Breathing Principles

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Introduction

The objective is not to completely eliminate stress or anxiety. This is something we need to make clear right from the very start.

Believe it or not, stress and anxiety are actually useful emotions. Both put the body into a physiological state of heightened arousal, attention and awareness and can even increase physical strength and power. When you're stressed, you're essentially 'amped up' and this makes you better at completing physical tasks or reacting on the spot.

Psychologists have also shown that stress can be a positive motivating force in the right circumstances. Stress is what compels us to study for exams and what motivates us to save money as a contingency fund. Specifically, this type of stress is known as 'eustress' and is a very useful phenomenon.

The problem is that many of us have no control over when we become stressed or when we get anxiety. This then in turn leads to us feeling those emotions in maladaptive situations.

Being chased by a lion? Then yes, the fight or flight response as it is known is exactly what you need.

About to give a big speech to a large audience? Then the same response is going to make you look nervous and unconfident.

Likewise, it's important that the stress response be appropriate to the situa-tion that we're in. Being a little stressed in a crowd is normal – but

having such a powerful response that you end up having a panic attack and faint-ing is a problem.

So our objective here is not to remove stress entirely but simply to learn to control it, to hone it and to use it to our advantage.

That's what this book is all about. This book will teach you to take control of your physiology and your psychology so that you can experience the right emotion when you need it. You can suppress your fight-or-flight response during a presentation in order to come across as calm and collected and you can switch it on again during competition so that you become an un-stoppable athlete.

You might not think that you currently have a particular problem with stress and this may well be true. But even if you don't experience any crippling anxiety, that doesn't mean you couldn't benefit from being more calm, more collected and more in control of your thoughts and feelings. All of us expe-rience inappropriate anxiety to some extent, the question is simply where you fall on that spectrum.

In this book, you will learn:

- How to stop panic attacks
- How to suppress the fight or flight response – no more shaking!
- How to tap into a 'flow state' for ultimate performance
- How to influence your psychology with:
    - Food

    - Exercise
    - Movements
    - Essential oils
    - Nootropics
    - Medications
- How to use meditation
- How to use cognitive behavioral therapy
- How to remain calm in any situation and approach it in the optimal way for the best results!

Without further ado, let's jump in and put you in control of those emotions…

Chapter 01 - A Peek into your Fight or Flight Response

So what exactly is stress? What is anxiety?

Both these are psychological and physiological states that are brought about by the release of certain chemicals in your brain and body. These occur in response to physical or psychological stimuli and have an adaptive function in helping us to survive for longer.

This might happen if you fall from a height for instance, or if you identify a threat in your immediate surroundings. In response to this, your brain's 'salience network' will direct your attention and trigger the release of the right chemicals.

These chemicals are made up of neurotransmitters and hormones including:

- Adrenaline (epinephrine)
- Noradrenaline (norepinephrine)
- Dopamine
- Cortisol
- Glutamate
- Testosterone
- Serotonin

Neurotransmitters such as dopamine are chemical ‘signalers’ that are released during synaptic transmissions. These are stored in ‘vesicles’ at the end of each neuron and released during communication to instruct brain cells on how to behave (modulating attention, memory and awareness). Hormones meanwhile are released primarily into the blood and have wider-reaching and longer-lasting impacts on the body and brain. Some hor-mones can act like neurotransmitters too, thereby affecting our mood, attention and memory.

You don’t really need to know all of this. Rather, you need to know what the effects are. Specifically, the fight or flight response causes:

- Accelerated heart rate
- Increased attention and focus that acts like ‘tunnel vision’
- Dilation of blood vessels
- Thickening of the blood
- Tension in the muscles
- Quickened, deeper breathing
- Pupil dilation
- Enhanced memory
- Reduced digestive and immune function
- Pain reduction
- Heightened sensitivity in your senses

- Increased energy
- Increased muscle fiber recruitment

This in turn is a response that has evolved to help us improve our chances of survival in life or death situations. Imagine you're trekking through the wild when you come across a lion. This would grab your attention immediately and cause the cascading release of chemicals that lead to the fight-or-flight response.

The main role here is to take blood away from secondary and less important functions (digestion and immunity) and to direct it to the muscles and the brain which can be used to fight or run. The pupils dilate in order to improve your peripheral vision and awareness, your attention narrows to keep you focussed on the immediate threat, your heart rate increases and blood vessels widen so that more blood can get around your body and your blood thickens to improve clotting in case of an injury. Pain is reduced so that we can continue to run and fight even if we become injured. Our muscles become more powerful ready to punch and kick or to sprint. Our memory improves so that we can learn from the experience and avoid danger in future.

All these things together thereby help us to escape our prey and live to fight another day. And once we're in safety, our body will switch to the 'rest and digest' state which will enable the body to recover, digest and heal.

This is why we have a fight or flight response and it is how it originally formed part of a healthy psychology.

The Problem With the Fight or Flight Response

The problem with this response is that it is still the same one we had in the wild. Our lives have changed a huge amount in a short space of time and unfortunately our bodies haven't had the chance to catch up.

Sometimes, a fight or flight response is still exactly what you need. If you get into a physical confrontation, or if you're pinned under a rubble, then all that heightened strength, power and reflexes is going to be very useful.

But in other scenarios, we can interpret a situation as dangerous and react inappropriately. For example, when you're giving a speech, having that much adrenaline is going to make life more difficult. The tunnel vision and focus that the fight or flight response gives you will make it more difficult for you to come up with creative phrases and your sensitivity to your surround-ings will make you jumpy and twitchy. Meanwhile, adrenaline causes other symptoms such as shaking and this means that your audience will be able to physically tell that you're scared. If you look nervous, then the assump-tion will be that you don't have confidence in yourself or in what you're say-ing and thus whatever you're saying will be undermined.

The same is true on a date or in an interview. Again it boils down to evolu-tion – if someone seems nervous it suggests that they are our inferiors and thus it undermines whatever it is that they're saying and makes us less likely to take them seriously.

When we panic we're less able to make smart decisions, we're less able to speak with authority and we come across to others as weak.

Worse is if you have a phobia or an anxiety disorder. Those who suffer from agoraphobia for instance might become worked into such a severe stress response that they begin to hyperventilate. This in turn can cause fainting which of course is not at all adaptive and can ultimately be crippling and prevent you from living a normal life.

Here's another one: fight or flight actually inhibits erections. This means that if you're very stressed then you won't be able to get an erection as a male – which in turn is one of the key causes of impotence. It makes sense: if you're in immediate danger, why would it be useful to send blood to your penis?

Finally, the other reason that the fight or flight response can be a bad thing is that it can become chronic. This basically means that you're in a constant 'low level' fight or flight response which ultimately means that you think you're constantly in some kind of danger. This is once again a result of the gulf between our evolution and our modern lifestyles. When we were still evolving, stress was only ever acute and would be caused by things like forest fires or predators.

Today though, our stress tends to last much longer and be caused by things like angry bosses, deadlines, debt, moving home, Christmas, relationships, tax, wedding planning, chronic illness…

These stresses then continue to affect us for a long time. If you're in debt, then having dilated pupils and tense muscles is not going to help you get out of it. Moreover, the fact that your blood is being directed away from your digestion and away from your immune system means you're more

likely to get indigestion and more likely to become ill. Likewise, a constantly elevated heart rate can lead to heart problems, while constant adrenaline can eventually cause adrenal fatigue.

In short, stress can take a serious toll on the body and eventually leave you feeling ill, exhausted and broken.

“Divert all energy to thrusters!”

“But captain… what about the life support unit?”

“I said ALL energy!”

Chapter 02 - What are Neurotransmitters?

Before we go into this in more detail, it's first useful to look in a little more detail at this response and the neurotransmitters that cause it. There are some subtleties here that many people miss and understanding them is one of the keys to overcoming unwanted stress and anxiety.

Firstly: it's important to recognize that no two fight or flight responses are the exact same. In other words, stress is a broad term for a large number of different experiences all caused by slightly different ratios of chemicals.

For example, the stress that you feel before an exam is very different from the stress you feel when having a panic attack late at night. Likewise, the stress that you feel in an argument with your partner is very different from the stress that you feel when you're going down a mountain quickly.

This is what can sometimes mark the difference between a 'positive' stress response and a negative one. And perhaps the most well-publicized example of a 'positive' stress response is that of the 'flow state'.

What is a Flow State?

A flow state is a state of heightened performance without many of the downsides we normally associate with stress. The most common example is in extreme sports where someone who is going down a mountain on a snowboard might find themselves subjectively experience the 'slowing of time'. They are exhilarated and completely focussed on what they're doing, which allows them to react with incredible reactions and to heighten their performance to incredible degrees.

Some athletes will describe similar experiences when they're breaking records and giving their best performances on the field, track or court; suddenly time slows down and they feel completely in-tune with their bodies. Rappers describe something similar, as do writers when they get into 'the zone' (which is generally regarded as being a synonym for flow). If you've ever been in a conversation and appeared to completely lose track of time for hours while being completely engaged in what you're saying, then that too is a sign of flow.

So what's happening here? Ultimately it comes down to a very similar set of signals from your brain, resulting in a very similar cascade of neurotransmitters but with a few subtle differences.

What you're telling your brain in this instant is that what you're doing is incredibly important and possibly even 'life or death' (as in the case of extreme sports). At the same time though, you're also telling your brain that you're enjoying the experience which slightly changes the chemical profile. Now you likely have an increase in serotonin (the feel-good hormone that numbs pain) and research suggests you also get an increase in anan-damide – which is the 'bliss' neurotransmitter that also increases creative problem solving. This same neurotransmitter is associated with the use of marijuana! You probably would experience less cortisol meanwhile which is what makes us feel anxious and paranoid. So you still get the focus and the heightened performance but instead of feeling bad with it, you instead feel right at the top of your game.

Research shows us that this selection of neurotransmitters and hormones leads to something called ‘temporo-hypofrontality’. This is a state where the frontal regions of the brain actually shut down and the body begins acting more on pure instinct. Ultimately, you become completely focussed on the thing you’re doing because you believe it’s important and rewarding and you therefore stop second guessing yourself.

But even within the flow state there are differences. The way you feel when hurtling down a mountain for example is somewhat different from the way you feel when deep in conversation!

Then there are other experiences that are somewhat similar to fight-or-flight. A good example is anger! When we’re angry we experience many of the same reactions but probably with an increase in testosterone and perhaps ‘substance-p’ which is a neurotransmitter associated with physical pain.

So with that in mind, what’s one strategy you can use to right away to start coping with stress better is to change the way you think about your stress. Instead of trying to ‘fight’ your stress and make yourself feel calm (which can often be a fool’s errand), instead consider changing the nature of your stress – try to enjoy the moment more as a challenge and a learning opportunity and you can hopefully trigger a flow state. Or perhaps instead try to get angry about the situation – anger is often viewed as a negative emotion but actually it is highly motivating and can be useful for increasing our drive and ability to get what we want.

Don’t get scared – get angry!

How Neurotransmitters Work?

Neurotransmitters are small molecules that live in the brain cells. Specifically, they are found at the end of the axons) which are tails coming off of neurons and connecting to the dendrites of other neurons. When a neuron 'fires' (called an action potential) energy is transferred down the axon and jumps across the synaptic gap to the dendrites of other neurons causing them to fire once they are overloaded. This is what creates our subjective experience of the world.

At the end of the axons are 'synaptic knobs' and at the end of these are neuro vesicles that contain neurotransmitters. When the action potential fires, these are then released along with the charge and attach to receptors in the receiving neurons (known as postsynaptic cells). Only the right neurotransmitters can fit into the appropriate receptors and they will have slightly different effects depending on where they are in the brain.

Why does all this matter? You'll find out in the next chapter…

Chapter 03 - Foods and Other Medication to Stay Calm

The ultimate aim of this book is to make you the master of your own emotions so that you can control your response to stressful situations. You decide when you're going to be focused and engaged and when you're going to be calm and restful.

The objective is to be in flow when you're working, stressed when you need to be and calm when you're relaxing in the evening.

But many people reading this will have bought this book to try and combat severe anxiety and stress. In that case, you may have been recommended medications by your doctor. You may even have considered self-medication of some sort!

Let's take a look at this and see whether it's a good idea or not. And now you'll see why an understanding of neurotransmitters is so useful…

How We Already Manipulate Our Neurotransmitters?

The first thing to recognize is that you already alter your neurotransmitters to some extent through what you eat and through your lifestyle. Everything you do will alter your mental state and your likelihood of being stressed and angry.

Did you know for instance that your mood is very closely linked to your blood sugar level? When we eat lots of food, this causes an amino acid called tryptophan to enter the blood. That eventually reaches the brain

and puts us in a good mood because the brain uses it to create serotonin. In turn, that serotonin can eventually becomes melatonin and gets us ready for bed.

When we have low blood sugar though, this causes us to have a lower amount of serotonin. In turn that makes us feel nervous and anxious and we have an increase in cortisol. This makes us more likely to have a stress response.

This is why people find themselves eating for stress. And it's also why you should avoid being hungry if you're about to attend a stressful meeting, first date or interview.

Another way people self-medicate when they're highly anxious is with alcohol. This is because alcohol triggers the release of GABA in the brain – GABA being Gamma Aminobutyric Acid – which is an inhibitory neurotransmitter. That means it reduces the firing of neurons and suppresses activity overall. This is in contrast to some of the stress hormones like glutamate and cortisol which increase activity. From a first person perspective, this creates the sensation of the brain 'quietening down'. If you're someone who has a lot of anxious thoughts and rumination's, then consuming alcohol or getting GABA in another way will make you feel quieter though also sleepier. Essentially it is a sedative.

Of course self-medicating for anxiety with alcohol is not a good idea and is certainly not recommended. This also has a number of other unwanted effects, causing some parts of the brain to completely shut down and making us more forgetful, disinhibited and more likely to get into trouble.

Likewise, you also put strain on the body in other ways causing liver damage, killing brain cells and leading to addiction. If you overdose on alcohol you can end up making yourself very sick and eventually it can even be fatal if it causes your system to completely shut down.

Anxiolytics

The scary part is that this is also how anti-anxiety medication works. Anti-anxiety medications are technically known as 'anxiolytics' and they tend to work in one of two ways:

Increasing GABA

Increasing serotonin

These actions will then help to improve your mood and at the same time suppress brain activity to put you in a calmer and more relaxed state. These can be used if you notice the symptoms of a panic attack for instance and should thereby help you to start feeling calmer, even if you do feel a little tireder. Likewise, they can be used before sleep in order to help you drift off without anxious thoughts that might keep you awake.

Benzodiazepines and barbiturates for example work by increasing GABA, while SSRIs work by increasing serotonin and are commonly used as anti-depressants.

Meanwhile, some people also attempt to alter these neurotransmitters through supplementation. 5-HTP for example is '5-hydroxytrytophan' and is a precursor to tryptophan. This means that the brain can use it to make tryptophan and in turn to make serotonin. Phenibut meanwhile is a deriva-

tive of GABA which is capable of crossing the blood-brain barrier and which can be used without a prescription.

So if you're someone who suffers from frequent panic attacks or who often finds their performance hampered by anxiety, should you consider self-medicating with phenibut? Or perhaps getting a prescription for anxiolytics from your GP?

The answer will depend on your situation. But make sure you're aware of the serious side effects and that you continue to treat the cause as well as the symptoms.

For starters, anything that increases GABA will cause:

- Drowsiness
- Confusion
- Difficulty waking
- Headaches
- Forgetfulness

Like alcohol, an overdose can also be very dangerous and potentially lead to coma or death.

More concerning still is the fact that using any medication to artificially increase neurotransmitters can cause addiction through processes called 'tolerance' and 'dependence'. Essentially, this means that the brain is adapting to the increase in certain chemicals and in doing so, it becomes 'used' to that state and finds it difficult to operate at normal levels.

If you keep increasing GABA for instance, then your brain may respond by producing less GABA naturally and by reducing the number of GABA receptors capable of responding to it. This means you need to take a larger dose of barbiturates or phenibut to achieve the same feeling you did before. What's more is that it means you'll now feel worse when you're not using the medications and will have unnaturally low levels of the neurotransmitter. This can eventually lead to users becoming dependent and even abusing the medications – and it can lead to withdrawal when you try to stop using them.

Another thing to consider is that no neurotransmitter works in a vacuum. That is to say that there is a complex relationship between the chemicals in your brain and the way that they affect your physiology, your mood and one another.

If you increase GABA for example, you will decrease your dopamine and your glutamate as your brain thinks nothing important is happening. This is why you might feel less motivated and why your memory can be negatively impacted. Likewise, when you increase serotonin you also increase mela-tonin – making you sleepier and less energetic.

There are probably still hundreds of neurotransmitters we don't understand yet and we're a long way from knowing everything about the ones we do know about. Simply increasing the amount of GABA or serotonin in the brain is a little like trying to fix a delicate watch with a hammer! Neuro-transmitters work best – by far – when they're left to the brain to moderate naturally.

The only time I would recommend using something like a barbiturate is if you suffer from extreme anxiety and you are using it to prevent panic attacks. Even then though, this should be viewed as a short-term solution to treat acute symptoms only. Meanwhile the focus should be on using other forms of treatment – which we'll address in this book – to manage the root causes of the problem.

Other Substances That Affect Your Neurotransmitters

Actually though, in this scenario I would still say that barbiturates are only really suitable for extreme cases. For most people, a better solution might be simply to use something like an essential oil. If you burn valerian root essential oil, frankincense or lavender for instance, then this can actually also trigger the mild release of inhibitory neurotransmitters. Valerian root oil in particular can cause a strong release of GABA and is very useful as a sleep aid. Again, you shouldn't rely on this method but if you want to relax in the evening while reducing stress then burning some oil is one approach that can make this all the more effective. And if you want to get a little help managing the early symptoms of a panic attack, that dabbing some tissue in this oil and inhaling might be less extreme than using anxiolytics.

And meanwhile, remember that some things you consume can actually make anxiety worse. The biggest culprit? Caffeine! Caffeine is a stimulant that increases dopamine, cortisol, glutamate and adrenaline and that's why it can also increase your heartrate, cause tremors and make you nervous. Caffeine is a little like having a stress response in a mug which is great for

focussing but not so great for staying calm. So if you're the anxious type then you might want to kick the habit of that morning coffee!

Oh and nicotine is also a stimulant, so you may want to give up smoking too.

Chapter 04 - Managing Panic Attacks and Anxiety

For those who experience regular panic attacks then, what can you do to safely start getting them back under control? There are a few different options available to you but the aim is to a) get yourself to safety and b) start to address the symptoms.

Here we will look at how best to manage a situation where you find yourself beginning to suffer from an attack…

Panic Attack Symptoms

Before you can begin to treat a panic attack, you first need to be able to identify the symptoms of one. This will give you 'early warning' so you can begin to put a plan into action that will help you to calm yourself down and return to normal function.

The symptoms of a panic attack then include:

- Rapid heart rate
- Shallow breathing
- Racing, negative thoughts
- Sweating
- Muscle tension
- Dizziness

- Chest pain
- Pacing

Often the heart rate can reach the point where it is so intense that it feels like you are having a heart attack. In fact, this is one of the big problems many people face when suffering from panic attacks: they become convinced that they are suffering from a heart attack which causes them to panic even more!

The symptoms take about 10-20 minutes to reach their peak and will often then subside but sometimes take several hours.

Of course it is very important to get yourself checked if you think there is any chance that you might be suffering from a heart attack. Note however that in cases of heart attack the feeling of dread will tend to precede the elevated heart rate or the stress.

Panic attacks also cause shaking, restlessness, rapid and shallow breathing, nausea and butterflies in the stomach. The best way to describe a panic attack is as being very similar to a fight or flight response but turned up to 11. If you have ever had to give a speech in public which you've been scared to give, if you have ever had a confrontation with someone in the street, or if you've ever gotten into a serious argument with someone in a shop, then you will likely have experienced these symptoms. This is what a panic attack feels like but a little worse and with the added breathing issues and dizziness. If that's what you're experiencing, then you're probably suffering with a panic attack and not a heart attack. You can be fairly sure of

this in fact – but if you are ever uncertain then it's always worth speaking with your GP to be on the safe side.

Consider as well the aspect of demographics and risk factors. Heart attacks are actually very unlikely unless you're someone who is in an 'at risk' bracket.

The next way to tell the difference between panic attack or heart attack is to examine the precise nature of the chest pain. Often it's the chest pain that makes us suspect we are having a heart attack when in fact it is 'just' a panic attack. However the chest pain associated with each is actually quite different. In a heart attack for instance, the pain is normally described as a 'crushing' pain and a dull ache, as though someone is sitting on your chest causing a shortness of breath. This is then often experienced alongside pain in one arm, in the jaw and in the neck.

In a panic attack meanwhile, the difficulty breathing is actually caused by hyperventilation rather than heart problems and this will be experienced as low CO_2 and dizziness as opposed to a feeling as though you're about to suffocate. Any 'tightness' in the chest will be caused by muscle contractions that are the result of stress.

What is a Normal Heart Rate During a Panic Attack?

Seeing as anxiety increases your heart rate (via adrenaline) and panic attacks are essentially extreme anxiety episodes, it makes sense that your heart rate should increase at this time. But what is a normal panic attack heart rate?

Unfortunately, the answer is not that straight forward. For starters, everyone has a different resting heart rate to begin with meaning they start from different base-lines. An athlete may have a resting heart rate as low as 40bpm or less, whereas someone unhealthy could have a heart rate as high as 120bpm when they're not doing anything.

Fitness dictates heart rate to a large extent because exercise strengthens the heart. The stronger the heart becomes as a muscle, the more it will be able to drive blood around the body with each beat. Ultimately, this means that a very strong heart won't need to beat as rapidly in order to circulate as much blood.

Other factors also affect heart rate however, include blood viscosity and vasodilation, height, metabolism and more. Even the air temperature can affect your heart rate. Some perfectly healthy people have high heart rates for seemingly no reason.

A panic attack heart rate then is likely to result in a marked and sudden spike for that individual, though it might still be beating slower than some people not having a panic attack.

As a general rule though, you can likely expect a panic attack heart rate to be anything from 100 to 170bpm – equivalent to an intensive bout of exercise. What's also important to keep in mind though, is that everyone experiences panic attacks differently and every case of a panic attack is different.

Managing Anxiety and Panic Attacks

In the short term, there are a few things you can do to help manage the symptoms of a panic attack and to get yourself back under control and to safety.

Get to Safety

The first and most important thing to do during a panic attack is to get your-self to safety. Panic attacks cause hyperventilation, light headedness and disassociation. In other words, there is a real danger of falling over or hav-ing an accident – especially if you're in charge of a vehicle.

For these reasons, you should try to get to safety immediately if you notice the symptoms of a panic attack beginning to set in and that way you can make sure that you won't be likely to fall over or to crash a vehicle. If you are in public, tell someone how you are feeling and then find a quiet spot to sit down where you can breathe quietly. If you are driving, then calmly take the next opportunity to pull over.

Treat Hyperventilation

If you are suffering a full-blown panic attack, then there is a good chance that you might be suffering with hyperventilation. This happens when we get overexcited which in turn leads to us breathing rapidly and thus lower-ing CO_2. This is also the reason that panic attacks will often lead to feel-

ings of light-headedness and dizziness and why they can even cause you to fall over or pass out.

There are multiple different types of treatment for hyperventilation and all of these can give you good ideas of what to do during a panic attack to help get your breathing back in order.

Breathe Slowly

With or without hyperventilation, it is important to get your breathing under control and to make a conscious effort to try and breathe deeply and slowly. This is one of the main methods recommended by cognitive behavioral therapists as a way to prevent the panic attack symptoms and to help restore order.

Breathing deeply and slowly is effective because it encourages the activation of the 'parasympathetic nervous system'. This is the system within the body that acts contrary to the sympathetic nervous system and which puts the body in a restful 'rest and digest state' that is essentially the opposite of the fight or flight response.

Breathe Into a Bag

Panic attacks offer trigger hyperventilation which essentially means you start breathing faster and faster to the point where you upset the balance of carbon dioxide in your blood. In other words – too much CO_2 and not enough O_2. The solution is to breathe into a bag which forces you to

'rebreathe' the same air thus adjusting the balance back to normal and healthy levels.

Use Medications

As mentioned, you might find that using some form of medication or perhaps essential oils can be useful for treating symptoms in the short term. If you really can't afford to have an attack, then this is a good way to reduce the symptoms. Over time though, the objective is to use the skills taught in the next section to avoid needing medication at all.

Calm Your Thoughts

When we have panic attacks, they will often occur alongside anxious thoughts and these can include fears of death among other things. As mentioned, these rumination's are both symptoms of panic attacks and causative factors – thus creating a vicious cycle.

Key in recovering from panic attacks then is to try and stay calm. This in turn means being disciplined with your thoughts and using positive affirma-tions etc. to try and reassure yourself that nothing bad is going to happen.

You can learn thought techniques designed to help you combat panic attacks by seeing a cognitive behavioral therapist. These are therapists that provide thinking tools which can help you to know what to do during a panic as well as during phobic responses and in a number of other situations.

In general, try to remind yourself that the best course of action is to let the attack run its course. As long as you are sitting down and you're safe, a panic attack poses no danger to you and is nothing to be embarrassed about. The sooner you can learn this and believe it, the sooner the symptoms will stop arising in the first place.

So the best thing you can actually do? That is to simply act normal.

And it's practicing this ability to act normal that will actually help you to de-crease the occurrence of panic attacks in the long-term...

How to Combat Anxiety and Panic Attacks by Control-ling Your Thoughts and Emotions

But where do these anxiety and panic attack hormones come from in the first place?

The answer relates back to what we've learned about neurotransmitters and hormones in previous chapters. As we know, these are released from vesicles (little sacks) at the terminal points of our neurons. When our brain 'does something' an action potential fires causing electricity to nip along our neurons. This in turn releases a number of chemicals that tell us how we should feel about that thing, whether or not it's important and whether or not we should cement the experience as a permanent memory.

In other words then, it is the formation and connection of specific neurons, releasing specific neurotransmitters which lead to anxiety and panic at-tacks. And this web of interconnected neurons is formed by our

experi-ences and our thought processes – resulting in what is known as a 'con-nectome'.

The key point to bear in mind here is that it's all going on 'in your head'. It's all to do with the way that your brain has encoded information and it's all to do with the way that you perceive what is happening. In other words, if you see a lion but you think it's a cat, then you will produce oxytocin instead of adrenaline (and you will die). Likewise, if you see a deadline and think you can make it just fine, then you will produce serotonin instead of cortisol. It’s not actually the danger itself that is causing you to have the panic attack, it’s your perception of danger.

And for some of us, our perception is completely skewed and not a fair re-flection of the reality. This is why some people end up with phobias and anxiety disorders. And in the case of panic attacks, this is very often related to agoraphobia or other phobias. You feel corners, you feel exposed, you feel jostled… and this causes you to over-react to the situation. Throw in your response to the experience of the panic attack itself and you can end up working yourself up to the point of passing out. That is a panic attack in a nutshell!

The good news is that you rewire your brain by changing the way you think about things and this in turn means you have more neuronal patterns that release positive hormones than negative ones. And that's how you improve your anxiety and panic attacks.

The problem is, that when you have a brain that's already swimming with stress hormones, this makes it very difficult for you to think positive

about things and to form those more positive beliefs that will help to combat stress. Thus you need to use mental discipline in order to help yourself overcome that stress.

The AWARE Technique for Panic Attacks

Mental discipline means reminding yourself constantly that what you're experiencing is not as bad as you think it is. Or that at least, believing it's bad will only make matters worse.

An example of how this works is the 'AWARE' technique that is often used for treating anxiety and panic attacks. This goes as follows:

A: Accept the anxiety and don't try to fight it.

W: Watch the anxiety as though you were an observer.

A: Act normal.

R: Repeat the other steps.

E : Expect the best. 'Feel' it start to work.

This is essentially a top-down approach that helps you to distance yourself from the anxiety by intellectualizing it. Simply by acting normal and going about your usual business, you can essentially teach yourself that a panic attack isn't a big deal. And the sooner you do this, the sooner you can start to relax and put yourself more at ease.

Another strategy is one taught in cognitive behavioral therapy which involves looking at the things you're afraid of that caused the anxiety and

panic attacks and then assessing whether they're logical fears. Can you really get a heart attack from a panic attack? (No). Will people really laugh at you if you faint? (No).

Again, this forces you to think logically about what's happening and thus to change the way you respond to stressors. Similarly you can think about the things that caused the anxiety in the first place differently. Are you really like to be fired if you're late for work? (No). Is there really any reason to get stressed when you can't do anything about it anyway? (No).

We'll talk a lot more about CBT in the next chapter of this book…

Practice, be disciplined and over time you'll find that your panic attacks be-come less frequent and less severe.

Exposure Therapy

Another type of therapy that is focused around overcoming fear of panic attacks is exposure therapy. This is a type of therapy often used in the treatment of phobias and involves exposing the individual to the thing they are afraid of in controlled conditions so that they learn there's no reason to be afraid of them.

Exposure therapy can also be useful for treating panic attacks. Here, it is employed by the patient allowing themselves to experience the symptoms of a panic attack once again in a controlled setting. This way, you can become familiar with the way they feel and you can learn to differentiate them from heart attacks or other conditions. What's more, you will gradually learn that panic attacks in themselves are not dangerous and while they might be uncomfortable, they don't generally lead to any negative

consequences. As long as you can sit down quietly somewhere, they pass and really there's nothing to be afraid of.

Note that exposure therapy here can also be used to combat phobias, which may be particularly helpful if phobias are what are causing the anxi-ety attacks. For instance, if you have a phobia of crowds and this is causing panic attacks; slowly exposing yourself to bigger and bigger crowds under controlled conditions is a very good strategy for coping.

Chapter 05 - Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Explained

Essentially what you're looking at when you use techniques like 'AWARE' to manage a panic attack is a form of cognitive behavioral therapy. This is a psychotherapeutic approach that we have already touched on lightly a couple of times and which you can use to not only combat severe anxiety but also to control any kind of stress response. Eventually, CBT can be used to completely control your reaction to stressful events and to help you tap into any emotion that you need at any given time.

Read on to find out how...

Behaviourism and a Brief Psychology History Lesson

Behaviorism is a school of psychology that was popular in the 50s but which has become largely defunct now. Still, it is a useful 'inroad' to the ideas that have succeeded it and a basic understanding is useful to lay the foundations for understanding CBT.

The best known experiment within behaviorism is 'Pavlov's Dogs'. Here, the psychologist Ivan Pavlov, held dogs captive and rang a bell every day at the same time as feeding them. Eventually, he found that simply ringing the bell would result in the dogs salivating. In other words, the stimuli had become linked for the dogs, such that the bell triggered the same response as food on its own. This is 'classic conditioning' which occurs through repe-tition.

Another type of conditioning is operant, which relies on reinforcement (positive reinforcement for instance means rewarding a behavior immediately after). Also interesting is vicarious conditioning, whereby behaviors, habits and beliefs can be reinforced simply by watching others.

We now know that Pavlov was likely forming and reinforcing connections in the brain between neurons the sound of the bell and then strengthening that connection with repetition.

Reward, as with positive reinforcement, helps to enforce the idea that the association is useful and positive and may increase dopamine and BDNF (brain derived neurotrophic factor – a neurotransmitter that encourages learning).

Vicarious conditioning on the other hand might work via the 'mirror neurons'

– neurons which fire when we witness something happening to someone else (we'll come back to these).

Mirror neurons are the reason that emotions can be 'contagious' (along with something called facial feedback) and this could also contribute to a passive form of plasticity.

Hardcore behaviorists believed that all of human behavior could be boiled down to our conditioning. We reach for things as children and learn gestures for grabbing (via reward) and we learn our likes and dislikes through similar exposure and experience. When things went wrong in the brain, they could be described as maladaptive associations (a phobia could come from one serious bad experience or several smaller ones). The solution

would be to desensitize the patient or to recondition them to create new, more positive associations, or to deconstruct the existing one. This form of treatment still proves useful for a number of phobias and other conditions.

Introducing Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Behaviorism alone though paints an incomplete picture of our brain and development as apart from anything else, it leaves no space for internal thoughts, instead explaining the entire human experience as being based on impulses and learned responses.

Cognitive behavioral therapy takes the basic idea of behaviorism then but layers a 'cognitive' aspect on top. CBT states that we can reinforce beliefs and behaviors through thought alone for instance – by rehearsing them in our brain or by being frustrated, scared or excited.

According to CBT, a fear of heights isn't just learned, it can also come from our thought processes and visualization. Negative beliefs and thought patterns for instance might lead us to think things to ourselves like 'what if I fall?' or 'what if the railings give way?'. We might even imagine falling and this alone is enough to trigger the fight or flight response. And ironically, you can learn to associate heights with that panic response and thereby 'reinforce' the idea that heights are scary in your own head!

Thus, CBT encourages us to change our thought patterns by rehearsing and enforcing thoughts like 'thousands of people have been here and there's never been an accident' or 'people don't just fall over for no reason'.

By rehearsing much more positive thoughts you can essentially recondition yourself with no need to subject yourself to heights.

As we mentioned earlier in this book – it's not the events that scare us but our perception of those events.

Likewise, by imagining something happening, or thinking about it, you can cause the very same neurons to fire in your brain as though it were hap-pening. From our perspective, that means that you can trigger neural plas-ticity simply by thinking. Now we're getting somewhere!

Cognitive behavioral therapy techniques have proven highly useful in treat-ing a number of psychological disorders and for improving quality of life. What's more, they are very cheap and practical to implement – therapists can even provide their counseling over e-mail! They can be used to combat phobias like agoraphobia but they can also be used to train ourselves to react better to different situations. You can change your thoughts so that you stay calmer in stressful situations or so that you give more attention and more focus to important events.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Techniques

The techniques for changing your thought patterns via CBT are known col-lectively as 'cognitive restructuring'. Essentially, this is like reprogramming your brain to think and react the way you want it to.

Here are just a few of the techniques used in CBT…

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a form of meditation used in CBT where the objective isn't to 'silence' your thoughts but rather to reflect on them without reacting to them. In other words, you are aiming to objectively survey the contents of your thoughts to see 'where your mind takes you'. This can also be used with journaling or just a little self-reflection.

In other words, you need to somehow identify what thoughts are having a negative impact on your performance in order to be able to undo them. You'll learn more about mindfulness and how to use it in the chapter on meditation.

Thought Recording

You don't have to do any mindfulness meditation necessarily though in or-der to identify what thoughts you have running through your head. Just as effective is to simply be a bit more aware of your thoughts and to record them as they happen.

You can do this for example by keeping a diary by the side of your bed, or just by noting down the thoughts you have when you note them.

Thought Challenging

Thought challenging is the process of taking an idea and then deconstruct-ing it (this lies at the heart of Tim Ferriss' 'Fear Setting' from The Four Hour Workweek).

So if you are currently afraid of public speaking, then you would use mind-fulness in order to identify why you're afraid and what ruminations are pre-venting you from performing your best. You might identify

thoughts like ‘everyone will laugh at me if I choke’ or ‘what if I forget my lines?’.

Thought challenging means taking these ideas and then thinking about them critical. So for instance, let’s ask how likely it really is that an audience might laugh you off stage. Isn’t it true that most people are more polite than that? Wouldn’t they be more likely to sympathize with your situation? And moreover, why would it even matter? You probably won’t need to see these people again!

Thought challenging can be even more useful if you write it down and if you revisit the thoughts regularly (to reinforce the ideas in your brain). Eventually, you can this way rewire yourself and find that you no longer have the same fear holding you back when talking in public.

Hypothesis Testing

The issue with thought challenging is that you have to really, truly believe what you’re saying. Essentially it boils down to a ‘self-placebo’ where you’re changing your belief in order to change your behavior and mental state.

Sometimes thought alone isn’t enough to genuinely transform your beliefs and in this case you might want to get ‘proof’. One way to do this is with ‘hypothesis testing’ which essentially means proving to yourself that your fear is unfounded. One example of how you might do this would be to go up on stage to do some public speaking and then purposefully choke and stutter. In other words – purposefully make an idiot of yourself.

What you'll find is that people don't laugh, jeer or boo. More likely, they'll wait patiently and there will be no negative consequences. What you've learned here is that the worst case scenario really isn't all that bad!

Hypothesis testing can be used in conjunction with thought challenging and exposure therapy – which is actually a form of behavioral therapy!

The blanket term for using these different techniques together is 'cognitive restructuring'.

How to be Socially Fearless With Hypothesis Testing?

To demonstrate just how you can employ these principles in practice and use them to achieve a healthier mindset, consider how you can use hypothesis testing and exposure therapy to become 'socially fearless'.

Let's say you're not phobic but that you experience a 'normal' amount of anxiety when talking in public. This isn't a crippling problem but it is enough to prevent you from being quite as confident, charming and persuasive as you could be.

So what do you do? One answer is to simply prove to yourself that there's nothing to be afraid of (hypothesis testing) and then to train yourself not to be afraid of it (exposure therapy).

So go into a shop that's not too near to your home and take some items to the counter to buy. Now, when you go to buy those items, put on a silly voice. As you do this, you'll find yourself experiencing all those normal signs of the stress response. Instead of getting anxious about that though, just let it happen and use the breathing techniques discussed in the next

chapters, or just make it into a ‘fun challenge’. Do this a few times and what you’ll find is that there’s no repercussion. You can be absolutely ridiculous and nothing bad will come of it.

The lesson? When you talk normally you really don’t have anything to worry about! As a result, you’ll start to feel much more relaxed and you’ll find it much easier to be confident, assertive and charismatic!

Chapter 06 - How Can Meditation Help?

Meditation is something that a lot of people don't fully understand. The as-sumption here is often that it is solely a religious practice or that it is in some way 'mystical'. And unfortunately, a lot of texts on the subject don't do much to dispel this notion.

In reality though, meditation is actually just one more important tool that you should add to your arsenal. And it's much more straightforward and simple than you probably think it is.

In short, all that meditation really is, is practicing the ability to direct your thoughts and to be disciplined with your brain. Just like training a muscle, you can train your brain with practice. In this case, you're training your ability to choose not to entertain stressful or anxious thoughts and not to de-scend into a fight or flight response. Studies show that people who practice meditation regularly remain calmer in stressed situations and also exhibit many other signs of a particularly healthy psychology such as improved at-tention and awareness.

Even just as a short term tool to take a break from stressful thoughts, meditation can be very useful.

To get started, you can choose your type of meditation. Here we will look at two particularly popular types: transcendental meditation and mindfulness meditation.

Mindfulness Meditation

The idea behind mindfulness meditation is to become a detached observer of your own thoughts. Rather than trying to force yourself not to think, you instead 'watch your thoughts go by like clouds' while not letting them effect you emotionally. This is useful in CBT as well as it allows you to make notes of the thoughts you have and of any that might require restructuring.

At the same time, mindfulness allows you to bring yourself into the moment by focussing your own body and your own presence. You can do this by lis-tening to your own breathing, by feeling the weight of your own body in your chair and by listening to sounds and the room around you.

Try sitting down for ten minutes and simply listening to the world around you and feeling your own body. As you do this, make no attempt to control your thoughts and instead just allow them to 'happen'. If you notice yourself engaging with them, then simply detach yourself and allow them to sink away.

Transcendental Meditation

The idea behind transcendental meditation meanwhile is simply to allow yourself to stop thinking all together and to have a completely still mind. The way you will generally do this is by focussing on your breathing or on a 'mantra' which is a single word (or even a noise like a hum) that you will re-peat over and over again. By doing this, you can focus purely on that man-tra or your breathing and thereby allow your thoughts to fall away.

If you notice that you start to lose concentration and your thoughts start creeping back in though, the trick is simply to acknowledge that your mind is wandering and then to re-center.

Some Tips and Advice

Notice that in both cases, you aren't being very strict with yourself or reprimanding yourself for letting your mind wander. This is the big mistake that many people make when they first start trying to meditate: they're so keen to be good at it right away that they get stressed and angry every time they catch their thoughts wandering.

This is entirely contrary to the objective of meditation which is to be calm and not to get stressed. When meditating, make sure that you aren't placing too much pressure on yourself to get good right away and that you simply 'notice' that you've let your mind wander and then bring your attention back to the meditation.

If you struggle with this, then another strategy is to try guided meditation. This is meditation that includes instruction from a recording to talk you through each step and to help bring you into a relaxed state. One of the best places to try out guided meditation is with the Headspace app, avail-able for both iOS and Android.

While the full membership isn't free, you'll get 10 free short meditation sessions you can try out and those alone will be enough to give you a good idea of how to get started. Likewise, you can try following guided meditation sessions on YouTube which can also be very effective.

Ultimately, the objective is to gain greater control over your own thoughts and ruminations. And eventually you should become adept enough at meditation that you can use the techniques wherever you are, whenever you need them! Eventually, you'll be able to maintain a 'moving' meditative state and be constantly in a state of mind that keeps you feeling calm and relaxed.

Chapter 07 - Breathing Techniques and Visualizations

We've already seen that breathing becomes rapid and shallow when we're stressed. We've also discussed that deep breathing can help to engage the parasympathetic nervous system and the 'rest and digest' state.

But there are other ways you can stay calm with the right breathing – and in fact, you can also use your breathing in the long term to improve your overall psychological state and health. Moreover, these techniques can be highly effective when combined with meditation.

And there's actually a good chance that most people reading this are currently breathing incorrectly! Curious? Read on…

Abdominal Breathing

Abdominal breathing is essentially the type of breathing we should all be engaging in all the time but most of us don't remember how to do it.

To test if you are breathing correctly, put one hand on your stomach and one hand on your chest. Now breathe normally and ask yourself which hand moved first – did your stomach or your chest rise to begin with?

Most of us will find that it's our chest that moves first but this actually limits how much oxygen we are capable of taking in and stifles the proper activation of the parasympathetic nervous system.

The way we're meant to breathe is with the stomach first. Our abdomen pushes outward, which creates space in the abdominal cavity. In turn, this allows the diaphragm to drop into that space and then we can expand out lungs using the greater amount of space this has freed up. We thereby take in more air and feel better – and if you watch a baby breathe this is the technique they use naturally. We only learn to breathe with the chest, which is much more shallow – because we spend so long during the day sitting at a desk with our bodies hunched over.

Focus on letting your stomach breathe first and you'll find its much more revitalizing and reinvigorating. Use this while practicing meditation and then try to make it your usual habit.

Other Breathing Methods and Visualizations

Another type of breathing you can use is called 'sama vritti' or 'equal breathing'. This type of breathing is taught in yoga and involves breathing in and out through the nose steadily for four seconds each. So that's one long inhalation and then one long exhalation. This is designed to put your breathing back under control and it forces you to breathe more deeply.

Progressive relaxation meanwhile is a type of breathing and muscle relaxation exercise. Here you use steady breathing and visualize each part of your body on each breath. So on the first breath you might imagine your head. Then your neck. Then your shoulders. Then your chest.

On each inhalation, tense the muscles slightly and make an effort to 'feel' where the muscle is and how tight it is. Then, on each exhalation, release

that tension and allow the muscle to completely relax and become entirely flaccid and limp. You can also visualize it 'sinking' into the bed or the seat underneath you for added effect.

This is an excellent form of relaxation that relieves stress and that can be a great help with meditation or sleep.

Remember too that you can also use visualization in other ways to help keep yourself calm. Perhaps one of the best examples of this is to visualize your 'happy place'. This should be a place you remember or a place you've imagined that is entirely relaxing and that makes you feel safe and at ease. You can 'visit' this place any time in your mind's eye and that will help you to feel more relaxed.

Visualization can also be used to imagine whatever it is you're afraid of going well, thereby making you feel as though it will be successful rather than letting you visualize the worst case scenario.

Chapter 08 - Power Positions, Facial Feed-back, Priming and Grounding

At this point we've seen exactly how anxiety and stress work and how you can get on top of them by using meditation, CBT and even medications if you're so inclined. The recommendation is to stay away from the latter and to instead focus on training your thoughts to 'rise above' the situation and feel calm even when the world around you seems to be falling apart.

But you can improve your ability to do all this even further by using power positions, priming, facial feedback and grounding and these will each serve as powerful tools in your arsenal against anxiety and rushed decisions…

Power Positions

Power positions are one technique that anyone can use to boost their confidence and reduce anxiety and they're perfect for using prior to interviews or even during dates (as long as you excuse yourself and head to the bathroom first).

Essentially, studies show us that when we adopt certain positions it can impact on the release of hormones and neurotransmitters. And one of the most potent examples of this is the 'victory position' in which we hold our hands over our head in a 'V' shape as though we were crossing over a finish line. This is one of the few 'universal' examples of body language and it triggers a surge in testosterone while increasing confidence!

Facial Feedback

Similarly, a process called 'facial feedback' can also be used to affect the neurochemicals in our brain. This particular process triggers the release of hormones and neurotransmitters in accordance with our facial expressions.

In other words, you may smile when you're happy, but you're also happy when you smile! Simply the act of smiling is enough to trigger the release of serotonin and other happiness hormones and this can be highly effective in improving our mood. One study showed that this works even if you force yourself to smile by holding a pencil in between your teeth.

So next time you feel stressed and you notice your face contorting (which also causes tension headaches by the way), try overcoming it by just smiling gently!

Note as well that we also adopt the moods of others thanks to facial feedback. When we see someone smile or frown, this actually causes us to mimic that expression unconsciously and in turn triggers the release of the same hormones and the same neurotransmitters. This is due to 'mirror neurons' in the brain – the very brain cells that give us the ability to empa-thize with others.

What's the take-away from this? Simple: surround yourself with positive happy people and try to avoid people who are going to make you more stressed during an anxious moment.

Priming

Priming means preparing yourself to be in a certain mood. This is something that is often used in marketing and sales and it basically means doing

something you know will affect your mood in a certain way before you need to be in that mood.

So in this case, it might mean doing something relaxing and calming (or something that gets you psyched up in a positive way) prior to a competition or an activity. You could do something similar before a workout by looking at images of your ideal physiques or watching videos of bodybuilders. Music is also great for priming yourself – and happy music can do a lot to improve your mood.

Oh and note that exercise itself can also be a good form of grounding! When we exercise it triggers the release of testosterone, growth hormone and serotonin and can drastically improve our mood while making us feel more alert and more physically capable – all good before an interview or another challenge.

Grounding

Finally, grounding is a technique you can use to bring yourself into the here and now and to create a sense of 'safety' by anchoring yourself to the ground and the world around you. You can do this simply by planting your feet firmly on the ground and being consciously aware of them. Other people will use techniques that bring them into the present moment by tapping themselves on the shoulders or clapping, or paying particular close attention to their surroundings. If you're currently stuck in your own head and worrying, reminding yourself of your physical presence and doing something to cement your attachment to the world around you can be very useful as a way to feel less anxious.

Chapter 09 - Cognitive Biases – How to Make Better Decisions

In the famous book Thinking Fast and Slow, Daniel Kahneman discusses how often our brain can play tricks on us and cause us to come to the wrong conclusions. This is particularly true when we're forced to make a decision quickly or when high emotions are at play and it's the result of some flaws in the way we think known as 'cognitive biases'.

Understanding these biases not only again demonstrates the importance of 'keeping your cool' in frightening situations but also helps you to better employ logic and reason when faced with tough and imminent decisions…

Here are some examples of common cognitive biases.

Gambler's Fallacy

The gambler's fallacy is a common misconception that we make when gambling – and it's responsible for a lot of lost money.

The belief here is that when you've thrown heads 5 times in a row that the next time you throw a coin it must be tails. Why? Because the odds of throwing heads 6 times in a row are miniscule. Of course if you remove emotion from the equation and think logically, you'll realize that actually there is still a 50/50 chance. That never changes!

Risk Aversion

Risk aversion describes our general distaste for risks. The point here is that we will go out of our way to take a risk even when it's a good idea. If entering a competition gives you a 50% chance of losing $5 and a 50% chance of gaining $12 then you should of course enter – but you may still feel anxious to!

Confirmation Bias

This is our simple tendency to seek out information that confirms our expectations and our beliefs. Likewise, we are more inclined to believe information that confirms our hypotheses. In fact though, you should really seek to find information that disproves your beliefs in order to challenge them and grow as a person.

Functional Fixedness

In functional fixedness, we find it difficult to think of an object in a different context to its primary use. For example, if you need fire wood then you might not think to use a hammer – because a hammer is a hammer and not 'wood'. Of course there is often benefit to thinking outside the box and us-ing tools and objects for other purposes, so it pays to be able to step back and think in this way.

Hindsight Bias

Hindsight bias is a bias that causes us to think of past events as being more predictable or easier than they really were in reality. Armed with new

information, old decisions now seem less challenging and this can prevent us from properly preparing for future challenges!

Contrast Effect

This is the tendency to view things in comparison to other things rather than judging them on their own merit. For example, if you have a mortgage worth $260,000 and you end up paying an extra $1k then you might feel that it doesn't really matter. But if you're buying a chocolate bar and it costs an extra $1k then of course that's going to feel like a very bad deal. In real-ity though, it's the same amount of money you've lost!

Chapter 10 - Wrapping it Up

We've seen a lot of disparate ideas and actually learned a lot about psychology throughout the duration of this book. Hopefully all this has helped you to better understand the workings of your own brain and how this information can be used to suppress anxiety and combat panic attacks. At the same time, hopefully it has shown you how you can ultimately take complete control over all your emotions if only you're able to put in the right practice and use the right approaches.

To help you get started with this then, let's take everything we've learned and summarize it in a few simple steps for you to follow…

Breathe – When you feel anxiety coming over you, make sure to breathe deeply and fully, thereby activating the parasympathetic nervous system

and triggering the ‘rest and digest’ state. You can try ‘equal breathing’ to this end.

View it as a challenge – To change a stress response into a flow state, try to see it as a fun challenge rather than a serious risk. This will help you to feel focussed without the negative anxiety effects.

Act normal – Most importantly, don’t worry about the stress and don’t fight it – continue to act as normal and let it run its course.

Employ power positions, grounding, priming and facial feedback if you get the chance

Breathe correctly – Breathing is important enough to appear twice on this list. It’s the title of the book after all! Whether you’re having anxiety or not, try to breathe the correct way and use abdominal breathing to improve your health and mental state.

Learn meditation – Another type of training you can do is to practice medi-tation and learn to have better control over your own mind.

Practice CBT – Most importantly of all, practice using CBT in order to re-program the way you think and the way you perceive situations. This means noting down your thoughts during mindfulness meditation and it means challenging your negative thoughts. You can also use visualization and even hypothesis testing. Try facing your fears gradually and you’ll learn to stay entirely cool in those situations in future!

Take a moment before making stressed decisions – are you falling victim to a classic cognitive bias?

This takes time and practice so stick with it! Once you finally get there, you'll find you become the master of your own emotions. And that changes the whole game.