



## This issue...

**ANXIETY!** We all feel it – some far more than others. A little about what it is and tips on dealing with it.

## Want to share your story?

Do you have a story that you would like to share? A life experience you want to talk about? I want to hear! I'm looking for life stories – sad, funny or just food for thought. So many people are isolated from others and don't realize that their stories are the stories of many others. I believe that both telling and hearing stories can be very healing.

## Want to receive these by email?

Simply send an email to Cindy Trevitt at [cindy@mycounsellor.ca](mailto:cindy@mycounsellor.ca) and write "subscribe" in the subject line.

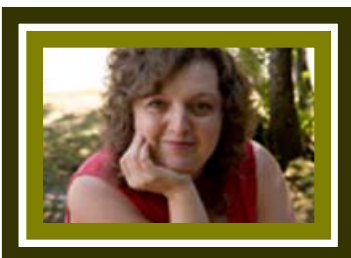
## Want to hear about a certain topic?

Email your suggestions or questions – I'd love to hear from you.



## New hours

**Now open Tuesdays through Saturdays!**



Cindy Trevitt, Registered Professional Counsellor

Contact me: [cindy@mycounsellor.ca](mailto:cindy@mycounsellor.ca) or call **604.518.1394**

Web page [www.mycounsellor.ca](http://www.mycounsellor.ca)

Member in good standing of the Canadian Professional Counsellor's Association: [www.cpcarpc.ca](http://www.cpcarpc.ca)

## Contents:

Anxiety, by Cindy Trevitt, RPC

Pages 2-5

Furthermore.... (recommended reading)

Page 5

Nerves and butterflies are fine - they're a physical sign that you're mentally ready and eager.  
You have to get the butterflies to fly in formation, that's the trick. ~Steve Bull

I often think about how our biological roots affect our lives - we're mammals of animal ancestry managing to function in an intellectual world. On the one hand we can go to work, write things down, use a computer, solve problems, plan for the future and be aware of ourselves. On the other hand we're like a deer in the rainforest, ears twitching, glancing to and fro, and fretting. Talking to our herd mates, "Did you hear something? I think I smell wolf. Do you smell wolf? Has anyone seen Edna? I can't eat this grass - I'm too nervous. Sure there's lots of rain today but what about tomorrow? Everything's going to dry up and we're all going to die! Everyone's looking at me. They think my ears are too big. Feel my heart. I think I'm having a heart attack."



Nobody realizes that some people expend tremendous energy merely to be normal. ~Albert Camus

**Anxiety is natural.** It is a necessary component of our survival. We need to be alert to what's going on around us: the other driver, the work to be done, where the kids are, and who's behind us. It's a warning system telling us to watch and sometimes even prepare to take action. It can be a normal reaction to stress or worry.

If I had my life to live over, I would perhaps have more actual troubles but I'd have fewer imaginary ones. ~Don Herold

**What is anxiety?** There are many types of anxiety. We have many in common such as are brought about by stressful schedules, school, work, family, and relationships. There are those who suffer from anxiety that may stem from trauma (requiring help that goes a little deeper). Anxiety can be experienced in subtly different ways but is often a vague unpleasant emotion felt in anticipation of some misfortune that may

be real or *perceived*. Anxiety can feel like a complex combination of fear, apprehension, nervousness, uneasiness, dread and worry. It is often accompanied by physical sensations such as palpitations, chest pain, tension, and/or shortness of breath. The most extreme cases involve an overriding inner emotional tension that has no apparent identifiable cause and is often severe enough to interfere with a person's life and ability to function. Anxiety is different for everyone - in its severity, its causes, its duration, frequency, and so on - but no less real.

**Anxiety that won't go away is something that many people live with.** It keeps showing up even when there's no imminent danger. It is responsible for many sleepless nights, for strained

relationships, for a constant and very fatiguing tension as the body prepares to fight or flee.

We probably wouldn't worry about what people think of us if we could know how seldom they do. ~Olin Miller

**What can you do about anxiety?** The first thing you can do, as with anything, is **take care of your physical health**. An exhausted and ill body affects your ability to think. Eat right, exercise, sleep and avoid alcohol, nicotine, sugar, and caffeine. Hormonal changes related to pregnancy, postpartum changes, hysterectomy, and interruptions in cycles may contribute to anxiety as do other physical conditions such as shifts in thyroid function.

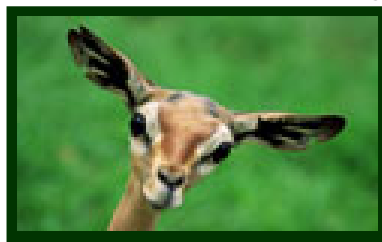
In preparing to deal with your anxiety, keep in mind to **be ready to think differently**. This can be a frightening prospect for some because they fear that if they don't get anxious then disaster will ensue - as if anxiety somehow prevents tragedy. Anxiety helps us *prepare* for things but **it does nothing to prevent things**

from happening. Think back to a time when you were feeling anxious. What did that anxiety do to make the *circumstances* better?

This disquiet is a normal but sometimes tricky state. Some of us have a strong sense that something is not quite right. I believe you should heed your senses. Just make sure that what you sense and what is actually happening are closely related and based on tangible reality.

"People are disturbed not by things,  
but by the view they take of them." - Epictetus

One theory considers anxiety as a symptom of repressed conflicts, hidden desires, primal dreads, and guilty secrets. Relief is gained by discovering insight into these dramas. Anxiety is also seen as a set of behaviours and physical symptoms that are sustained by irrational beliefs. Any way you slice it, **the important part can be in discovering the underlying beliefs, thinking, or history that has led you down this anxious path.** Something that is highly unique to you, individually. There may be deep personal meaning for your anxiety when you look at the underlying emotional context from which it arises. Sometimes before you can begin to address the anxiety, it's integral to understand the root cause. Usually it's that part of you that requires the symptom, that part has the actual control even when you or parts of you want to be rid of the symptom.



To discover this, you can begin by remembering a time where you felt anxious and then imagine **what it would be like if the same situation occurred but you didn't feel anxious.** What would happen? Often when you remove the symptom, the actual cause reveals itself. Start to reflect on this every time you experience anxiety. What would happen if you didn't feel it? And I don't mean, *pretend you're not anxious*, I mean really try and discover what it is you believe will happen. When you get to that point, ask yourself where you learned that belief. Keep trying; sometimes these things take time and reflection. If it was easy, it wouldn't be a problem for you in the first place. If you do get

stuck, you may consider enlisting the help of a counselor.

One woman had panic attacks every time her husband came home late. Upon further investigation and much to her surprise she found out that she had a belief that if she didn't fret and anticipate bad things something bad *would* happen. If she didn't "suffer" by fretting, then bad things would happen to her or her family. She began to look for "replacement" things to "suffer" so that she could change her behaviours and slowly began to have less panic attacks.

Sometimes panic and anxiety don't appear to have a function but they are still necessary for underlying reasons. One woman had several things going on in her life simultaneously – certainly grounds for feeling stressed but her anxiety had begun to overcome her. Learning to be more assertive would have helped but wouldn't have addressed a deeper issue. In her core was the message "good girls don't get angry". In order for her to fulfill her need to be "good" she didn't stand up for herself, didn't fight back - which helped her fulfill her need to be 'good' and her anxiety was a necessary by-product of simply being vulnerable to others without any defense. Insight and ownership of our unconscious positions are important.

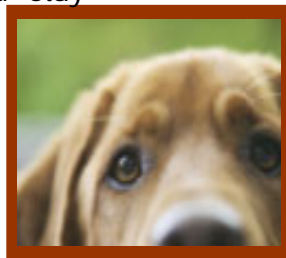
**Breathe.** For some, this seems over-simplistic or maybe they've tried it and it doesn't work. It helps tremendously if it is *continually practiced.* (Also try

attending a yoga meditation and/or breathing class). It will slow down or stop the stress response. It teaches your body *not* to panic. This is something that needs to be brought into your life as a new habit – you need to train yourself. Steady and consistent persistence is key. Start out by doing conscious, deep breathing for about one minute at a time, 10 to 15 times per day, every time you find yourself waiting for something – the water to boil, the phone to ring, the bus to come, the line to move at the grocery store. This will help you associate breathing with all your surroundings and activities and you're more likely to remember to do this when your anxiety spikes.

**Mindful awareness.** You may have heard about mindfulness – it's worth learning (see my newsletter on Soul Callings for more tips). When you start to feel the onset of anxiety and worry, your mind may be trained to look for evidence to support this feeling. Some people are, in fact, more inclined to have these feelings than others. Even when you're not worried about something, an anxiety-prone brain can create a sense of doom, which then causes hypervigilance in finding something wrong. So, when you feel the first pangs of anxiety out of the blue, say to yourself, "It's just my anxious brain working overtime" and then perhaps try relaxation breathing and then mindfulness. Notice your body, notice how your breathing feels, what you hear, smell, feel throughout your body. Then look at what's going on immediately around you – take it all in – observing. Then return to the mindfulness exercise. Repeat. This exercise helps teach you what aspects of your world you'll notice and help you feel more in control as you stay mindful of the present.

**You're very busy!** Anxiety may come as the result of too, too many things to do. Thoughts speed through your mind like a jet plane, faster than you can recognize any of the details but loud enough for you to viscerally react. The key here is for you to slow things down and actually register each and every thought, how it makes you feel, what you need, and then begin a slow, methodical address of each item: what you can do, what you're willing or not willing to do, and how can you manage things differently. It's all about recognizing the tornado that enters our mind, slowing it down, dissecting it and dealing with each item, one at a time – realistically.

**Fear of other emotions** like **anger** can be at the root of anxiety. Fear of feeling it, expressing it or witnessing it. If you think this may be the case, the next time you feel anxious, sit down and write as many, brief and specific answers to the question, "If I were angry, what might I be angry about?" You may need outside help with this one but simply admitting that you're angry is helpful in reducing anxiety.



**Have fun!** A lot of people who are chronic worriers take a very dogged approach to life. They work long and hard or have many projects or responsibilities. They get to the point where they just never let go or maybe have a hearty guffaw or a spontaneous trip mid-December to the 114-flavour-icecream parlour. Being silly and playing *without purpose or goals* are essential to a joyful and fulfilling life.

We are always more anxious to be distinguished for a talent which we do not possess, than to be praised for the fifteen which we do possess. - Mark Twain

**Hamster brain.** This is the classic ruminator. The person who just won't stop thinking about distressing thoughts. They go around and around and around and around. It's not so much about the individual 'worry' as it is the act of worrying. This type worries and looks for constant reassurance but if one worry is resolved, there's always a fresh worry du jour. If it's like an engine stuck in gear and overheating, then slowing or stopping it gives it a chance to cool off. Rumination can then become less likely to continue.

**Turning it off:** Try sitting quietly with your eyes closed and focus on an image of an open container ready to receive each and every issue on your mind. See and name each worry and imagine putting it into the container. When you're done, mentally 'put a lid' on the container and place it on a shelf or somewhere out of the way. Then invite the *most important* current thought or feeling and specifically address that thought.

If you need something more visually tangible, write each item down and put the list in a desk drawer or even the freezer overnight. The goal is to turn off your thoughts to give your mind a chance to rest and calm down.

At night, right before sleep, invite a peaceful thought to focus on while drifting off.

**Schedule your worry time:** If your mind persists, you can: 1) worry through all the issues (set a time limit, 10 minutes would be good); 2) do anything that must be done at the present time; 3) set a time when it'll be

necessary to think about the worry again; 4) write that time on a calendar; and 5) whenever the worry comes up again, you can say, "I've already worried about that" and stop the thought and think about something else.

*"When I turned two I was really anxious, because I'd doubled my age in a year. I thought if this keeps up, by the time I'm six I'll be ninety." – Stephen Wright*

**Learn to plan instead of worry.** The difference between planning and worrying is that a good plan doesn't need constant reviewing. To replace worrying with planning: 1) concretely identify a problem; 2) list the problem-solving options (if any, sometimes you can't do anything about something and you need to learn acceptance); 3) pick one of the options; and 4) write out a plan of action. Once you have completed this process, if your mind returns to the problem you can think, "Stop! I have a plan!"

**Grab life by the horns!** There are those who live life in a safe cocoon of worry and anxiety as intimate friends and protectors. Rather than actually dealing with their fears or taking risks, they will do anything to avoid any kind of discomfort. They live in a prison created by their fears. So, for some, you need to simply try to do something that is outside of your comfort zone. Something you might not ordinarily do. Relax your guard a little, encourage symptoms to show up, and seek out a little uncertainty.

I make it a point to do something at least once a year that is outside of my comfort zone. It goes a long way to making me feel exhilarated and incredibly encouraged and empowered!

In short, feel all the physical aspects of fear and anxiety but allow your mind to be calm. Breathe

through the fear. A Buddhist saying goes, "Don't just do something. Sit there."

**Practice saying this to yourself:**  
"I'm willing to be uncertain."



Anxiety also has its place in our lives. If we use it as a signal, we can use it to motivate us, propel us forward, or to make a change.

On those restless nights where you keep tossing and turning before you return to work. Perhaps you need to admit that you are simply not happy where you work. Anxiety can sometimes be the symptom of some aspect of our lives that we are simply not willing to admit or acknowledge. Maybe we feel anxious about trusting someone because they have not proven to be trustworthy. Maybe we feel anxious about not having friends because we don't want people to see us as we really are. The point may be that there is an underlying truth that you have, thus far, not been able or willing to face but maybe now is the time.

Why should you try to overcome fear and anxiety? If you are afraid you'll fail, you will be reluctant to act. If you can begin to reduce your fear and anxiety, this will help heighten your sense of self-efficacy.

And lastly, I want to emphasize that I'm not saying to get rid of anxiety – or any other emotion for that matter. I think they are all part of us – as complete beings. They are what make life interesting. A little drama always spices things up nicely. And besides – it's normal! But like anything else, anxiety is a better servant than master.



#### Furthermore:

I recommend educating yourself in the art of living consciously and in keeping with your authentic self. Find self-help books that truly speak to your unique sensibilities. Here's this edition's recommendation:



**Don't Sweat the Small Stuff by Richard Carlson, Ph.D.**