisfaction out of life. The hard part is knowing what part of the needs and wants puzzle you need help with. There is another hard part which is a bit more confronting. Are you ready to change? If i said to you you simply have to learn some new principles and skills, and apply them in your everyday life , and you will get much more happiness satisfaction fulfilment out of life Are you ready to do that.

I’m not trying to propose that it's easy, it's straight forward, and that your life will go more smoothly If you invest in creating a balanced life focusing on maximising your wellness and fulfilment power. I'm not trying to suggest that it all can't be taken away from you through a tragic accident or terrible disease. I'm simply saying that investing your mind, your time, your effort into learning how to maximise your wellness your relationships , your emotions , and following a direction that is meaningful to you and creating achievements that you're proud of is not only more fun it's easier and makes life much more engaging. When people make this shift in their thinking they seem to adopt a positive, enthusiastic engagement with every day life that the previously didn’t have.

### The Good Source

If you want to find out more about how to maximise your Wellness and fulfilment so you can enjoy satisfying and fulfilling life you don't have to go very far. Magazines, The Internet, is abundant with information that is good, accurate and effective at maximising Wellness and teaching you how to feel more satisfied and fulfilled end achieve more. Again, what is important when it comes to finding good sources of information is that they come from trustable reliable sources. As we know of recent times the idea that social media is trustable and reliable. That's the most important part in learning about Wellness and fulfilment and that is that the information you get comes from I trustable and reliable source and what's more it makes sense.

### Summary

At one level well-being, satisfaction and fulfilment is very straight forward. Simply create the conditions for a healthy mind body and soul. When it comes to the body again it's straight forward. Eat well largely eat Whole Foods that are low in fat salts and sugars high in complex carbohydrates insufficient proteins. When it comes to other health factors rest and exercise end of course sufficient recovery time from exercise or injury is vital to feeling well in your body. Of course, developing a positive framework of beliefs values and assumptions and expectations goes a long way to creating mental wellbeing. Finally learning to master mindfulness and mind skill completes the picture.

I'm not going to go into much more then this brief introduction to wellness and fulfilment. I will say if you want to find out more then please feel free to ask me any questions you may like. You could send me emails to contact@cleardayconsulting.com.au . For now I want to turn our attention to the topics at hand stress and anxiety. Because one of the most important areas you need to invest in to create a satisfying and fulfilling life is to eliminate or greatly reduce the stress and anxiety that is in your life.

## Obstacles to Wellbeing Fulfillment and Maximizing Life and Living

It's all very well and good to adopt positive psychological framework and develop a positive healthy attitude to life and living but sometimes life gets in the way making it all but impossible. Sometimes bad things happen. When this happens, we have to adapt.

The things that make us have to adapt are really predictable. Critical events such as accidents injuries, deaths, and diseases, falls from grace when you lose your job can make maintaining and optimistic attitude difficult. Needless to say, things that go on in your world can often make it challenging, too stay positive and optimistic. Equally things that happen inside your head can make it difficult to stay positive and optimistic and maintain a fully satisfying fulfilling life. Stress, anxiety, and depression are the most common problems that virtually all of us have to deal with at least at one time in our life. stress, anxiety, and depression limit our satisfaction and fulfilment. Needless to say, learning how to eliminate them, or reduce them greatly absolutely improves our sense of happiness satisfaction and wellbeing. In the next level section of this article I'm going to address stress, and anxiety and show you some basic strategies and some more advanced strategies for managing them.

# Stress and Anxiety What Are They, What Causes Them and How Do You Get Rid of Them?

## Stress and Anxiety What Are They Anyway?

Most people don't realise that stress and anxiety are not the same thing. Many people think stress and anxiety caused by the same problems end can be addressed by the same solutions. Stress and anxiety are similar but are different in ways that are important to understand. in the next section I'm going to explain exactly what stress and anxiety and the difference between them so you can know more fully what to do about them

### Stress, what is it?

Stress is defined as any pressure or influence applied to an organism that makes it adapt. What does this mean? Well let's just use the example of physical stress. If we apply physical stress throughout bodies for example when we exercise we are stressing our body our muscles and are ligaments, our heart and lungs and that triggers a response in the body that makes it adapt. If we stress our bodies through exercise enough, we get stronger and stronger because of the stress. When most people are talking about stress, they are really referring to type of stress called overwhelm. Overwhelm is defined as any pressure or influence applied to an organism that exceeds its ability to adapt. Just like in exercise you can do too much. If you exercise too much and push through the pain of exercise you might cause yourself injury. In other words, you exceed your body's ability to adapt. When you do that you get injuries.

Let's apply this idea to mental stress. Understanding physical stress is easy. You overwork you get tired and fatigued your brain starts to become foggy your energy levels are depleted. What's interesting about physical stress is it also affects our mind. We've all experienced situations in which our tiredness, our fatigue levels, our energy levels are so low that we are unable to feel optimistic and positive about anything. When we realise that it's just a problem of fatigue, we can still be optimistic because we know that a simple prescription of rest, recovery and a couple of good nights of sleep will remedy the problem.

When it comes to mental and emotional stress, we have a different situation. One that a good night's rest and a week of recovery won’t fix because the stress isn’t in the body. It’s a process taking place in your brain and mind. Mental stress is essentially caused by worry and a particular type of worry called rumination. Worry is defined as strong thinking that causes upset or distress. Note it isn't just strong thinking. you might do strong thinking to solve the problem and whilst you might feel tired at the end you won't feel distressed. You might have to organise an event which takes a lot of logistics end mental organisation. Whilst you might be tired by this process you aren't necessarily stressed by it. For you to be mentally stressed you have to be upset or distressed by the process of thinking. Let's say for example you are organising a 50th birthday party for 200 people and you find that you stop to become concerned or worried that the people at the party my find it boring. Or you may start to panic that the delivery services won't arrive on time. You might then start to be concerned that if the deliveries don't arrive on time the whole event will become a catastrophic disaster. This is the worry component of the strong thinking. Rumination is when you take these worries and go over them time and time again and always get to the same upsetting conclusions and then you continue to do this endlessly. Rumination is a particularly nasty type of worrying because it is potentially endless and for each worry you focus on you can think of you more. When people get into this type of worry it can cause enormous stress and lead to more serious problems affecting your health and wellbeing, your relationships, even your ability to concentrate. Left unchecked you can become so focused on your worries that you are unable to function well and you’re life may start to suffer.

### Getting the Balance Right

I want to now bring the physical stress and the mental stress together. There is loads of evidence to show that mental stress causes physical stress and vice versa. For example, if you are a anxious warrior you are more likely to have irritable bowel conditions we know that anxious worriers suffer with headaches and joint pain more than people who don't worry. There's also another correlation between physical stress and mental stress. If we want our bodies to get stronger, we must stress them so there is a benefit to stressing the body. Now it might be unpleasant to do exercise but if we do not do exercise, we are certainly going to become weaker, less flexible, and less capable of doing the things we need to do every day. Knowing this, many people realised that to really enjoy life and living we need to stress our bodies enough that they get stronger every day. Words we need a certain amount of physical stress to make our bodies stronger.

It's remarkably similar with mental stress. If we don't exercise our minds, our brains then our brains will not get stronger our minds will not get more resilient. We need to put ourselves under enough stress mentally every day to maintain mental fitness. This could simply be learning a language. It could be doing complex puzzles like crosswords or playing games of chess every day. It means mentally stretching ourselves so we remain sharp of mind and wisdom. It certainly means learning how to handle more and more domestic stress such as running the kids around managing the budget organising the bills. So just as not enough stress in the physical world is a problem, not enough stress in the mental world is also a problem. What we need to learn how to do is eliminate the mental stress that causes us distress. The right amount of stress is good for us. Too, much or too little is bad for us.

### How do you get mental stress?

Most of the research into mental stress shows us that worry is habitual patterns of thinking that we learn through our life and our experiences. Typical types of negative upsetting thinking patterns include black and white thinking either believing everything is either right or wrong good or bad. Awfulizing thinking that everything has awfulness about it when it may or may not. Catastrophizing is another form of worrying thinking when we take a small problem and follow in escalating stream of thinking that leaves us to the point of panic for example. Personalising is another habitual form of thinking that causes us upset. When we take other people’s thoughts and ideas on board and believe they reflect on us badly. There are many, many forms of faulty thinking patterns that make us distressed. If we eliminate those faulty thinking patterns our stress and worry goes away. Negative patterns of thinking can cause devastating a fix on our sense of safety certainty and security. Negative parents thinking can cause us to panic when there is no need to.

A form of negative thinking ruminating is an extremely common form of worrying thinking. Ruminating is essentially endless loop worrying thoughts that you never seem to get out of. They ah cyclical in that you can't ever resolve them, end all they achieve is distress. They are intensely habitual and may not even be logical however they can have a devastating effect on our optimism our enthusiasm how will being and our fulfilment. The most notable feature of rumination is they are simple habitual thinking patterns anywhere from having to check , check and double check doors after leaving the house right through to fears that you might be having a heart attack when you're simply out of breath. To escape the tyranny of ruminating thoughts we have to first recognise we're doing it. Secondly, we have to become aware of the negative impact the worrying thoughts is having on our life so that we no longer value worrying habitual thinking. In fact, we need to see it for the harmful negative impact it has on our life so that we are willing to let go and negative Habitual thinking. once we've convinced ourselves that negative habitual thinking is bringing nothing but harm to her life and distress, we can begin the process of letting it go and breaking the habit. Below awesome examples of negative thinking patterns that caused us nothing but harm.

Here is a list of Common Faulty Thinking Patterns that cause distress and worry.

**Black and White Thinking:** Seeing things in black and white terms, with no middle ground. Situations are either great or a disaster. One’s performance is either good or catastrophic. People are either good or horrible.

**Overgeneralization:** Making broad generalisations on the basis of specific negative behaviours or experiences for example “everyone thinks”” I’m stupid, nobody likes me”, “I always screw up”, “men always end up just hurting me”

**Selective Abstraction:** Focusing on mistakes, failures or weaknesses, or only looking at evidence that supports your negative point of view whilst ignoring the evidence that challenges a negative point of view.

**Predicting Catastrophe:** Expecting the worst in any situation for example “I'll probably make a mess of it”, “They’ll reject me “, “I'll be the first one to be retrenched”, “He'll probably leave me “.

Awfulizing: Exaggerating the importance of negative events. When things go wrong, or even have the potential to go wrong, we see their consequences as terrible.

**Personalisation:** Feeling responsible for things that are not our responsibility; Assuming that other people’s responses reflect on ourselves or are directed at us; taking things too personally and becoming distressed.

**Blaming:** The inability to accept human failings, bad luck, or limitations. Unnecessarily blaming ourselves, or others when things go wrong.

**Labelling**: Labelling or writing ourselves on the basis of some of our behaviours or performances for example I’m a bad person, I’m a failure, I'm unattractive, I'm stupid, I'm hopeless.

**Jumping to Negative Conclusions:** Making negative assumptions interpreting events in a negative way for example they're only saying that because they feel sorry for me, my boss will sack me because they don't like me.

Mind Reading: assuming we know what, other people are thinking or that other people know what you are thinking. Especially that they are making negative evaluations of us.

**Fallacy of Fairness:** Expecting that things should be fair or have to be fair when there is no rule book that says they must be fair.

**Should’s:** Rigid, inflexible beliefs about how the world should work. Or rigid inflexible beliefs about how people should work or how they should be.

**Comparing:** Using other peoples achievements or characteristics as a means of measuring your own worth. This can be done in an arrogant way I I'm better or a self minimising way, ie. I'm worse than.

Here are 10 common patterns of faulty thinking adapted from Dr David Burns, author of the classic [*Feeling Good*](http://www.amazon.com/Feeling-Good-Handbook-David-Burns/dp/0452281326) and pioneer of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy:

**All-or-Nothing Thinking**: Failing to recognize that there may be some middle ground. Characterized by absolute terms like always, never, and forever.

**Overgeneralization**: Taking an isolated case and assuming that all others are the same.

**Mental Filter**: Mentally singling out the bad events in one's life and overlooking the positive.

**Disqualifying the Positive**: Treating positive events like they don't really count.

**Jumping to Conclusions**: Assuming the worst about a situation even though there is no evidence to back their conclusion.

**Magnification and Minimization**: Downplaying positive events while paying an inordinate amount of attention to negative ones.

**Emotional Reasoning**: Allowing your emotions to govern what you think about a situation rather than objectively looking at the facts.

**Should Statements**: Rigidly focusing on how you think things should be rather than finding strategies for dealing with how things are."

**Labelling and Mislabelling**: Applying false and harsh labels to oneself and others.

**Personalization**: Blaming yourself for things that are out of your control.

All of these very common faulty thinking patterns can cause distress and worry. So how do you get rid of worry the cause is mental stress. At one level it's fairly straight forward. Doing the opposite of what your automatic habitual thinking pattern tells you to do is a good place to start. For example if I an in the habit of getting angry because I am using black and white thinking doing the opposite will help me get out of black and white thinking. If I think that it is a failure big cause it isn't how I want it then using oppositional thinking would see me asking a different question how is it more successful because it isn't the way I want it . Or can I take advantage of it even though it isn't the way I want it.

If on using catastrophic thinking and believing that the world worst case scenario will happen leading to a catastrophic problem for myself And I choose to think the opposite I might say well that's one possibility but what if the opposite was true but nothing bad was going to happen that I might even gain some advantage. If the opposite is as true as the catastrophic option, then why choose to think catastrophically. It's only making you upset and it's no truer than the exact opposite then why fixate on the negative.

Go through all of the above negative thinking patterns and tick the ones you know you do . Then ask yourself what happens to me when I think this way. does it simply cause me distress or is it somehow useful? On the other hand then ask what if I gave up thinking this way how much would my life be better for letting go upsetting worrying thoughts.

### Strategies for eliminating or reducing stress and anxiety

There are other strategies for helping you eliminate or completely get rid of worrying thoughts that cause you distress for example using Socratic questioning. Socratic questioning is a way of challenging your own negative thoughts and helping you create more positive thoughts and understandings that enable you to be more effective and feel better at the same time. They basically breakdown into five key categories questions about evidence for and against your worrying thoughts. Then there are questions about what reasonable people might think in any given situation. There are questions about are there alternative ways of thinking that are just as valid or more valid than the way I'm currently thinking. There are questions about what the effect of my worrying thoughts are on my health and wellbeing. Does this Fort help me or does it simply upset me . What would be the benefit if I simply stopped thinking this way. Then there are questions about impact and tolerance. for example, realistically what is the worst thing that could happen to me if my worrying thought were true can I live with it or can I tolerate it. Then there's questions of probability what is the most likely thing to happen or how unlikely is my worrying thought.

All of these questions are designed to either disprove you wearing thoughts, give you alternative ways of thinking about the problem, or asking you whether or not you can tolerate the worrying concerting. By applying these questions not only will you create many, many more opportunities and alternative solutions that you would not otherwise have thought of, But you also make yourself feel better and you also make yourself take better decision's.

Socratic questions

find the thought or perception that is worrying you and write it down in very simple language. For example, I'm upset because I believe this xyzzy might happen.

1. What is the evidence that supports my perception?

2. What is the evidence that contradicts my perceptions?

3. How else or what alternative ways can I think about this situation that is also true?

4. What is the effect of my believing the things that I'm telling myself? Does it help me, or does it just upset me?

5. What would be the effect of changing my thinking?

6. What would I tell a friend if he or she were in the same situation?

7. Is there anything I can do about the situation?

8. Realistically, what is the worst that could happen? Could I live with it?

9. What is the best that could happen in this situation? How likely is that?

10.What is the most likely thing that will happen?

If you learn to start challenging your own worrying thoughts your stress levels will come down enormously. Even in extremely difficult situations your stress levels will reduce immensely. There are other strategies for illuminating stress those that work on changing the things outside of you like your environment for example reducing noise or clutter or disorganisation. Asking people to help you with situations can also help you reduce stress on many levels. On the other hand, there are many ways of reducing mental stress by changing the way we think. The examples above ah some of those ways of changing your automatic worrying thoughts.

It's incredibly important to learn to challenge worrying thoughts because they can entirely incapacitate you if you don't. What's more negative worrying thoughts often make you make poor choices and therefore disempower you making your life less satisfying and fulfilling. If I just quickly revisit an idea about fulfilment and fulfilment power one of the ways you can increase your fulfilment power is to improve the way you think and perceive the world, you are in. If you overwhelm yourself with negative worrying thoughts your fulfilment power absolutely goes down. On the other hand, if you learn to overcome negative worrying thoughts and adopt positive empowering thinking your choices improve, your sense of confidence certainty and security improves, end this flows through in many many ways that empowers you. you become more optimistic, you become more enthusiastically engaged in life and living and the things you do. This has a secondary effect of attracting opportunities that you would not otherwise receive. For example, people with an optimistic positive outlook are more likely to be given positive attention. People with a positive optimistic outlook are more likely to find better solutions and therefore be given more responsibilities and also more opportunities. This is the reason your fulfilment power goes up simply by adopting a more positive approach to your own thought life. I could go on endlessly about the advantages of positive creative thinking an improving your immediate satisfaction but also the satisfaction of your lifelong term but for now I want to turn our minds to the question of anxiety.

# Anxiety: What is it, How do You Get it and How Do You Get Rid of It.

### Anxiety, what is it?

Anxiety is fear that is exaggerated and or inappropriate or unhelpful. The difference between stress and anxiety is stress is a feeling that you get when your confused concerned overwhelmed or uncertain. Whilst anxiety is the feeling of fear you get when you perceive a threat. They do overlap quite a bit. However, it's very important that you understand the difference so you can more effectively find solutions.

### How do you get anxiety?

We know that some people are born with trait anxiety. That is, they are from an early age noticeably more frightened or more startled then other children. We also know that people can learn anxiety. No matter how old you are if you go through an anxiety provoking event , such as an accident , a serious injury or illness , or a life threatening assault almost anyone at any age would develop some level of anxiety if only for a short period of time. For you to feel anxious you must perceive a threat. That threat may be real and exaggerated or that threat maybe imagined and exaggerated however you must feel a threat to say that you're anxious.

### Fear is normal, Anxiety Can Be a Problem Though?

fear in and of itself is not the problem. Fear is protective. If we don't have fear, we do really dumb things. We take risks when we shouldn't. Let's look at Vertigo. The fear of falling from a great height. Vertigo is normal. It's the feeling that you get when you go near the edge of a height such as a Cliff balcony rail or window. Humans are designed with Vertigo so that we don't go near the edge of cliff and fall off. On the other hand, animals like mountain goats or birds, don't have vertigo or the fear of Heights big cause there neurophysiology has adapted in such a way they don't get it as much as we know. You would not be said to have anxiety if you will be experiencing Vertigo when you went near the edge of a balcony rail that is 23 stories in the air. That's normal. You would only be said to have anxiety if your fear of Heights prevented you from being able to do normal things like stand on a balcony. That is your fear whilst normal is exaggerated and interferes with your ability to function. That's when you would be said to have anxiety. The fear of moving through a dark alley is also frightening for most people. This is protective. It stops us walking down dark alleys and potentially tripping over or being assaulted by a thief in the night. You would not be said to have anxiety if you thought walking down a dark alley in the night is worrying or frightening you might simply be sensible. You would be said to have anxiety if you could never turn out the lights for fear of what might happen.

Sometimes out anxieties are imagined. For example, in the case of agoraphobia people fear some kind of harm might happen and are so terrorised by the fear they never leave their room. Many if not all of the fears they are concerned about so extraordinarily unlikely or completely imagined. Panic disorder is often associated with an imaginary process. A person who panics might feel there having a heart attack when they are merely having a slightly raised hot right because I've just walked up the stairs. In each of these cases the fear is based on an imaginary scenario and then exaggerated.

As in the case of worry anxiety can become habitual. It can become very pervasive in our lives causing enormous dysfunction and disability. You might fear germs so much that you constantly wash your hands to the point of causing severe dermatitis causing bleeding and infection. You might so fear a home invasion that you build fortress of locks and surveillance throughout your home, causing you to become unable to sleep and unable to think of anything else perhaps not even being about to leave your house.

### How do you get rid of anxiety?

To get rid of anxiety you need to use a strategy similar, to the strategy we use for stress and worry. You can use the Socratic questioning to help you reduce your anxieties however you may need to do other things as well. To understand what else you need to do let's breakdown anxiety into its component parts and then the solutions to anxiety will start to become much more apparent.

You can breakdown anxiety to a formula. And that formula is anxiety is equal to the perceived cost multiplied by the probability of that cost happening divided by your tolerance for that cost. So here is anxiety expressed in a mathematical formula.

Anxiety = the Perceived Cost x Perceived Probability of That Cost / your Tolerance to that Cost

Broken down like this it's far easier to understand the psychological mechanism that occurs in anxiety and what you can do about it. The size of the anxiety is dependent on the size of the cost multiplied by the likelihood of that cost happening divided by your tolerance for that cost.

So, if you can change the cost or lower its probability you can reduce your anxiety or increase your tolerance the anxiety gets smaller. Understanding this formula helps us understand what we have to do to reduce our anxiety.

### Perceived cost, probability, and tolerance

Research shows us that a lot of the things we fear are imagined or exaggerated or are distortions of reality. Often what makes something seem more frightening than it is, are our assumptions, our expectations, our imaginings. Let me give you an example. Two people standing tied together on a 400-metre bungee platform, are about to do a tandem bungee jump. One of them is excited in the extreme the other one is terrified in the extreme. Why? Well the first person might believe that jumping off a platform that is 400 metre in the air feeling the rush of the wind, and letting go control, is extremely exhilarating. If this person didn’t fear injury as well, they would very likely have no fear or anxiety.

On the other hand, the person who is terrified may be extremely frightened of losing control, they may fear not knowing what will happen, and may be concerned that some unpredictable injury might occur. Their anxiety is likely to be extremely high.

Now note that both people have the same risk factors yet one person perceives the fear greater than the other. So, let's go back to our formula and see what we could do to help the person who's frightened reduce their fee.

If we could convince the scared person that it is perfectly safe, we eliminate one of the perceived costs, their anxiety will go down. Let’s look at the fear of losing control. This for example is something that most of us manage every day, when we get on buses, or trains or when we’re passengers in a car. We can’t control the driver, or the other passengers or the maintenance people who take care of the vehicle. We have no control over whether another person goes to sleep at the wheel and drives into us. We have no control over whether the driver takes a corner too fast and runs the train or bus off the road. Yet most of us do this simply believe that nothing bad will happen and we take a risk. If the person was able to be convinced that not knowing isn't that frightening, then they are likely to see their anxieties go down. If we could convince them that they perfectly safe because they can see that the bungee rope is in excellent condition and it is properly attached and the harness That they're in is perfectly safe because it can hold 2000KG the fee will go down. if they see other people doing it without harm again their perception of threat will go down.

I think you can start to see the way this works. Identify the root fear and see if you can realistically reduce your fear of that then your anxiety will go down. Let's look at the rest of the formula. Cost or threat in many cases can be reduced by increasing safety factors. But what about changing our fears by illuminating or reducing the probability that that fear will happen. Again, research shows us that many of the things we fear either won't happen or are very unlikely to happen. The risk of dying in a aeroplane crash around the world at large, is extremely low. If you calculate the number of aircraft in the air at any one time then work out the number of people in those aircraft and compare that to the number of people who die or get injured in a plane crash the statistics of dying in a plane crash are very low. If you are convinced the likelihood of a serious accident is very low, then your fear of that happening will go down. For example, you might be frightened of dying in a car crash but because the likelihood of dying in a car crash is very small you are not frightened of it. This brings us to the last part of the formula which is tolerance it is impossible to live a risk-free life. So, what most of us do is we organise things to reduce the risk of serious harm two very low levels and then we simply accept the risk. As in the case of driving a car the risk of having a serious injury or death whilst driving a car very low. however, because we need to drive to get around, to perform out normal activities in life and career we simply accept the small risk of being caught in an accident that causes injury or death and drive anyway.

With this in mind we can start to see how we might address anxiety so that we can have I fully functioning thriving life despite the risks. Let's look at the five key strategies you can use to eliminate anxiety. Here they are below:

1. Acceptance
2. Influence
3. Adapting
4. Quarantining
5. Leaving

Let's look at them each in turn and see how we can apply them to help us manage our anxieties. Acceptance, can you accept the situation or is the situation unacceptable to you. If it is unacceptable to you can then move on to the other four strategies. Can you influence the situation in such a way that you reduce your risks? On the other hand, if you can't reduce your risks can you adapt. That is can you change yourself in such a way that you are able to no longer fear the threat. This is where working through your perceptions of the threat, or the likelihood of the threat or the tolerance you might have for the threat comes in. On the other hand if you can't accept influence or adapt perhaps quarantining the problem. That is putting you or the problem in a safe place where the threat or the harm can't happen. Finally, if accepting influencing adapting and quarantining can't work then the best way to reduce your anxiety might simply be to leave the situation so you are no longer under any threat of harm.

### Identifying the root cause of anxiety

Being able to identify the core fear is critical in being able to eliminate or greatly reduce anxiety. A strategy we teach people to apply that helps him get to the core fear is the downward arrow technique. Simply asking yourself the question if that were true Why is that frightening to each consecutive thought in my have will help you get to the bottom of your anxieties. To shortcut the process we know that the average person only has five potential core fears. These are listed below:

1. The fear of death
2. The fear of vulnerability
3. The fear of loneliness
4. The fear of powerlessness
5. The fear of meaninglessness
6. The fear of not being good enough.

I don't have time in this short description of core fears to go into each and every one of them however the most common fears are the fear of vulnerability, the fear of loneliness, the fear of powerlessness, and the fear of not being good enough. The dread or fear of death is one that we all have to come to terms with and for the most part the majority of us do. Some of these other fears tend to never go away until they are directly addressed. With that in mind it helps to be able to identify and understand your core fears so you can get to the bottom of your anxiety rather than being distracted and confused by more superficial fears. Once you have identified your core fear you can then use the following core strategies to reduce or eliminate it.

### Exercises in eliminating or greatly reducing anxiety

### Socratic Questioning

Using Socratic questioning can help you clarify whether your fee is real or imagined or how big it actually is . Socratic questioning can also help you decide whether your fear is likely or not or whether you can tolerate it or not. Here's some examples of how you can use Socratic questioning to greatly reduce your anxiety or eliminate it altogether.

1. Once you have identified fear ask yourself the question what is the evidence I have for my fear or against my fear?
2. Then ask yourself what would my most reasonable friend say about the fear.
3. Then ask yourself if I were trying to reassure a friend what would I say to then to reassure them?
4. What is the likelihood that my fear will in fact happen or am I just frightened about a very unlikely threat?
5. If the threat is real Do I need to do anything about it or can I simply tolerate it?
6. What can I do to reduce the likelihood or reduce the severity of the threat?
7. What bad thing would happen if I simply left the situation and put myself in a safer place?

You can see that using Socratic questioning can help you clarify the fear, change how affronting it really is and help you decide if you can Simply put up with it.

Sometimes we need to prove to ourselves through little experiments that our fears are not as bad as they seem full, or we can tolerate them, or that day my simply be so unlikely to ever happen that it's not worth worrying about. This is called a behavioural experiment approach. It's our way of doing our own personal scientific test to determine whether or not we need to be concerned or if we can simply ignore the fear or put up with it. To do this we breakdown the fear into smaller component parts and test the fear with safe little experiments. Two conductor behavioural experiment simply identify the fear and then work out a way of testing your fear , then putting your little experiment into action and finally assessing the results. For example if we look at the case of the two bungee jumpers above, a behavioural experiment could be to get the frightened person 2 practise jumping off hey two metre diving board until they're comfortable with that, then a 5 metre diving board over a pool , then 20 metre diving board over a pool and so on. once the person becomes convinced that free falling is safe we could then train them over a foam pit tide to a harness such as the ones used 2 teach circus performers aerial tricks. if at each stage the person is able to be convinced that free falling isn't that frightening, that falling protected by a harness is perfectly safe you could increase the height, until they no longer fear doing a bungee jump.

If we wanted to look at the fear of social anxiety which is usually the fear of not being good enough the behavioural experiment would simply be to help the person realise that they are good enough to do very simple things such as hold a one to one conversation with friends. then we would increase the number of people that they speak to using the same conversational approach. Once the persons convinced they can speak to two or three people at one time without being found to be not good enough we can then increase the number of people that day talk to at any one time. Then going forward, we simply increase the number of people that they are comfortable to speak with until they are comfortable speaking to 10 to 20 people and by this stage the social anxiety is typically gone.

I think you can see how behavioural experiments work. Identify the fear, then create a behavioural experiment that tests the fear, then keep repeating the experiment until people become comfortable with it. Finally, you simply need to keep it increasing the difficulty in small increments until the person is very convincing very comfortable overcoming their fear.

# In summary: Just a Reminder of the Important Bits

this short book on stress anxiety happiness and fulfilment was designed to give you a brief introduction to positive psychology, happiness Wellness and fulfilment, and how illuminating or greatly reducing stress can help you live us happy satisfying and fulfilling life.

We then looked at stress and what it is and how to eliminate it using Socratic questioning, and re framing and self-challenging strategies. We looked at illuminating or greatly reducing anxiety by identifying what the core fear is and using Socratic questioning, behavioural experiments, and the 5 core strategies of acceptance, influence, adapting, quarantining, and leaving.

I hope this brief overview has helped introduce you to this fascinating subject and I hope that it has given you some great ideas that you can apply immediately to help you in your situation. With that in mind if you have any ideas you want to discuss please feel free to reach out to me on my email contact@cleardayconsulting.com.au And I will be happy to answer any of your questions. Below is a list of all the resources you could use if you want to research these topics any further. In any case I wish you all the best in your personal challenges and hope that I have been in some way helpful.

Regards,

Jim O'Connor

# Resources and Further Support

If you'd like to find out more about how to eliminate anxious and worrying thoughts so that you can live a more satisfying and fulfilling life please don't hesitate to call me on 94200788. Or you can look up the following resources on the Internet to get you started.

1. Resources for following up
2. Penn State University Department of Positive Psychology
3. Sydney University Department of Positive Psychology
4. The Australian Psychological Association
5. The Mind Brain Institute
6. The Happiness Institute
7. Clear Day Consulting Counselling and Coaching Services.
8. Psychology Today articles