

Breaking Free of Anxiety, Part II The Cause of It All!

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The causes of anxiety and panic disorder are multiple and interactive. The fact is...we live in a culture that is medically oriented. The sale of pharmaceuticals is a huge industry. For this reason, there is a natural tendency to think of anxiety as a biochemical imbalance with a medical solution. This is a serious and unfortunate error. Secondary anxiety (see part one of this series) is purely psychological and has no biological cause. Furthermore, primary anxiety and panic disorder have their origin in cognitive, social, and biological factors. Our body's biology is altered by psychological and social factors. Our brain chemistry is altered significantly by what we think and how we think.

A core dimension of all anxiety is the psychological tendency to overestimate risk, while underestimating one's resources for dealing with risk. As a result, individuals suffering from chronic anxiety live in a heightened state of fear, which suppresses the effectiveness of their immune system, making them more susceptible to illness and disease. It is not at all uncommon for an anxiety sufferer to trigger an anxiety or panic attack simply by thinking about having one. This is the power of the mind and an example of secondary anxiety.

Many anxious people will say "I know it is silly to think this way." But they cannot stop themselves from worrying and thinking in ways that trigger fear. This can lead to a great deal of self-criticism. The fact is, however, that logical thinking has little impact on decreasing anxiety levels. Anxious thinking has its origin in a different part of the brain than that part responsible for logical thinking. This is why cognitive therapy interventions work. Specifically, hypnosis can be very effective, because such treatments reach a deeper part of the brain, which work off mental processing which is not entirely logical.

The key here is to realize that breaking free of anxiety and panic has a good deal to do with how one cognitively assesses risk and the universal need to feel safe and in control. It is no coincidence that the occurrence of anxiety and panic disorder has increased significantly in our society since the 9/11 attacks. Anxiety and panic disorder is a psychological experience, with biological ramifications. In my next blog posting, we will look at specific psychological and cognitive patterns that increase one's vulnerability to the development of an anxiety or panic disorder.