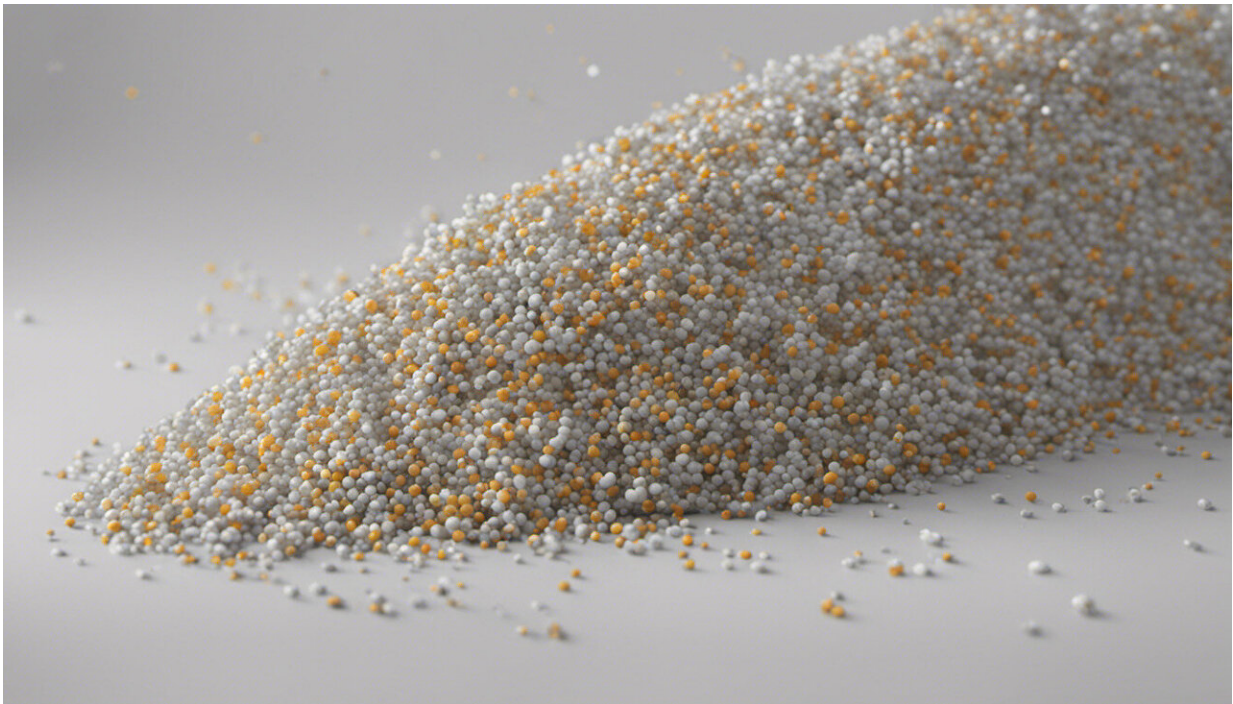


Anxiety—stop censoring yourself and learn to lose

August 1 2018, by Olivia Remes



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

[Anxiety disorders](#) are some of the most common mental health problems today. In fact, [four out of every 100 people](#) around the world have one, and research my colleagues and I were involved in at the University of Cambridge has shown that women and young people under the age of 39 are most affected.

Anxiety [disorders](#) reportedly cost the healthcare system and employers over US\$42 billion each year in the US alone, and if left untreated or unattended, can lead to [depression, substance use, and suicide](#).

There is a difference between normal anxiety, which all of us experience, and an anxiety disorder. Normal anxiety is a feeling which serves to motivate you, mobilise you for action, and protect you. In the modern world, anxiety makes you feel energised as you are trying to meet an imminent deadline or a rush if you find out that someone close to you has been in an accident. But if these feelings start arising in situations which don't pose a real threat, that's when you might have an [anxiety disorder](#).

There are different types of [anxiety disorders](#), and some of the most common are panic disorder and generalised anxiety disorder. If you have [panic disorder](#), you feel intense spikes of anxiety arising out of the blue – your heart starts beating fast, and you feel dizzy and out of breath. You might even think that you're about to have a [heart attack or die](#).

If you have generalised anxiety disorder, you tend to worry about everything happening in your life and you find it very difficult to shift attention from your worries onto something else. The worries can be so intrusive that they can make you want to skip school, work, or [important life events](#).

Anxiety leaves no marks, scars or bruises on your body, but can be more debilitating even than some serious physical illnesses, such as [cancer or diabetes](#).

There is medication, but relapse is common and some people don't experience [improvement in symptoms](#). There is also [cognitive behavioural therapy](#), but waiting times to get an appointment can be long and not all therapists are well-suited for everyone. But whatever options

you choose, you can also help yourself using some simple methods based on science.

Stop censoring yourself

People with anxiety often edit what they're about to say in their minds, because they don't want to offend anyone; they try to find the perfect moment to bring up something; and they worry about the impact that they have on other people. In general, they tend to [assume the worst](#) and worry about all the things that might go wrong.

Because people with anxiety are afraid to voice their ideas, they often feel unassertive and that others [take advantage of them](#). So the solution is to stop censoring what you say or do. Even though it might seem hard at first, it's important to start doing it. Start with the people you feel most comfortable with and extend it to others around you, one by one. As soon as you begin to do this, you will feel a sense of ease and see yourself as an independent thinker. And this is a skill that can be developed with practice.

Live in the now

First, only think about what you're doing right now. Do you think a lot about what happened yesterday or what will happen tomorrow? This could mean you're not living in the present. And if you're not living in the present, you're more likely to [experience anxiety](#).

But there is a way out. Whenever you have upsetting thoughts, don't feed them with energy. Instead, try to focus as much as possible on what you're doing in the [present moment](#). Next time you're drinking a warm beverage, for example, try to become immersed in the experience. See how holding the hot mug feels against your skin and smell the aroma.

When you become immersed in the present moment, your body relaxes and your mind becomes peaceful. This type of mindfulness meditation has been shown to lower anxiety in many [research studies](#).

Learn to lose

Because people with [anxiety](#) sometimes have a harder time [forging connections with others](#), they feel as if they must do everything in their power to maintain the relationships they have. This can make them needy and dependent.

But to preserve your [mental health](#), it is important to learn to lose. If you upset someone and can see that they don't want your friendship anymore, let it go. This is better for your dignity and, ironically, can build your sense of security as you begin to feel more reliant on yourself.

As the ancient Buddhist monks used to say: "When you let go of clinging, you can experience something else." When you stop thinking about situations which can't be changed, your mind automatically starts thinking about possibilities for the future. And this can be exhilarating and energising. In fact, learning to lose isn't just about relationships, it can apply [to anything in life](#). Give it a try.

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