



Beating stress, anxiety
& depression

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Part 1

Understanding stress, anxiety and depression

'There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.' **William Shakespeare.**

'Any idiot can face a crisis - it's day-to-day living that wears you out!' **Anton Chekhov.**

Feeling anxious? That's because your brain is producing chemicals associated with fear. These can shake your ability to cope with things that you previously took in your stride. People can become stressed without massive problems – the stressor needn't be real, it can be self-generated through imagination.

Anxiety and stress are two different conditions – stress is experienced as a response to a threat whereas anxiety is a reaction to stress – but the symptoms are usually the same. So let's take this opportunity to explore what's really going on in your head...

Stress hormones, such as adrenaline and noradrenaline, help us perform better and react faster. People who experience frequent anxiety will recognise the symptoms (women are nearly twice as likely to experience anxiety than men). Symptoms range from feeling nervous over the slightest thing to struggling to deal with difficult situations. These symptoms are reasonable responses, but they become problematic when they become permanent.

Anxiety – more specifically known as Generalised Anxiety Disorder, is a mental health condition in which people find it difficult to control their stress and worry. Anxiety is thought to affect around one in 20 people in the UK, although its causes are not fully understood, other than in general terms. However, the stresses and strains of everyday existence on planet earth are usually the cause.

Anxiety is triggered by the activity in certain areas of the brain, a chemical imbalance, or some past trauma. Some people can become anxious for no apparent reason at all. Over time, all adaptations, including suppressed immunity, low sex drive, digestion, and sleep become permanent symptoms. For some people, the cause of the stress – unhappy marriages, problems at work, finances, or bereavement – are never out of mind – they can live on in our imagination and we internalise them.

Other causes of stress include smoking, poor diet, social disadvantage, lack of green spaces, or long-term negative thoughts & emotions. These pressures are 'like a dripping tap' and are, perhaps unsurprisingly, also present in the animal kingdom. Anxiety is a normal part of life that affects different people in different ways at different times, sometimes as a result of a combination of causes, or sometimes *without* an obvious cause.

The physical manifestations of anxiety range from clammy palms to pounding heart or feelings of dizziness, chest tightening, indigestion, dry mouth and fatigue. Other symptoms include increased heart rate and muscle tension, hyperventilation and dizziness, nausea, a tightness across the chest, tension headaches, hot flushes, trembling, feeling like you are

choking and tingling in the hands and feet. Most of these physical feelings are the same as those for fight and flight.

Some psychological symptoms include believing you are losing control, thinking you might die or fall ill, imagining people are staring at you, feeling detached from others or constantly on edge. Staying positive can feel like a daily challenge that requires a certain amount of focus and attention... and energy.

Stress and anxiety harms us in all kinds of ways by causing depression – self-medicating addiction, anger, insomnia, relationship problems, fear for the future, constant worry poor concentration, and loss of appetite. Some people are so stressed they can't even think straight.

Stress is a strategy that can help us survive in the short term, but chronic stress keeps short-term responses active for too long. Raised blood pressure, exhaustion, loss of sex drive, even digestive problems like IBS are actually adaptive and essential functions that are outstaying their welcome!

Anxiety is most often characterised by impatience, poor concentration, feelings of helplessness, irritability, tension and restlessness, but there *are* things you can do about it!

A lot of people say they 'tend to overthink'. In truth, what they mean is, they tend to over imagine. We have to help people spend less time ruminating to stop them falling into depression. If people spending lots of time ruminating they can be helped to make their lives a more comfortable place in which to live. To put it bluntly, they have created their own prison in their heads, and that prison has become the hardest to break out of!

Anxiety can make a person imagine, or believe, things are worse than they really are. Events in our lives, often beyond our direct control, can build up until a person is unable to cope – with anxiety taking them by surprise.

When you're under constant attack, logical thinking takes a back seat, but if the cause of the stress is permanent, your body continues to produce the long-term stress hormone cortisol – and it's cortisol that produces the symptoms of stress and anxiety.

The Neurological causes of chronic stress are better understood. Stress is caused when the amygdala, the hypothalamus and the pituitary gland conspire together to direct feelings & emotions. This process is often called 'amygdala hijack' and it's cortisol that takes over control of the brain.

Cortisol connects to the wider body, affecting stress, anxiety, the immune system and also longevity. Ironically, cortisol is also the only hormone that you can't live without. Cortisol controls tissue, bone, muscle, metabolism, immunity, mood, arousal, cognition, and more.

New research has discovered that cortisol levels are directly linked to socio-economic position. In other words, cortisol is linked to social status and low cortisol, combined with low self-esteem, means that you are likely to feel your position in the social hierarchy is more threatened. Stress affects cortisol secretion and this can inhibit memory, circadian rhythm and cognitive function. Cortisol waking response is going to dictate what sort of day you're going to have.

Surprisingly, some people suffering from anxiety may even prefer to be slightly worried all the time than feel relaxed. Researchers have suggested constantly being uncomfortable could buffer someone's emotions in the case of something actually going wrong. In these cases, a sudden spike in anxiety would be less unpleasant because they were already

anxious! However... psychologists believe it's much healthier to allow yourself to experience a full range of emotions so you can learn to both relax *and* react as situations demand. The more you do this, the more you realise you can do it – it's much healthier to allow yourself to be relaxed.

For evolutionary survival reasons, our brains are hard-wired to look for and focus on threats. This survival mechanism served us very well when we lived on the savannah and had to hunt for food, but there has been a price to pay for this strategy – the strategy can also create pessimism and negativity because the mind has an inbuilt tendency to wander until it finds a threat. This capacity often magnifies our perception that things may be about to go badly wrong. Maybe it's human to imagine the worst may happen, even though imagining the worst means that we can prepare a 'plan B'.

Numerous studies have shown that optimists are physically and psychologically healthier than pessimists. But negative thoughts and emotions are bad for both mental and physical health.

Martin Seligman, along with researchers from the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Michigan and Dartmouth College, worked on a study that followed people from age 25 to 65 to see how their levels of pessimism or optimism influenced their overall wellbeing. They found that pessimist's health deteriorated far more rapidly as they aged.

Researchers at the Mayo Clinic, US, also found that optimists have lower levels of cardiovascular disease and longer life-spans. Although the exact mechanism through which pessimism affects health hasn't been identified, further research at Yale University and the University of Colorado found that pessimism is also linked to a weakened immune response. Researchers from the University of Kentucky even injected optimists and pessimists with a virus to measure their immune response – and found that optimists had a much stronger immune response than pessimists.

But having a positive outlook on life doesn't just affect your health, it affects your performance. In one study, researchers measured the degree to which insurance salespeople were optimistic or pessimistic in their work. Optimistic salespeople sold 37% more policies than their pessimistic counterparts, who were also twice as likely to leave the company during their first year of employment.

Even if you practice meditation, you will still get odd thoughts popping into your head every few seconds. When brains are not engaged in any specific thought process, they inevitably start to wander, either reflecting or planning. In other words, your brain is constantly thinking. If you're anxious, it's like having someone you don't like looking over your shoulder, constantly telling you you're doing things wrong.

Thinking about what's happened – or what might happen – is such a central part of the human condition that neuroscientists now consider it to be the brain's 'default-mode'. In effect, we piece together bits of our life history, past, present and future. While there is still some discussion about this, neurologists generally see this activity as a healthy. But there is one particular way the brain thinks that psychologists say can be destructive because some of our thinking can be self-limiting – even self-destructive.

People tend to take their thoughts to be real and objectively true, but in contrast to tangible things – such as TVs and computers – thoughts are just... thoughts – intangible, fleeting, and sometimes unreliable. We spend our lives so immersed in our own opinions about people, places and things – including ourselves – that we often mistake things we *imagine* to be real for reality itself.

Social psychologists call this 'naive realism'. It means that your experience of something is the final word on that thing – if someone made you mad, it's because they're a bad person, or if you just got fired, that means you must be useless at your job. These self-narratives are especially self-limiting and even self-destructive, and this kind of rumination is a key component of depression and anxiety disorders.

Rehashing negative experiences likely has its roots in human evolution. Your brain remembers difficult times as significant experiences and rumination tends to replay negative memories and all the negative emotions that go with them. Recycling the same thoughts and associated emotions is unproductive because it doesn't offer any insight into cause and effect – in other words, the meaning of those events as part of the bigger picture.

Instead, we should learn to create psychological and emotional distance between these imaginary events and ourselves. In other words, we should learn to put things in perspective. For example, if you're constantly going over an argument with your partner in your head, you're not really getting anywhere.

Rumination encourages anxiety, which in turn can lead to depressive thoughts. People who ruminate a lot are less forgiving of themselves – some turn to alcohol or drugs and tend to take more risks. In extremis, some are at greater risk of suicidal thought. This repetitive pattern can spiral into depression, where every event becomes a reflection of your negative self-worth. If you're looking for a negative interpretation of events, you're more than likely going to find one. These thought processes border on paranoia – sufferers always imagine that the worst interpretation is the truth. If the pattern continues, you begin to impose your own negativity on similar events. Before you know it, you have established a cycle from which it is difficult to break free.

So the mind doesn't always work on logic, most of the time it works on imagination as our brain processes information and tries to predict the future. Consequently, beliefs are not always factual, and anxiety often becomes a misuse of the imagination.

But imagination can also be a powerful resource. Hypnosis is the key that unlocks the imagination and helps clients to learn and develop. When your mind was constantly reinforcing negativity, you started to believe it – and beliefs are not always factual!

From the moment of our birth, we continually struggle to make sense of the world, and by the time we develop language skills, the self-narrative process already interwoven with our sensory experience, even before episodic memory starts to form. The narrative process is part of the cognitive process, so thoughts become integrated into our initial experiences.

Self-narrative, language use, and sensory experience are all interwoven. *Everyone* has a voice in their head which comments on everything. This is so completely embedded in our experience of the world that most of the time, we're not even aware we're doing it. Attention to what's happening in the world around us is a needs-based function of cognition, but as well as allowing us to notice opportunities, it also highlights threats.

Millions of years of evolution is telling us how and what to think – the ancestor that didn't worry about storing enough food for winter or what went wrong on the last hunt didn't live long enough to pass on his genes to *be* your ancestor. Although anxiety evolved as part of the 'fight or flight' mechanism as a way to avoiding danger, so anxiety is also part of the survival strategy, but it can be inappropriately activated in everyday life when stress builds up.

I have treated a lot of clients who suffered from anxiety. The techniques to deal with it are well understood, although I have a much less formal approach. Both therapist and client understand that anxiety is something to avoid because of the impact it can have on mental and physical health. High anxiety levels change how our brains deal with dangerous and threatening situations. Anxious people can respond better to danger, especially if the anxiety comes at the right moment! High levels of anxiety can also change the way we spot danger and this too can make us better able to respond to threats.

Anxious people detect threats in a different region of the brain than those who are permanently laid back – they process social threat signals in the sensory circuits in the temporal region of the brain. Coincidentally, these are the same areas responsible for facial recognition. But this difference may allow anxious individuals, such as those who are hypersensitive to threat detection, to take more rapid action when they sense danger.

Daily annoyances, from being stuck in traffic to frustration at badly behaved computers can make us irrationally stressed and angry. However, older adults who have already survived a major stressful event, such as a war or a serious car accident, are better able to cope with the ups and downs of day-to-day stress.

Older people often get used to stress and develop strategies to help themselves cope with it. When stress returns after a long absence, it can be just as debilitating as before. Even so, constant day-to-day stress is much more difficult to deal with than rare stress events.

In one clinical experiment, volunteers were shown a selection of photographs of angry or menacing faces in order to determine their individual ability to detect stress. The researchers noted that the direction the person in the photograph was looking played a key role in enhancing sensitivity to threat assessment, irrespective of whether the volunteers were suffering from high levels of anxiety or not.

Anger coupled with a direct gaze produced a response in the brain in only 200 milliseconds, but if the angry person was looking elsewhere, the response was slower. This is because the brain automatically and instinctively devotes more processing resources to negative emotions that signal threat, rather than to any other display of negative emotion signals, such as sorrow.

The volunteer's brains were also able to detect other negative emotions, such as fear more quickly than positive emotions. Again, a very useful skill when it comes to survival. Walk through any British city centre late on a Saturday night and you'll know what I'm talking about.

Each volunteer had their anxiety levels measured before each experiment. Those with high anxiety levels tended to have more activity in the areas of the brain that govern movement and fight and flight mechanisms and so were more ready to spring into action.

So brief periods of anxiety might not be such a bad thing after all. It stopped our ancestors from being eaten by the odd sabre-toothed tiger and it can save us from an encounter with someone with a Liverpool accent.

Depression and suicide

Depression can strike anyone, regardless of background, status, health or wealth. The black dog of depression has no regard for how you think your life is *supposed* to be. Left to its own devices and unchecked... depression can be a killer.

Most hypnotherapists are not sufficiently trained or equipped to deal with individuals who are seriously thinking about ending it all. Thus, any kind of intervention would be decidedly risky. Any talk of suicide needs to be handled by qualified professionals – psychologists or psychiatrists who have experience in counselling, or who have had the proper training. I have only ever had two clients who have talked of suicide and on both occasions, I have referred them to those wiser than myself. This is not just about being professional and what is obviously in the best interests of your client – it may save a lot of explaining when the police knock on the door with the bad news. Charging in where angels fear to tread could be the short route to a malpractice suit.

There are many reasons why people take their own lives, but the main factor is the feeling of isolation and loneliness. Suicide accounts for almost 1% of annual deaths in the UK. Second only to road traffic accidents, suicide is the biggest killer of young men. It is also the leading cause of mortality in women who are either pregnant or in the three months after birth.

Depression, left undiagnosed and unchecked, does its work slowly, sapping energy, hope, and eventually, the will to carry on living. Sufferers slowly, imperceptibly withdraw from society, so much so that in the end, no one even notices their absence.

Around two thirds of adults in the UK experience some kind of mental block during their lives, but of those, two thirds recover without any therapeutic intervention. Of the remaining third, only about 5% are actually at risk. But even this 5% represents a significant number of people needing help.

There are plenty of prescription pills and potions available, but for our purposes, I wish to concentrate on the alternative or complementary therapies – the ‘talking therapies’ – which have transformed the lives of literally millions of people.

The inner suffering of victims of depression is hidden from view and is complicated by the fact that no one can truly understand the psychological agonies that many sufferers describe as being far worse than any physical pain.

Also overlooked is the fact that depression doesn't only affect the victim – those closest to them are often powerless to help, something that can be just as traumatic. Depressives can be unpredictable in their behaviour and sometimes this unpredictability can even be violent. There can be little or no warning and episodes can explode in a split second, often for no apparent cause or reason.

There are many reasons why people take their own lives, but the main factor is the feeling of isolation and loneliness. Most people avoid talking about suicide with people suffering from depression, mainly because no one wants the responsibility of accidentally triggering an attempt, not to mention the fear of saying something insensitive or stupid. The irony is that the opposite is true!

Caring is the enemy of suicide! Recent research shows that talking about suicide and discussing it openly reduces the risk of people actually trying it. It is precisely because people are afraid to talk to potential victims about suicide that increases the risk they might try it when in fact for the sufferer, there is something very calming about talking openly about it.

Sufferers need to be able to express how they feel – that's therapeutic in itself. Once it's out in the open, both client and therapist can breathe a sigh of relief. Individuals who are serious about taking their own lives are usually honest about the reasons for it. Talking about it can diminish the desire – which is why volunteer groups such as The Samaritans are so good. They have vast practical experience, patience and understanding at their fingertips.

Every A&E department has access to mental health professionals on a 24 hour a day basis – even on Christmas Day, which is one of the highest risk times. You can just walk in and ask to speak to someone, no questions asked. They *will* be able to help.

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is recognised as a genuine condition and there's compelling research to suggest that SAD really does exist.

Studies suggest around a third of people suffer from SAD, which was first identified by US scientists in the early 1980s. Symptoms range from mildly lower energy levels to severe depression. Most people find themselves somewhere in the middle – they are not paralysed with despair, but as the days shorten, they struggle to get out of bed and have to force themselves to go outside and absorb any available light. Sufferers can feel profoundly miserable, without anything specific reason. Gloom is often alleviated by a walk in the sunshine, or a sun-filled holiday abroad. Most people resign themselves to SAD symptoms being part of winter life.

Symptoms listed by the UK National Health Service (NHS) include persistent low mood, loss of interest in normal activities, irritability, despair, lethargy, struggling to get up and strangely, craving carbohydrates.

A new study of more than 5,200 people conducted by the Netherlands University in Groningen discovered that lack of sunlight does not influence mood – on the contrary, people who are of a natural sunny disposition are unaffected by the nights drawing in.

Some people may feel worse in winter simply because they associate their negative mood to factors outside their control... but winter could simply be stressful because of an increase in other depression-related symptoms. In other words, people think they've got SAD because they just expect to have symptoms. The Groningen study's key finding was that overall, only those already high in neuroticism – those more likely to suffer negative emotions such as anxiety, fear and worry – felt worse at the end of the summer.

People who are already vulnerable to emotional instability are more likely to be impacted by the change in the seasons. Lack of light and seasonal change increase vulnerability factors that can make people more prone to experiencing depression and low mood – those who suffer from anxiety especially so. In other words, it's all in the mind, so no surprise that being anxious increases the likelihood of SAD.

However, none of the above makes SAD less real – it simply means that people suffering from anxiety or depression are likely to feel worse. A reduction in sunlight availability can affect the hypothalamus and cause us to produce too much melatonin, which makes us more sleepy and lethargic. Lack of sunlight can inhibit production of the brain chemical serotonin, without which, we may experience bouts of low mood and depression.

SAD is a genuine condition closely linked to depression, so sleeping patterns can also affect the severity of SAD. In winter, we don't get enough light to set the biological clock that synchronises our rhythms over 24 hours, so they drift later and later. If you have a 'late' clock when it comes to sleeping and waking, you may be more likely to be more vulnerable to depression.

Getting up early provides the key to feeling better. Recent research discovered a photo receptor in the eye sensitive to light. As light hits a certain cell in the retina, it transmits information that it's dawn or dusk, light or dark, direct to your brain's biological clock. By absorbing light first thing in the morning, you regulate the rhythms in your body. But

without that trigger, the brain fails to receive the right signals, and you'll struggle to wake up. Worse, you'll crave carbs and feel gloomy.

However the condition is not necessarily connected to direct sunlight, but to the length of the day, whether sunny or not, which is presumably why some studies have found no appreciable effect of Vitamin D on SAD. One solution is to get up as soon as it gets light. And then there's good sleep hygiene – make sure there are not too many distractions in your bedroom, no stimulants before bed and keep the room cool.

Some people find a light-box useful. It produces a bright, white light that mimics sunlight to encourage the brain to produce serotonin and reduce sleep-inducing melatonin. One study found a light-box also decreased cravings for carbs.

And then there's exercise. When you exercise, your brain releases feel-good hormones, endorphins and serotonin, which give you a natural boost and trigger positive feelings. In addition, your body also becomes better at managing the stress hormone cortisol.

The Antidepressant myth

If you really want to know about the effectiveness of antidepressant drugs, then you could do no better than read Professor Irving Kirsch's book, ***The Emperors New Drugs – Exploding the Antidepressant Myth*** – a damning indictment of the pharmaceutical industry.

We are in great danger of becoming a nation of zombies, reliant on anti-depressants to anaesthetise us against life's little problems.

Prescription rates have nearly trebled in 15 years, putting the UK fourth among 29 Western countries. Britons take nearly twice as many of the 'happy pills' as their counterparts in France, Italy and the Netherlands and it is estimated that one in ten people are on some kind of antidepressant medication.

It's easy to blame GPs for fobbing off depressed patients with pills because waiting lists for in-depth therapy are so long. Patients are generally willing to ask for help and for some people, anti-depressants can help to normalise chemical imbalances in their brains. But GPs are too often having to deal with patients with complex social problems and have less than ten minutes to sort them out – it's easier to write a prescription for the 'quick fix' these drugs represent.

A major problem is that society is becoming less tolerant of emotional pain and we are trying to protect ourselves too much from negative emotion. People are getting anti-depressants in situations where a few years ago they would buck up and get on with their lives. Feeling a bit down or even downright depressed happens to everyone at some time in their lives – we all suffer losses and the natural progression is that some adversity stimulates personal development. We should accept that feeling miserable for a few weeks is normal!

In any event, anti-depressants are not the quick fix many believe them to be – it can take weeks for the drugs to have any effect. By that time, the patient has come to terms with their despondency anyway. The fact is that a million people a year in the UK are needlessly given anti-depressants or sedatives, many of whom were wrongly prescribed.

James Davies, an expert in mental health at the University of Roehampton, agrees that patients are being given drugs because there is poor provision for proper therapy, which in this case means *someone to talk to!* Some people have to wait more than a year to access therapy on the NHS. Many patients remain on the drugs for years because doctors mistake the effects of withdrawal when they come off the drugs for depression, so so they keep prescribing more of the same. Some are being prescribed when the depression is only minimal. Side-effects include feeling agitated or anxious, nausea, indigestion, headaches and low sex drive.

At best, Anti-depressants are not happy pills – they merely help people to cope. They can give people strength to go to work or to see friends – or to engage in therapy that will get them better. Some patients remain on the drugs indefinitely. A rare but deadly side effect is 'serotonin syndrome' which causes seizures, irregular heart beat and unconsciousness. Most anti-depressants are not generally very effective for mild depression.

There are four main types of anti-depressant – the most common, including Prozac, are selective serotonin re-uptake inhibitors that work by increasing levels of ‘feel-good’ chemicals in our brain, known as neurotransmitters, including serotonin.

Coping with the ups and downs of life – personal relationships, the workplace, family issues or bereavement should be more a matter of picking yourself up, dusting yourself down, and starting all over again, not wallowing in in your own personal self-absorbed pit of despondency. The magic pill to make an unfaithful spouse ditch their lover, or improve the behaviour of your ungrateful teenager, or get the boss to ease your workload, or bring back the dead has not been invented yet – and nor is it likely to be. . That life’s ups and downs make you feel downhearted is normal, not pathological. Feeling dejected is not an illness and drugs ain’t the answer!

Previous generations got on with life and bore the brunt of worse problems than this generation can possibly imagine. They lived through world wars, made do with clothes that lasted a lifetime, had no TV or internet, and no central heating. They knew life would be tough and they had the resilience to deal with it without resorting to drugs.

The only thing you can say about drugs is that they’re cheaper than psychotherapeutic interventions. I’m not blaming the Health Services or the government – I’m blaming the whingeing masses who want and expect an easy life. The fact is, life is easier now than it has ever been!

Talking to someone is the answer – not enriching the pharmaceutical companies!

The effect of environment on stress and anxiety

I'm lucky – I've never had a boring job, although the long drives and the hundred or so hours I spend sitting on aeroplanes each year is the downside. But I'm not going to complain because my job is interesting. I get to meet new people, I get to visit exciting places and see extraordinary things. I have never suffered depression, even though some bad things have happened in my life.

But I am interested in other people's lives and how *they* cope with adversity, especially as so many of my hypnotherapy clients complain about their jobs. Job satisfaction can affect memory and concentration in later life and lead to a decline in overall brain function.

Researchers at the College of Human Science at Florida State University are concerned that having a dull job and a dirty working environment can have a long-term negative effect on the psychological well-being of employees.

Of course, we long ago realised that working in a dirty or noisy or dangerous workplace can have a detrimental effect on both physical and psychological health, but a closer look at how *stimulating* one's work environment is has revealed the largest effect.

The Florida State researchers examined cognitive function data, gleaned in the main from questionnaires and interviews, from almost 5,000 working adults who participated in the study. They examined work environments and compared them with their ability to remember and later use the information they had learned at work. They also examined their ability to complete tasks, manage time and pay attention.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, they found greater occupational complexity – that is, the more challenging the job, specifically the learning of new skills and new challenges – resulted in stronger cognitive performance as people aged. Perhaps unsurprisingly, they also found that those whose jobs exposed them to a dirty working environment suffered a cognitive decline over the years.

One of the conclusions of the study, and perhaps the most important, was that jobs that involved workers in some decision-making ability protected cognitive function later in life. Even minor changes to the work environment, for instance introducing carpets, plants, or art into the workplace made a difference to employees which continued later in life.

The study was published in the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*.

A few years ago, researchers in Japan discovered that giving houseplants to elderly patients in care homes to look after increased their life spans. The idea that the simple act of caring for and nurturing a plant gave residents something more to live for was proved to be correct. Residents who didn't get a houseplant to look after passed away sooner than those who did.

Sterile work environments are depressing and offer no encouragement whatsoever to employee's creativity – but putting plants close to workers' desks encourages them to work harder, thus improving performance and productivity by almost a fifth! The presence of a little greenery also improves job satisfaction and wellbeing – and makes workers feel happier.

Dr Craig Knight, an expert on the psychology of working environments at the University of Exeter extended this idea to the workplace. His 'test subjects' were employees at three different companies in Finland. First, they were asked to work in a bleak, stripped-down office. Then, one group were allowed to choose plants to put around their desk, while a second group had their office 'greened' for them. Just adding a few plants had a strong effect on productivity, especially when workers were given the chance to control their own environment.

Putting green foliage near desks also boosts intellectual performance. Plants give workers a feeling of autonomy, possibly because unconsciously, it reminds us of being at one with nature. It is already accepted that people are happier living where there are trees and green spaces, rather than in the 60's style concrete jungles responsible for hopelessness.

This study, along with others like it, has important ramification for those suffering with depression. Adding greenery to homes does lift the mood. The problem with people suffering from depression is that their homes are often unkempt and untidy. Depressives get into a rut where tidying up and cleaning falls by the wayside. Giving people suffering from depression some houseplants to water and to look after engenders feelings of responsibility.

For many individuals, this could be the first step on the road to recovery.

Part 2

Quick fixes and long-term solutions

'Life would be boring without a few ups and downs...' **My grandmother.**

'Use the past as a springboard, not a settee...' **My other grandmother.**

There are ways to beat stress, anxiety and depression – one session of hypnotherapy can be enough – but there are also some simple quick fixes you can try yourself...

1. First, try to identify exactly what it is that's causing you to feel anxious. Next, form a mental picture (visualise) the cause and mentally separate it from everything else that's happening in your life. This only takes a few seconds, but it will help if you can find a quiet corner where you can close your eyes and use your imagination.

Focus on all the positive things that are happening in your life at the moment and imagine putting the source of your anxiety in a strong wooden box. Once you've done that, remind yourself that you can deal with the cause of the anxiety *later*, in other words, you'll deal with it only when it's convenient for you or appropriate to do so!

Finally, imagine yourself putting the box away somewhere... you are literally going to store it out of the way until the time is right. You'll be surprised how easy this is to do, and the more you practice it, the easier it will get.

2. Another useful step would be to cut out caffeine. Caffeine is a stimulant that prompts your body to release stress hormones that will make you feel even more stressed and on edge than you were before! Caffeine is also addictive – both tea and coffee act like a drug. As the caffeine effect wears off, your brain starts to crave more. No one wants to end up on this roller coaster of highs and lows.

Because caffeine is a drug, it may be a mistake to stop suddenly and go cold turkey because some people do experience quite dramatic withdrawal symptoms such as headaches, nausea, tiredness or even muscle cramps or depression. It would be better to gradually cut down your caffeine intake over a few weeks, perhaps slowly substituting other drinks, such as herbal teas or warm flavoured drinks.

3. Another step in the right direction would be to cut out sugar – especially if you want to start controlling the highs and lows – because an essential part of combatting anxiety is to balance your blood sugar levels.

Sugar crashes, which can happen during periods without food – or more to the point, the right food – cause the stress hormones adrenaline and cortisol to be released into the bloodstream. Again, it might be an idea to do this over a period of time. There is a price to pay for being able to run away from the lion that wants to eat you! You can feel more jittery and irritable when blood sugar plummets, so gradual change is the better course of action.

As your blood sugar levels steady, so will your mood swings – reduced adrenaline levels will automatically make you feel happier and calmer inside and feel less stressed and anxious.

4. Empowering yourself to just say no is easier than you think! This is a step that a lot of people find difficult, but it doesn't have to be! Believe it or not, being assertive is surprisingly empowering. You will be amazed how much better you feel if you look after number 1 – that's you! – and there's nothing wrong with doing that! Maybe it's time to start saying 'NO' a bit more often.

5. You should try to get regular sleep. Sleep, stress, and anxiety are all linked. Without enough sleep it can be harder to adapt to challenging situations, and when we can't cope efficiently with stress it can be harder to have a good nights rest. Many of us experience feelings of pressure, tension, and nervousness, especially after a busy and stressful day and these feelings can appear more prominent at bedtime. But this doesn't have to be a vicious circle – there's truth in the saying that things always look better in the morning!

Sleep represents a significant contribution to a healthy lifestyle, and it's important to get your fair share – you are entitled to it you know!

6. It's well known that posture can profoundly affect mood. Even just standing or sitting up straight can beat depression because posture has a direct impact on mood.

Let's try this experiment:

First, stand with your shoulders hunched down, pull a sad face and stare at you feet...Now try and feel happy... Difficult isn't it?

Now stand up straight, take a deep breath, put your shoulders back and put a big smile on your face. Now try and feel sad. Impossible?

Well that just proved my point. The right posture really can change the way you feel! Standing or sitting up straight boosts energy, enthusiasm, and attention, and makes you feel more alert, confident, and less fearful. It also gives you a higher sense of self-esteem. I have conducted this experiment many times with both clients and hypnotherapy students and the results are always the same.

The benefits of the technique have been confirmed by Dr Elizabeth Broadbent of Auckland University in New Zealand. Once in position, students had to give a five-minute speech, which would be judged, before counting backwards from 1,022 in blocks of 13. During the test, they were randomly asked to fill out surveys about their mood and how they were feeling. Overwhelmingly, those who were sat straight showed more energy and more enthusiasm. They also articulated themselves better and used more words.

Hypnotherapists and NLP enthusiasts have been using this technique for decades, but it's nice to see that it has now been confirmed by scientific testing.

So there are some quick fixes, but there are also some long-term solutions:

All humans need attention, security, intimacy, connection to community, and a sense of meaning in life. When these needs are unfulfilled, they are replaced by an emotional hunger.

Loneliness or a sense of meaninglessness are both indicators of unsatisfied needs, so I always try to discover what clients are missing in their lives. Problem solving must include

helping the client to meet their emotional needs. In keeping with my lifelong passion for finding the simplest and most efficient way of solving problems, and I often try to find common-sense short cuts for clients. Getting straight to the point has always proved a success, as has my dislike of pussyfooting around issues.

A good therapist should identify the point, or points, on which each case turns. Clients will recover the moment they recognise the truth... even if it has to be dragged kicking and screaming from the very depths of their minds. I'm not a great believer in telling clients what they want to hear... If their best friends won't tell them the truth, then it's up to me to get them to face up to it.

People suffering from depression can usually identify the cause of their depression. I have lost count of how many times I've listened to clients talk about their present problems, but never mention the things they used to enjoy in life. The goal is to get them to want to get back to their old happier normal.

The real key to curtailing depression is action, not words – mainly clients need to escape from their own prison of social isolation and get out more... and forget the Prozac.

Hypnosis can help clients recognise their true selves, as if reflected in a mirror. I have learned by experience that depression is often just a symptom of isolation, of having lost the ability to engage with others. If an individual has withdrawn from society, it only takes a little practice to rejoin the club. This is particularly true for clients suffering from learned helplessness – the answer really is to get them back into engaging in social activities as quickly as possible.

For these clients, just getting them out of the house can take a certain amount of effort, but it's worth every ounce of it. Many clients have lapsed into laziness and succumbed to the habit of giving in to the instant gratification snacking or drinking or cannabis addiction, which is why many of them are overweight. More sugar, more salt, leads to more weight gain and a reduced desire to enjoy what the world has to offer.

Nearly a third of clients do not respond to CBT or 'Mindfulness' or other mainstream psychotherapy. Of those who do respond positively, many relapse, although the exact percentage is unknown because some clients simply stop turning up for appointments. The good news is that there is a better and far more effective way to get people up and running and rejoining the human race.

Human interaction really is the best cure – and the best protection – against depression. Any hobby group, for example pottery, photography, sport, art, music appreciation, *anything...* as long as it brings them into contact with other people who enjoy the same things. It's not just the company other human beings provide – with membership also comes responsibility and a sense of purpose.

People who join societies and clubs learn to be reliable, they learn basic responsibilities like turning up on time, they learn to be supportive themselves, and most important, they realise they have an obligation to their fellows. These factors, once harnessed, can turn a lonely depressive into a contributing member of society. Social contact with groups who have the same interests is considerably more beneficial than contact with individuals who share no common or specialised interests.

I can hardly believe I'm saying this, never mind recommending it, but joining a mainstream church group can sometimes offer a way out of the vicious downward spiral of depression.

At least with mainstream religious groups, individuals receive debt-free support from the group, something which is fundamental to human needs and the human survival strategy. You don't even have to believe in an omnipotent deity to be accepted into the church because the church is more about community than it is about conversion!

Everyone functions better in a group. Joining a group – better still, joining two or three different groups, also has distinct economic advantages, broadening horizons, increasing knowledge, enabling the individual to see new places and enjoy new experiences, and most important of all, make new friends. Deep down, human beings are social creatures who depend on each other more than they realise – or will admit.

It is important to remember that depression often has external triggers such as loss of a companion or being forced to live alone, but there can be no doubt that social isolation is the breeding ground of depression.

University of Chicago Neuroscientist John T. Cacioppo has dealt with 229 middle-aged and older adults and published his own findings in 2010. He discovered that individuals who reported being lonely at any point in a five year period were much more likely to develop depression within a year. The opposite was true of those who reported low levels of loneliness. The results were regardless and independent of age or gender.

Loneliness is also the prime factor that precedes suicide. Individuals with low levels of social support are more likely to consider ending it all – a fact confirmed in 2012 by a team at the University of Newcastle (Australia) led by psychologist Tonelle Handley. The study centred on rural communities in New South Wales where social networks and the availability of social support were unusually low.

There is no doubt that depression is the result of social isolation because I have seen it in numerous clients. It's really not that difficult to spot because most of them tell me how lonely they are within minutes of walking through the door. If there is no sense of belonging, loneliness will spawn depression as surely as night follows day, and the more protracted the loneliness and isolation, the worse the depression will be.

The need to be part of a group is written into our DNA. Soldiers see the regiment as a family. Bonds established between members of one regiment are stronger than those between soldiers from outside the regiment.

Disenfranchised and socially awkward young Asian men run off to join terrorist groups that offer them something better than second-class citizenship in a country they do not recognise as their own. The plight of these young men is exacerbated by the fact that they have often been brought up in isolated communities that do not interact with the rest of society and where there is little or no integration. Little wonder then they perceive the opportunity of becoming a 'fighter' attractive. Maybe the thought of owning an AK47 and having sex with girls means they will at last be treated with some respect. It would certainly appear more satisfying than stacking shelves in Morrisons.

So the moral of the story is that it's not just membership and social interaction with a group that staves off depression, but the sense of connection to the group that makes it work. My experience is that once people start taking part in and contributing to something, they start to enjoy it – slowly but surely, the shackles of depression begin to fall away. The more groups, societies or clubs they join, the more they are likely to go out in groups to dine or watch a movie – and the more likely it is that depression will be staved off in the long term... and the less likely they will be to fall back into it.

A 2013 study at the university of Exeter proves the point. Of a study of 4,000 individuals suffering depression, those who did not join a group or engage in any social interaction had a relapse rate of 41%. Of those who joined one group, the relapse rate was 31%, two groups, 21%, and with those who joined three or more groups, the relapse rate fell to just 15%.

There is however a caveat with all this. For the group to represent an effective therapy, it must reflect the interests of the person joining it. This is a matter of common sense, but its importance should not be overlooked. It is important that the individual truly feels a connection with the group – they must have a common interest (yoga, photography, amateur theatrics etc.) and they must get on well with the other members. Individuals who feel strongly connected to the group recover twice as well as those who feel only weakly connected to it – so it's absolutely necessary to find something that genuinely interests and excites them.

So... how does all this work in practice?

Research has shown that sharing an experience with other people (and the more the merrier) makes the experience more intense. It makes no difference whether the experience is good or bad, funny or frightening. More than that, shared experiences are intensified even if they happen in silence. The same is true when an experience is shared with someone they have only just met.

A recent study carried out by psychologist Erica Boothby of Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, shows that people who share experiences with another person rate those events as more pleasant (or even more unpleasant) than those who undergo the experience by themselves. What's important is not just simply being together with others but taking part in activities that involve the whole group. When all the group are focused on a pleasurable activity such as watching a live comedy show, listening to a concert, or watching their team play football, the experience is enhanced for each member.

It's true – I have carefully watched audiences at my shows for 40 years – and groups and also families always have the best time. It worries me if I see someone sitting by themselves, which occasionally happens. They are, I'm sure, laughing inwardly, but they are not having the same experience, and therefore missing out on the same bonding as the groups.

Erica Boothby and her colleagues have explored the relationships between members of the group when experiences are shared. In their first study, 23 female college students were given chocolate to taste. All the chocolates were exactly the same, but some were tasted by all the members of the group at the same time, while some were tasted by students in isolation. Although the chocolates were identical, the tendency was for the students to report the 'shared' chocolates as being tastier.

The researchers suggest that sharing an experience with someone else, even silently, such as listening to music or looking round an art gallery, shows that the mere act of sharing can influence how things are sensed and perceived. To find out whether sharing an experience really does make it more pleasant or unpleasant, the researchers got another group to taste some 'chocolate substitute', in reality a square of dark chocolate the researchers hinted would taste unpleasant. On this occasion, the students reported they liked this chocolate less. They also reported feeling more involved in the tasting experience and more in tune with the other participants when they tasted the chocolate at the same time.

When human beings take part in shared experiences, the mind makes an association with

social interaction with others, something that is a basic human need. The extent to which we are influenced by people around us, even people we don't know and aren't even communicating with, has yet to be measured in more detail. But while individuals are glued to their mobile phones, texting, checking Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp, normal social interaction, the result of hundreds of thousands of years of evolution is being swept aside. The result will be more isolation and more cases of depression.

We evolved to be social creatures – groups give individuals a sense of belonging and add meaning to life. Research has also shown that membership of a group can not only increase one's sense of life being worthwhile, it can also help boost an individual's immune system and make them less likely to lose their temper.

So this is what I do with my clients. I employ suggestion and metaphor that encourages them to get out more... and it works. Nine out of ten of my clients report an improvement in a very short space of time. In short, the answer is... get out more!

Another common cause of stress is feeling powerless or loss of control over one's destiny. Absence of fulfilment also causes stress. By helping clients find effective problem-solving strategies, we can help them reclaim ownership of not just their feelings and emotions, but also their lives. One sure-fire antidote to excessive stress is relaxation – once calm has been restored we can focus on overcoming the real problems. This is where Hypnosis comes into its own.

We know that anxiety is a function of the human survival strategy and that it is purely instinctive. In the more socially sophisticated modern world, it's natural that some people may even find social situations like parties or meeting new people, stressful. Some people will experience anxiousness when faced with important meetings at work – especially if we have to actually *talk!* This is a perfectly natural reaction and if you feel like this, then you should take comfort in knowing you are not alone. Most people are nervous about public speaking or meeting someone others might regard as 'important'. So if this is you... then rest assured that you're normal!

The real problem is that anxiety can undermine your confidence. If you have low levels of confidence or self-esteem, your weaknesses and failures – most of which are imagined anyway – take on a disproportionate meaning. If things don't go well, you're very likely blame your own personal failings, and this in turn means you're less likely to try again. But there is good news... anxiety is easy to control once you know how.

Exercise or time spent in nature is good for relieving stress. Exercise, and I mean moderate aerobic exercise like a short walk or dancing to music (Zumba is very good for this) works wonders, and in a very short time. A little exercise increases energy levels because it increases the amount of oxygen sent to the brain, which in turn increases confidence. Later on, it also helps you sleep. You could even join a cycling club or sports team! The important thing is to do it regularly. Believe it or not, just 20 minutes of exercise three times a week can make all the difference!

It's well known that mood improves with green spaces – not just in individuals but also in groups, creating a positive and discernible shift. It is also well known that arts and music decrease stress. Even a 30 minute visit to an art gallery, a walk in the woods or along the beach will reduce stress.

Exercise produces feel-good endorphins that exert a noticeable positive effect on mood. Make a mental note of how you felt before the exercise and how you feel after. Rate it on a scale of 1 to 10. The positive effects of regular exercise on mood are also accumulative, so

you have to establish a regular pattern. Little and often is the best way. Studies have also shown that when you're physically fit, you don't react so badly to stress.

Talking about your anxiety is also a good idea. Just talking to a friend helps to put things in perspective. It's important to remember that you don't have to feel isolated – it's alright to be open about what you're going through. Getting counselling might help, but I believe with the right approach – easy enough to learn and get used to – getting rid of anxiety is relatively straightforward. It does take a modicum of self-discipline, but once you've done it a few times, it becomes second nature.

Despite it's hype, 'Mindfulness' just means being aware of your thought processes... noticing your thoughts and the impact they have on your feelings and emotions. Mindfulness can get you out of the negative thinking habit.

Part of the success of mindfulness comes from your own ability to meditate for a few moments. Just close your eyes, relax your body, focus your attention for just a few seconds and use a bit of imagination to push away the negative thoughts and replace them with more positive ones. Again, the more you do it, the easier it becomes.

Take a few moments to relax every day. I understand that in the real world, this may be difficult, but a few minutes relaxation will keep stress levels in check. Again, this will make a big difference to your mood. Relaxation is enormously therapeutic in itself.

When you're depressed or anxious, it's all too easy to spend an inordinate amount of time dwelling on and worrying about why you feel so down. This sort of thinking represents a downward spiral into further depression and anxiety. So here's a good exercise... write a list of the things you are worried or anxious about on a piece of paper. This will help you identify each problem and make it easier to mentally lock them away. You need only spend a few moments examining them and the rest of the day is now yours, to concentrate on the things that really matter!

Exercise releases endorphins and endorphins make you happy. Researchers at the Massachusetts General Hospital presented evidence based on genetic data showing that working out really *is* beneficial to both body *and* mind – and there is no evidence to suggest that depression affects your ability to work out.

Remember... getting emotional does not manage stress, it means stress is managing you!

There's a new buzzword in psychology... 'Prioritising positivity'. Ok, so that's two words, but it's all about enjoying little hits of pleasure throughout the day, and a growing number of psychologists think it could be a solution to rising anxiety levels in society as a whole.

So here are a few tips to help you on your way:

- 1.** When we're feeling low we tend to focus on the negatives and overlook the positives. Try this brief exercise: Think of the things that have gone well in the last few days and do this while you're lying in bed before you go to sleep. Trust me – you will notice a change. It's all about being realistic and learning how to prioritise!
- 2.** Write a list of things you've been putting off, rating them from easiest to hardest, then try to tackle them one at a time – starting with the easiest – even small achievements will help rebuild confidence.
- 3.** If you're anxious or depressed, you may be one of those people who thinks they can find solace in Alcohol. *That never works!!!* Alcohol may temporarily lift your mood or

anxiety, but in the long-term it's one of the most common triggers for anxiety and depression. An occasional drink is OK, but you shouldn't drink every day – taking regular days off from alcohol is a much better strategy.

4. Put yourself first! You are entitled to make time in your day to enjoy a treat, a quiet cup of tea or a chat with a friend.

5. Eat sensibly. That doesn't mean trying to survive on salads and lentils! *[Here's a little known fact – lettuce is about as nutritious as cardboard! That's right – there is hardly any nutritional value in lettuce at all! Lettuce is mainly used to 'bulk up the size of sandwiches!]*

Your brain is acutely sensitive to what you eat and drink. But 60% of the brain is made up of essential fatty acids so it's no surprise that countries where people eat the most fish – a good source of essential fatty acids – have the lowest rates of depression. Studies have also found a link between low levels of folic acid, a B vitamin that helps regulate the nervous system, and incidences of depression.

6. It's also important to be realistic about what you can achieve in one day.

Try to understand that a busy life is not necessarily a successful one. There is absolutely no need to feel guilty for not being able to keep up! Chill... you're only here once! Having too much on can create a relentless washing-machine spin of thoughts, mental checklists and fears, which can impact negatively on mood.

7. A useful exercise is to think about a time when you were happy and allow yourself to daydream about it – this is one of the best ways to beat stress.

8. Activities like yoga, exercise, reading and socialising can also help to manage anxiety.

I'm not saying that the above strategies are in any way a 'cure-all' for every anxious thought you may have – sometimes it's only natural to worry – but more often than not one's worries or anxieties really are all in the mind. Joy and meaning doesn't come from constant peace, as some might assume, but from a blend of peace and stress. Manageable emotional stresses can make us stronger, providing better self-esteem and increased confidence. Sometimes life's troubles can be turned into resources to master challenges both old and new.

Many of the leading treatments for anxiety and depression involve methods for establishing new relationships with a person's predisposition by identifying threats and analysing weaknesses and self-narratives.

Both meditation and Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) train people not to believe everything they think about. Meditation has been shown to reduce rumination and depression. CBT can also help with depression, generalised anxiety and panic disorders. The combination of meditation and CBT may be especially effective – mindfulness-based CBT can significantly reduce relapse in people who have recovered from depression.

With CBT, self-narratives are challenged through reappraisal. This can be accomplished by working with a therapist – two people in search of a solution – in a group, or even by clients themselves. Once clients understand the mechanism, they can learn to self-diagnose and change their narrative so it becomes more positive, more upbeat. Combining treatments with hypnosis – even just the relaxation techniques – means clients can become more focused on positive thoughts and emotions.

By rethinking a given situation, possibly examining whether your ideas about what you *thought* happened are truly accurate or what other's intentions might have been, rethinking the narrative and adjusting your emotional reaction will change your perspective. If you can change the way you think about things, you can change the way you feel about them, and if you can change the way you feel about them, you can change the way you feel in yourself.

The main reason CBT works so well for people heavy on rumination is because they've already spent much time interrogating their own thoughts. With reappraisal, they can use that same internal investigation skill and turn it into something that breaks down barriers, rather than creating them. The kind of mental processes used in reappraisal include the ability to focus on certain sensations and ignore others. They can greatly improve your ability to sense what you and others are feeling in a given situation. When these processes work in concert, you can revise your assumptions and see situations in a new light. Clients are sometimes surprised that this happens so quickly and spontaneously. All emotions are subjective and all experiences are subject to some degree of interpretation. It's all about getting beyond the subjective and getting to a place where you recognise clearly the truth of the matter.

Hypnotherapy provides a fast-track to recovery. Hypnosis in itself is not the therapy – hypnosis is the vehicle that delivers the therapy. Once patterns have been recognised and reordered, the rest is surprisingly easy.

The ability to reminisce about happy past times is important for regaining real happiness. People who suffer from depression are less able to remember good times. They have fewer, less detailed and less vivid positive memories. They have difficulty recalling the past – and the ability to reminisce about the past is important for happiness – the absolute opposite of ruminating on negative memories that can lead to depression.

Remembering the good times can cut your stress response by up to 85% because happy, pleasant memories fire up the reward centres in the brain. Remembering or thinking about happy times, visualising positive things or even dreaming about a happy future works better than simply trying to distract yourself.

Research by Dr Mauricio Delgado and Megan Speer at New York's Rutgers University and reported in the journal *Nature Human Behaviour*, tested the effectiveness of pleasant memories on stress on 134 volunteers. The results showed that those who thought about happy times felt calmer, and that the expected rise in the stress hormone cortisol was on average only 15% that of a neutral control group. When their brains were scanned, the participants who thought about happier times showed activity in the circuits linked to reward processing and emotion regulation.

The technique is most effective for people who are already emotionally resilient, but the study concluded that thinking about good memories is the opposite of mindfulness, which encourages people to focus on the present, rather than the past or the future.

According to the World Health Organisation, depression is the leading cause of disability and it affects more than 300million people worldwide. Of all the therapies on offer, Hypnotherapy has the greatest success rate.

In 2019, The Royal College of Psychiatrists finally admitted that withdrawing from antidepressants can cause side effects which can last for months. They also admitted that the potential harmful effects from taking antidepressants are so serious that all patients

should be warned of the risks when they are first prescribed the drugs. For years, health officials minimised the difficulty of withdrawing from antidepressants, insisting side-effects were 'mild'. But in a new 'position statement' the Royal College of Psychiatrists admitted some patients do experience 'severe' side effects which can last weeks or even months.

The worst-hit patients experienced nausea, anxiety, insomnia and agitation. In a major U-turn, the Royal College said the risk should always be discussed with patients when they are prescribed the drugs... and called on NHS watchdog – the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) – to change its guidance to reflect this position.

Britons use more antidepressants than most other Western countries. Yet our GPs still prescribe the vast majority of antidepressants. Part of the problem is that GPs only have a few minutes to spend talking to a patient, so a prescription pill is a fast alternative to sitting down with patients and exploring alternatives.

The problem with anxiety is that in the 21st century it is too often triggered by situations that are emotionally challenging rather than truly life-threatening. Stress, Anxiety, even panic attacks can be overcome. Patients – and clients – should be taught to think of a panic attack as your body trying to protect you. Maybe we could call it a 'protection attack'.

One approach is to 'Dial Down' the worry. Your brain likes to be occupied, and if you don't give it something constructive or positive to think about, it will start to find its own more destructive things to focus on. Clients should be taught that 85% of the stuff people worry about never happens.

Mental health disorders that first occur in adolescence are more severe and more likely to recur in later life so training youngsters to reminisce about happy times could be a useful lifelong tool in building resilience and training teenagers to use positive thoughts to control their emotions was found to reduce stress hormones and improve self-image over the long-term. The technique also builds resilience particularly in those adolescents who are most at risk for depression. These findings were published in the journal *Nature Human Behaviour*.

A separate study led by the University of Cambridge analysed 427 young people, with an average age of 14, who were considered to be at risk of depression. To find a new way of tackling the condition, experts have suggested making young people resilient before they begin to suffer by teaching them the techniques in adolescence. It's not rocket science and should be easy – not to mention cost effective. In the experiment, the teenagers were given a word and told to recall a specific memory relating to the word. Those who were able to recall specific memories tended to be more resistant to depression, which has also been linked to generalisation and a difficulty remembering specific events.

Young people's levels of cortisol [high levels are linked to depression] were lower a year after practising recalling positive events in their lives. The teenagers also had fewer negative thoughts about themselves.

We already know that people who are emotionally positive live longer and more fulfilled lives. Now we know that the right kind of therapy solves problems by working with feelings and emotions. We also know that the imagination can be a powerful resource and that imagination is the key to the cure. Too that, I would like to add that the Hypnotherapy session can herald the beginning of change.

“Wellbeing means I have hopes and goals; Wellbeing means I have self-esteem, confidence, spiritual energy, vitality, autonomy, personal growth, self-acceptance, a purpose in life, and positive reactions with others. Wellbeing also means I feel relaxed, at ease, happy...”

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