

Your Anxious BRAIN



BY RICH PRESTA

No. 3847

THE HUMAN BRAIN



Your Anxious Brain

**How Science Is Changing Our Understanding Of Anxiety And Revealing
How It Can Be Treated More Effectively And Faster Than Ever Before**

by Rich Presta

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Your Friend,



Rich Presta



About the Author

Rich Presta is an internationally recognized authority on overcoming anxiety, panic attacks, and phobias. His self-help programs have been used by literally thousands of individuals all over the world, and have been seen in Psychology Today and Natural Health magazines, as well as on Discovery Health channel, MSNBC, CNN, and more.



To get additional information on quickly overcoming your anxiety, panic attacks, or phobias, visit his available resources at the end of this report or by [clicking here](#).



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Phase One: Understanding

I think you're going to find the information in this report is long overdue.

All day every day, I work with people around the world to help them overcome the excessive anxiety, fear, and panic attacks that may be holding them back from the lives they deserve. As much as I love what I do, and couldn't dream of doing anything else with my life, it never ceases to amaze me how completely misunderstood anxiety and fear is, even by those who suffer in its grip.

Myths and misinformation spread like wildfire, and from thumbing through most of the books on overcoming anxiety at your local bookstore you would think that we haven't had any new discoveries or advancements in treatment in the past fifty years.

Not true.

Anxiety disorders such as phobias, social anxiety, panic disorders, agoraphobia, and generalized anxiety disorder effect as much as fifteen percent of people, and I know how easily your world can be turned upside down by anxiety or panic and how unbelievably strong the urge to avoid feeling the full intensity of your fear can be, because I suffered for years with severe anxiety myself before learning how to free myself and live a better life.

We're going to talk about what changed that allowed me to conquer my anxiety and panic attacks, but before we do, we need to shatter some myths surrounding anxiety and discover what it REALLY is...



I know from my own personal experience that anxiety feels like an enemy, and it's easy to understand why you hate it, I hated it too. Maybe you think it's a disease, character flaw, or abnormality that you're born and stuck with. I know when I struggled with my anxiety and panic attacks I felt weak, different than everyone else, limited, and like I was somehow sick with an illness that robbed me of my courage.

If any of those incorrect perceptions ring true to you, it's for **one reason and one reason only**. You don't know what anxiety REALLY is.

Hey, don't feel bad, hardly anyone does, not even many of the so-called "experts".

Until relatively recently, anxiety and fear were pretty misunderstood. We made a lot of assumptions and plausible guesses about what was happening in our bodies and minds when we were afraid, but we never knew for certain. Technology, specifically in the field of nuclear medicine, is changing the field of psychology and our understanding of our minds rapidly, we're learning and discovering more about how our brain truly works far faster than ever before.

Just a few decades ago we had to rely on "hunches" about why certain thought patterns and mental habits became problematic, and even what caused people to be predisposed to struggle with

anxiety in the first place. We thought maybe it was because our parents didn't hug us enough, or hugged us too much, or because we got dealt a bad genetic hand, or because we had some sort of "chemical imbalance".



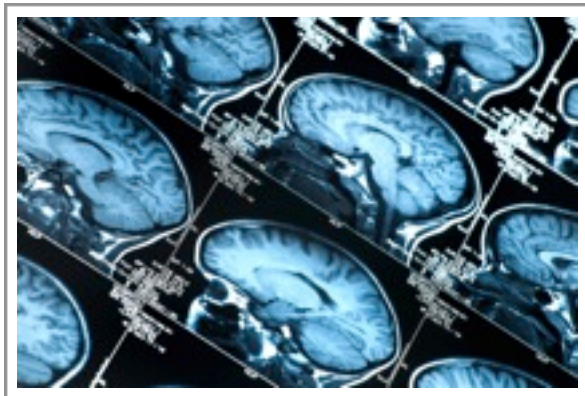
The strange truth is that, even though many of these theories came from mental health professionals, psychologists, and even doctors, **they couldn't prove any of it.** We've been conditioned to accept as fact whatever the "experts" tell us, but that's usually because they have some pretty good evidence before they start drawing conclusions on cause. Not always so with psychology. People spend weeks, months, and years in their therapist's offices talking about their childhoods and relationships assuming that would lead to the solution. Unfortunately, there wasn't much evidence for that being the most effective treatment for anxiety. We could have just as easily used astrology or voodoo to help, there wasn't much of a standard and people tried any number of treatment approaches that "sounded good". It was no different than 600 years ago when everyone KNEW the world was flat. That's what everyone's assumption was, and no one questioned it. If everyone believes it, it **MUST** be true, right? Until one day someone took a closer look and changed everything....

Like Columbus setting sail into the unknown and discovering new worlds and answers to questions no one had even thought to ask, some among us are using cutting edge technology to unravel the mysteries of our minds and arriving at **ANSWERS** instead of hunches, theories, or good sounding guesses. Just like the



invention of the microscope allowed us to pull back the curtains and peer deeply into things never before possible and as a result helped us take a giant leap forward in our understanding of the world around us, a similar advancement is giving us the same opportunity in the field of psychology. It's allowing us to look inside a working brain and has given the world a new understanding, a raw and unvarnished look at how your brain **REALLY** works, at a level unprecedented in human history. The advancement that is taking us into the next evolution of understanding is the Functional MRI (fMRI).

So what is a fMRI? A fMRI is a type of brain scan that uses electromagnetic radiation to allow us to see activity inside your brain in virtually real-time. So while a X-Ray or even CAT scan is more like a snapshot of your brain at a given point in time, a fMRI is more like a hi-def video that allows us to see and understand



far more by viewing what regions of the brain are active and working together given certain conditions and stimuli.

What does all this mean to someone living with anxiety? As it turns out, quite a bit. While we've known for quite some

time what physically happens to our bodies when we undergo fear, we weren't always exactly quite sure HOW it happened, in what order, and what was the cause versus the effect. All that has changed. Now we know precisely what happens in our brain when we experience fear or anxiety on even an unconscious level, and the real significance in knowing how the process is started



and what steps it goes through is that it has allowed us to develop better and more effective ways to **STOP IT.**

I think it's incredibly important and therapeutic for you to understand what's happening within your brain, on a biological level, when you get anxious or experience fear. The problem is that usually the only explanations have been in old musty medical texts or thick and difficult to read and understand books developed mostly for people who wear lab coats and pocket protectors. My goal is to take all that knowledge and pare it down to the very essence of what you need to know to better help yourself overcome your anxiety in a way that is simple, fast, and hopefully, a bit less boring than organic chemistry class.

We're going to start with a summary understanding of what happens in your brain when you experience fear, and that requires a little bit o' biology, but I promise, it's really pretty gosh darn simple...

Anxiety Unleashed

What is anxiety anyway?

I don't mean what does it FEEL LIKE...I mean what is it really? When you get anxious or scared, or even have a panic attack, what's going on?

Maybe before we get to that, maybe we should take a step back and think about why we get afraid to begin with. What good does fear do?



Fear is an extra dose of mental and physical power designed to keep you safe.

I know it doesn't feel like that, I know it can feel just *awful*, but your response of fear is something that can be an incredibly positive and useful thing when you need it.

At the core, you experience fear in order to protect yourself. Fear is fine, good in fact. It's not the reaction of fear that's the problem, it's the **timing**.

Picture this...

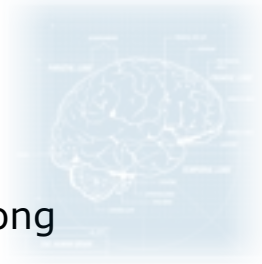
It's about 100,000 years ago, and two cavemen are walking across a field of tall grass in Africa. The sun is setting, so they're starting to get some relief from the intense sun, and they're tired from a long day of hunting Woolly Mammoths. All they want to do is get back to their cave and curl up with a big piece of Mastodon meat and chill out by the fire.

All of a sudden they hear a twig snap behind them.

The first caveman feels an intense and immediate reaction of fear and runs away.

The other one doesn't.

The only caveman that ended up relaxing in front of the fire that night was the one that got afraid and ran away.



For a REAL long time, it's been to our advantage to have a strong and sensitive fear response, the quicker and more intense, the better. It kept us safe and allowed us to make little cavemen with great fear responses. We're direct descendants of the cave-people that ran away when a twig snapped.

As useful as having that hair trigger on our fear response was back then, it doesn't serve us nearly as well now, there's simply not that much that's still out to get us.

But from an evolutionary perspective, the safety of modern life is still pretty recent, just a sliver of the past million years, not nearly long enough for your fear to know that it doesn't need to be so darn jumpy about things.

Even now, your instinctual fear response can keep you safe. If you've ever narrowly avoided an automobile accident, you probably felt your fear response in action, although may have not known that's what it was at the time. Maybe there was a crash in front of you and all of a sudden time seemed to slow down, you became intensely focused, slammed on the brakes, and decided where to steer so you could avoid crashing, all in a matter of a few seconds. You could NEVER have reacted with such speed and precision had it not been for your fear response kicking in. It did **what** it was supposed to do **when** it was supposed to do it, and it kept you safe.

Your fear has a purpose.

The problem with fear is twofold. First, it can get triggered when it's not necessary, like when you're in line at the grocery store,



going to a party, speaking in public, far from home, or up in an airplane. Second, it can get tricked into reacting WAY too intensely when the situation doesn't warrant it. When your fear response is activated, the surge of chemicals throughout your body can be so fast and intense it can overload your mind and you can be left barely able to function, like short circuiting the logical and rational part of your brain that you need to perform normally. Your logic and reasoning gets all but turned off, like the lights dimming in a room, and when that happens you're not much different than that caveman in the field 100,000 years ago, completely controlled by your fear.

Small amounts of anxiety and fear HELPS us, it keeps us sharp, hyper aware, and can even make us stronger. We've all heard stories of little old ladies lifting a car off someone or performing some other superhuman feat in the throes of panic or fear. The problem is with the swing of the pendulum. What if we could learn to control that fear response so we could use the energy and incredible power it gives us, without letting it slip out of our control and spiral into panic or anxiety that debilitates us or becomes uncomfortable? What if you could teach your mind to not react with such intensity when there wasn't a need to?

YOU CAN.

Ok, buckle up, time for some learnin'...



The Evolution of Anxiety

Right smack dab in the middle of your noggin is a part of your brain called the thalamus. This is sort of like your brain's traffic cop whose job it is to direct the data you get from your senses and make sure it gets to where it's supposed to be going. So if you smell some delicious chocolate chip cookies baking, your thalamus will be sure that "yummy smell" data makes it way to the part of your brain that makes you hungry.

Now this is where it gets interesting. Whenever you get input from your senses, it gets sent to two different parts of your brain for analysis. One is called the frontal cortex, and it's right below your forehead. The other is called the amygdala (uh-MIG-duh-luh), which is actually two nerve centers that look like almonds and are located on either side of the thalamus.

The frontal cortex is where the cool stuff happens. It's the part of our brain that makes us different than gorillas and chimpanzees, it's where the "human" part of us lives and is why we can figure out how to build an airplane, drive a car, or do other complicated things that other less evolved animals can't. From an evolutionary perspective, this is a brand spankin' new part of our brain, it's only been around a couple million years.

The amygdala on the other hand, is old. Real old. It's part of what is often called the "reptilian brain" because it's been around since we were virtually reptiles ourselves, and one of the main jobs of the amygdala is **assessing danger and keeping us safe.**



The amygdala is like a file cabinet of important memories. Not memories such as your favorite guacamole recipe or where you put your car keys, but memories the reptile in you considers important. You know, stuff that can hurt or kill you.

You have to keep in mind that the job of a reptile is only one thing, to make more reptiles, so it doesn't need to remember much to accomplish that and it doesn't consider most events important and worthy of remembering. What about catching food you may ask? Reptiles only need to catch food and eat in order to stay alive to make more reptiles. It's a pretty single minded existence, and probably hard to believe that we still have that part of our brain making decisions for us, but we do, and it's a powerful force.

If a lizard strolls out into the open in broad daylight and gets attacked by a predator and manages to survive, the amygdala is going to remember that. Not for a day, not for a week. **Forever.**



From then on, the lizard will remember that open spaces and daylight equal danger, and will start to hide or only come out to catch prey at night. Hard to disagree that those are all good ideas in the life of a lizard right?

That part of your brain still operates the same way.



Let's look at an example to make it more concrete. There was a time when you didn't have a memory in your amygdala for burning yourself on a stove. You weren't really careful around stoves and you didn't think about the possibility of getting burned, no matter what your parents told you. One day you were playing around and not being careful, or decided to see what the grown-ups were making such a big fuss about, and you touched a hot stove. Remember that day?

Probably not.

That's ok, YOU don't have to. Your amygdala remembers. Vividly.

The memory of that burn got filed away in your amygdala, and I bet you've been MUCH more careful around hot stoves every since. If you accidentally touch a stove, even a cold one that WON'T burn you, your amygdala remembers those few seconds that happened decades ago and instinctively pulls your hand away. You don't think about it or wait to see if it's REALLY going to burn you. You don't decide to pull away. Your amygdala takes over in an instant and you just ACT.

So what's the problem? That sounds like it's working pretty good, right?

Yep, most of the time the amygdala works great and the threats it protects us from are valid. But not always...

As wonderfully effective at keeping us alive as the amygdala is, there are some pretty significant drawbacks.

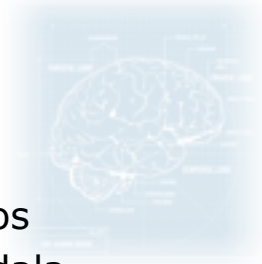


Remember how it was difficult if not impossible to remember the first time you burned yourself on a stove and created that imprinted memory in your mind you carry around to this day? That happens with a LOT of things and is what makes treating anxiety, phobias, and panic attacks so challenging - you're often completely unaware of what distant memory or association is triggering your fear! It's why it's so frustrating when someone who doesn't have a difficulty with anxiety asks, "Why the heck are you afraid of that for"? You often have NO IDEA WHY you're so afraid and reacting with anxiety or panic, you just are and have no conscious awareness of why! The answers are sealed up tight in the amygdala.

How do I know this? fMRI experiments have been done during which an individual's amygdala was activated just by being shown PHOTOS of unfamiliar things. A change that is not routine is the very first sign of risk, whether it's hearing the sound of a car horn, a big bump on an airplane, being in strange surroundings outside your comfort zone, or hearing a twig snap. From your amygdala's perspective, scary always starts with different.

During these experiments, test subjects were shown photos of people they didn't know. Keep in mind, the photos weren't of angry or intimidating people, just normal, everyday people you might run into at the mall or while standing in line at the bank. The key factor is that they were unfamiliar. Then the subjects were also shown photos of people they DID know.

When the photos of people they did know were shown to them, their amygdala was cool as a cucumber and the fMRI registered



no significant change. However, when they were shown photos of people they hadn't seen before, the fMRI showed the amygdala light up with activity, signaling that it thought a possible threat was present.

The people involved in the test didn't **FEEL** any anxiety or fear at all. What's important and so significant about these experiments is that it is evidence of just how sensitive the amygdala is and that it can and often is **registering threats on a level below our conscious awareness.**

This explains why you can be going about your day, feeling just peachy keen, and all of a sudden, seemingly out of nowhere, you feel your anxiety kick in. It may appear that you weren't thinking about anything that was bothersome, and that nothing happened to cause you to feel that way, but now we know that isn't necessarily the reality. The anxiety you feel can originate from something the amygdala considers a potential threat, even if you know there's nothing to be the least bit concerned about, and you may NEVER even be aware of what it was!

If this can happen with photos of people you don't know, imagine what can happen when a memory is triggered of something even slightly more legitimate, such as a painful childhood memory or when you think about how awful it felt the last time you got anxious or had a panic attack.

That's right, you can actually become conditioned to be afraid of your own feelings of fear, which will come as no surprise to most people struggling with anxiety.



Remember, the amygdala's job is to keep you safe, so it doesn't take any chances. When the amygdala detects a threat, it initiates an instant self-preservation reaction that's commonly referred to as the fight or flight reaction. It immediately prepares us to do one of two things, run away from whatever the danger is, or fight it off if we can't.

Let's just take a pause here, because just knowing and being aware of all this can be tremendously helpful. Anxiety, fear, and panic seem so mysterious, and like they come out of nowhere, but that simply isn't true. They come from the amygdala and the reaction it kicks into gear to keep you safe. It's not because you're sick, strange, weak, or a coward. At the very worst, your brain is confused and is taking steps to protect you when there's no need for protection. **You're OVERPROTECTING yourself.** It's what I call a "mental misunderstanding".

All the symptoms and crummy feelings you experience when you get anxious have an explanation behind them and a reason they're occurring, all rooted in the fact that your body is doing absolutely everything it can to keep you safe, whether it needs to or not.

Let's take a look at just a few of the more common physical changes you might experience as part of the fight or flight reaction so if you feel them again you know why they're happening and can take comfort in the fact that they're designed to help you if you need it, not hurt you:



Trembling - As soon as your fear response is triggered, one of the first things to occur is your body's massive release of adrenaline to prime your muscles for action. If you were to take off and run down the street every time you got anxious or afraid, you would use up the adrenaline in short order, but when you get the same sensations of fear sitting in your car, in line, or at work, you don't have any way to use up that monster dose of energy so it can cause trembling as a means of releasing it.

Sweating - Whenever you think of someone who's nervous or anxious, what probably comes to mind is someone who's sweaty and jumpy. We even have everyday expressions that infer sweating is a symptom of nerves, we tell people, "Don't sweat it" when we want to imply it's nothing to get worked up about.

Nervous sweating is actually your body beginning to cool itself for the pending exertion of fighting or fleeing. It's also been theorized that a sweaty body is more difficult for a predator to grab onto, which would be a good benefit if we had to choose the "fight" part of the fight or flight equation.

Dizziness and a Feeling of Disassociation From Reality -

This is a very bothersome and frightening feeling, where you may feel somewhat distanced from reality or the world around you, or as if you're in a movie on the outside looking in on yourself. This feeling is primarily caused by the rapid change in brain chemistry combined with a decreased level of oxygen to your brain from shallow breathing. With proper treatment, it can actually be one of the first symptoms to vanish.



Intense Desire to Escape the Situation - Your need to avoid or escape from the situation that may be bringing you anxiety is the "flight" part of the fight or flight response at work.

Remember, when you're in the midst of your fear response, you have millions of years of evolution screaming at you to RUN AND GET AWAY.

Rapid Heartbeat - Your heart starts pounding to quickly get blood to your muscles in case it's needed.

Stomachaches and GastroIntestinal Issues - During your fear response all unnecessary bodily functions shut down so maximum resources can be directed to where they're needed most during a crisis. One of the least "urgent" things going on within your body is digestion, so it shuts down until the threat is deemed over so your salivation can stop and your mouth can go dry, as well as a host of other stomach or gastrointestinal changes.

Inability to Concentrate or Think Clearly - David Eagleman, a neuroscientist at the Baylor College of Medicine explained it nicely when he says, "Normally your brain is doing lots of things at the same time, just under the surface of awareness. Your brain is thinking about where you're going to eat lunch and what you're going to wear to the party tonight, and what you're doing for your career, and so on. What happens in a really scary situation is that the amygdala essentially tells the rest of the brain, 'Hey, everybody shut up and pay attention to this.' All the nonessential processes get shut down and your whole brain, or as much of your processing power as you have, gets devoted to this one thing going on."



When you get afraid, it's very easy to focus on your fear, and very, very difficult to focus or pay attention to ANYTHING else.

As soon as the amygdala detects something it thinks could even *possibly* be a threat, it kicks off this reaction to some degree, but then it gets a second opinion...

Remember how I told you about the frontal cortex, the part of your brain that hangs out under your forehead? I explained that the thalamus sends all your sensory data to TWO parts of your brain, one being the amygdala that we've been talking about, and the other being the frontal cortex. Whenever the amygdala thinks it has a "situation" it needs to protect you from, it starts the fight or flight reaction we just talked about, but the **NEXT** thing it does, is contact the newer and smarter frontal cortex for confirmation that its assessment is correct.

If the frontal cortex agrees with the amygdala's verdict that a threat is present, the fight or flight reaction continues and grows stronger. However, if the front cortex processed the data the amygdala gave it using all the advanced logic and reasoning that it has on tap and determined that there isn't really a threat, it tries to convince the amygdala to settle down. When it's successful in reversing the amygdala's decision, the fight or flight reaction comes to an end. Back when the photo experiment was done, the amygdala may have been screaming out, "Yikes! Look at all these spooky looking people who may be out to get me! Whadda think frontal cortex?", to which the frontal cortex would reply, "Relax, they're just photos, don't bother getting all worked up."



These reactions are accomplished by two subsystems in your body called the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems. These two systems work in harmony to maintain your level of relaxation and anxiety as you go about your life. If you're sitting on your couch in your living room watching television, chances are you'll be feeling pretty relaxed, which is a sign of the parasympathetic nervous system at work. It makes you breathe easy and feel that all is well in the world.

But when you get afraid or anxious, the sympathetic nervous system gets triggered and begins to shut down and override its relaxed parasympathetic cousin. This is where the fight or flight reaction gets started from.

Maybe you're thinking that is doesn't make much sense, that's it's pretty poor design. I mean why wouldn't our brains wait to get the input from our more intelligent and discriminating frontal cortex before putting us through all this anxious misery for no reason?

It's because of **speed**. In comparison to the amygdala, the frontal cortex is slow as molasses.



By the time the frontal cortex evaluates a threat for validity, it could already be too late. Think about the narrowly avoided car crash we spoke about earlier. If the amygdala hadn't had thrown on

your fear response immediately, you may have been hurt or even killed. What about the hot stove? If you waited even the second or two it would take your frontal cortex to make the decision



regarding whether or not you should pull your hand away or leave it there to sizzle, you'd already be badly burned. When the threats are real, you don't have time to wait for the frontal cortex to dilly-dally.

The Danger of Untreated Anxiety

Maybe you think you'd like to just turn off your amygdala entirely and be completely without fear, but you don't want NO FEAR, what you want is *balance* between your amygdala and frontal cortex. To accomplish that, **one of the things we need to teach your frontal cortex is to get better at recognizing when your amygdala is overreacting and convincing it to calm back down faster.**

The more often and severely your fear response is triggered, the more easily it begins the next time. You've probably noticed that once you're anxious, you get jumpy and it doesn't take much to kick your anxiety up to the next level. It's called "fear potentiated startle" and what it boils down to is that the more trained you are to get afraid, the easier and quicker it happens. Exactly what you DON'T want.

To make matters worse, when you get highly anxious or frightened often, you can very easily begin to make anxious thoughts and behaviors **automatic**, so they happen over and over again without much if any rational thought, even if they're causing you more harm than good!

For instance, let's say you experience some anxiety while driving on the highway far from home. What initially made you anxious may have nothing to do with driving, the highway, or your distance from home, but your amygdala starts the fight or flight reaction and it scares you so you pull off the highway and take side streets home. The next time you get on the highway you watch your body for signs or evidence that anxiety is lurking again so you're more likely to get afraid (there's that fear potentiated startle thing again) so you **DO** get anxious.

You remember what you did the last time to feel better so you pull off the highway once again and your fear eventually subsides. After you've "practiced" doing this for a few times, your amygdala will store the highway, or being far from home, or driving itself as something that's dangerous and will trigger the fear response every time it presents itself. Your default response will be to fall into a pattern of negative, scary, and irrational thinking that ultimately results in you pulling off the highway in an attempt to feel better.

That's the danger of leaving anxiety untreated, it almost always follows that destructive pattern. It gets easier and more automatic to become anxious, fearful, and panicked, while simultaneously your fear reaction gets more severe and leads to avoidance behavior. It's a vicious cycle that needs to be stopped, but traditional treatment methods are so seldom successful because they require you to attempt to correct an emotional and instinctual reaction on a rational and logical level, which as you probably know, just doesn't work. In the next section, you're going to learn how to use what the science tells us about fear to

overcome it and how to start teaching your brain **NEW AND BETTER** default reactions instead of anxiety...





Phase Two: Changing



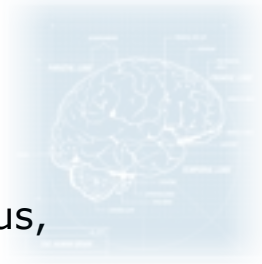
Stopping the Anxiety Cycle

To overcome your anxiety you need to learn how to break your automatic and habitual cycle of fear that keeps you stuck. By now you know what the cycle is and how it's all playing out inside your mind. The trouble is, it happens very quickly and can easily become automatic behavior that occurs without any conscious thought.

What's critical for you to realize, is that in between the thought that causes your amygdala to react and your fear response, is what I call **"The Pause"**. There's a measurable time period, maybe not a long time, perhaps only a second, but a definite moment in between the anxious thought and your reaction. One of your goals is to learn to increase The Pause and give yourself room to make a decision about what to do next, instead of simply reacting with anxiety just because that's what you may be used to doing.

This is especially important because **what you're USED to doing about your anxiety is usually WRONG!** Remember, anxiety is really just an instinctual response to a threat that isn't really there. Because of this, what you're drawn to do automatically as a means of coping with or stopping the anxiety actually has the opposite effect - making your anxiety worse and more severe!

Let's look at something you probably do now when you get anxious and see if it's helping or making you feel worse...



You're going about your day and all of a sudden you get anxious, afraid, or feel a panic attack coming on. What's the very first thing you do?

You try to push it away. Talk yourself out of it. You try to suppress your anxiety.

Understand this...you CANNOT hide from or suppress your fear. It's impossible and the fact that you're reading this is evidence that it doesn't work. If you could simply choose to shove your feelings out of your head you wouldn't still be having a problem with your anxiety, right? You can PRETEND your anxiety isn't there...you can choose to act in spite of it, but that isn't suppressing it because nothing has genuinely changed. It's like when you go to someone's home for a meal, sit down at the table, take a big spoonful of what they cooked and realize it's terrible. You can put on a happy face, tell them how wonderful their version of chicken ala' king is, but underneath, you KNOW it's bad and want to spit it into the napkin. You can suppress the outward reaction, but not the inward REALITY. Your feelings of anxiety are no different. You can put on a happy or brave face and pretend you're not feeling afraid, but inside, YOU KNOW. False suppression and getting better at pretending everything is going swell isn't what you need to focus on, instead, **you need to discover how to stop the process that causes the fear before it begins.**

Of course suppression is just one faulty and ineffective anxiety control technique that's frequently used, there's many more and some that not only don't work, but actually make your anxiety and fear grow more rapidly and spread into other areas of your



life. I discuss those in more detail in my full programs you can read about at the end of this report, but for now, I want to talk a little bit about two important concepts that you can use that I think will help make whatever treatment you're involved with exponentially more effective. You'll also be able to use what you're about to learn as a basis for evaluating whether or not the treatment approach you're using will be something that will help you when you need it most.

Cognitive Overload

We talked before about how challenging it is to focus or pay attention to anything besides your own feelings or fear when you're under high anxiety or panic. This combined with the rapid dump of chemicals into your brain makes it extraordinarily difficult to think clearly, use logic, or remember how to perform even simple tasks. Anything that hasn't been practiced and learned to the level that is unconscious and automatic suddenly becomes very difficult, as cognitive overload kicks in and the **amygdala shuts down your frontal cortex and takes over control of your body.** This lack of availability of high functioning mental processing presents an interesting dilemma during treatment.

You can learn all you want about how to best cope with and handle your anxiety, but if you can't remember it or slow your mind down enough to put it to use when you're actively going through your fear response, what good is it?



You need a way to enlist the help of anxiety control techniques when it's MOST DIFFICULT to use them, and you can do this by incorporating two strategies into your treatment plan...

The first, and what I consider one of the most important things, is to ensure that the techniques you're going to use when you're experiencing anxiety are going to be optimally effective when you need them, and one of the most obvious but often overlooked aspects of that is making certain you know and can remember what they are!

When you're sitting at home reading a book or manual, or even this report, it's deceptively easy to think you can predict what you'll do the next time you feel those feelings of fear and panic you've felt before. Maybe you tell yourself, "The next time, I'll just ignore them" or "That's it! I'm not going to worry about THAT anymore".

It's simple to make those well intentioned plans and commitments when you're at ease, but **terribly difficult to stick to them once your self-preservation instincts kick in.**

That's why more is needed and why anxiety treatment PLANS are so useful and effective. You need to know in advance *specifically* what things you'll do to bring your anxiety levels down and bring peace to your amygdala.

Most every book you may have read on anxiety will have some advice on things you should do, and some of their advice is actually pretty good. They'll tell you to breathe deep, accept your



feelings, and go about your life anyway, all good things. But it's not enough. They're missing a key component.

Let me tell you a little story to illustrate my point...

On January 15, 2009 US Airways Flight 1549 departed New York bound for Charlotte, North Carolina. Everything was going smoothly as Pilot Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger and Co-Pilot Jeffrey Skiles made the takeoff into the crisp afternoon air. At 3200 feet, suddenly and without warning, the plane flew through a large flock of Canadian Geese. They lost power to both their engines virtually immediately at a very low altitude...a worst case scenario to be sure.

Sullenberger and Skiles had just a few moments, literally minutes, to decide what to do, what order to do it in, and to then execute the plan. If they didn't choose right, or choose the wrong order, or were too slow to act, it would be too late for them and the 155 passengers and crew.

What do you think they did?

Did Captain Sullenberger and Skiles turn to one another and start discussing the possibilities? Weighing the pros and cons and trying to think back to what they read in their manuals during flight school?

No. They immediately pulled out their emergency checklist and began following its procedures. Because of the checklist they knew what was needed quickly, without thought, and with certainty.



You probably know the ending to the story. Flight 1549 made an emergency landing in New York's Hudson River and all 155 people aboard survived, making it one of the most amazing examples of perfect execution in aviation history. Do you think Sullenberger and Skiles attribute the "Miracle on the Hudson" flight's success to their own uncanny abilities, quick thinking, and intelligence?

No. The checklist is what mattered.

When the situation is critical and high levels of stress will make important decisions challenging, almost every industry relies on the use of checklists so they can plan what to do **BEFORE** the need arises. Aviation doesn't let their pilots decide how to respond when an engine fails, they prepare a checklist so the crew KNOWS what to do should the need arise. Power plants don't HOPE they figure out a solution if something goes wrong, they have a checklist. Surgeons and hospitals have them. The Red Cross has them. Anywhere you look, when it's important, there's a checklist.



Except with anxiety treatment. Then we just "wing it".

Ridiculous, right? There's no reason to NOT plan out beforehand what you're going to do if you begin to experience anxiety or panic **EXACTLY AND IN WHAT ORDER** prior to ever needing it! The easy to remember and execute "checklist" type of treatment strategy is one the primary reasons the programs I develop can



be so effective against even the most severe anxiety, it takes the thought out of the equation, which only makes sense to me because **thinking** when you're anxious is almost **impossible!**

Trying to accurately remember 150 pages of jibber-jabber about positive thinking, complicated rituals, procedures and whatnot when you're anxious or having a panic attack WILL NOT WORK. Like we talked about and you know from your own life, when you're under high anxiety or during panic, only the most automatic and basic functioning is possible. To expect to remember what you need to know to feel better during that time is setting yourself up to fail. You need a checklist. Something that you can easily call into your memory that says, "Do this. Then do this. Then this. Ahhh, ok, it's over."

If you can't stop reading this sentence right now and tell me **EXACTLY** what you're going to do the next time you get anxious and in what order you're going to do it in, or if it takes you more than five steps to accomplish, you need something different. You're simply asking your brain to function at a level it's incapable of during a stress response.

Re-Training Your Amygdala

Every experience your amygdala considers a possible threat it stores away in its archives and remembers. It's why you can ride a bike without falling after 20 years and why even when you're 80 years old your brain remembers to pull your hand away from the hot stove. Once those memories are established, they're permanent. I know that what you may want more than anything

is to be able to just forget you ever had anxiety and go back to how you used to be, but unfortunately it's not going to happen *quite* like that. Once your brain has those experiences in "the vault", it's not going anywhere. You're stuck with the memory.

Your amygdala never forgets, but what you CAN do is put the memory in perspective by creating new, more positive memories for it to draw upon. If you had an anxiety attack in an airplane for instance, you would be preconditioned to become anxious in an airplane again and would likely feel some degree of anxiety the next time you flew. However, if you got on board an airplane once a week and coped with your anxiety better so it didn't escalate and trigger your fear response, in a relatively short amount of time, you would have enough positive or at least neutral memories around flying so your amygdala would no longer consider it a threat and you could fly comfortably and without anxiety again. If you flew often enough and learned how to control your stress response, you could actually make 30,000 feet a place you feel very relaxed and at peace at!

Unfortunately, the reverse is also true. Repeatedly subjecting yourself to a feared situation and continuing to cope with it in an unhealthy manner such as with anxiety, by having a panic attack, or by leaving the situation to bring relief has the **INVERSE** effect of actually giving your amygdala **MORE** ammunition to come to the conclusion that the situation and your associated feelings ARE a threat. The more frequently you get anxious in a situation and the more severe your fear gets, the more negative memories get created. When this occurs overcoming your fear becomes increasingly difficult and the likelihood that you'll continue to feel



your anxiety on an ongoing basis unless you make radical changes skyrocket.

Confronting your anxiety the **WRONG** way can actually be far worse than not facing it at all and can create a deeper, more pervasive, and automatic stress response.

Remember, your amygdala is ALWAYS “in training” and learning, so you need to be absolutely certain you’re teaching it to behave the way you WANT.

There is a way to accomplish this re-training of your amygdala to respond the way you want **WITHOUT** setting off your fear response, and it’s through a concept called “over-learning”.

The military has been using the strategy for hundreds of years, but at it’s most basic, over-learning is simply practicing the behavior or response you WANT to have when it’s **NOT** urgent, so when it **IS** urgent it can be performed automatically and without thought.

Over-learning must be done when you can “practice without pressure”. Think about watching a basketball game and seeing a player making free throws that can decide the outcome of the entire game or season. They have to perform flawlessly with the roar of the crowd and the opposing fans doing everything in their power to distract them all while adrenaline surges through their bodies, but they do. They would never be able to make those difficult shots under that tremendous pressure if they hadn’t spent hours in an eerily quiet gym, with no one else around, silently making shot, after shot, after shot, until the process

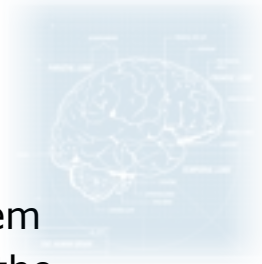


became so automatic they could let go and just let their body do what it learned during practice. As difficult as it may be to grasp and as counterintuitive as it may sound, what you need to do is *learn until you are able to forget.*

Of course the difficulty with this as it applies to anxiety is that in the early stages of treatment, it's incredibly challenging to face a feared situation and **NOT** react with fear, there's simply been too much practice getting anxious for the amygdala to allow anything else. What's needed, and what virtually no treatment plans typically incorporate, is a way for over-learning to take place WITHOUT the opportunity for anxiety to begin.

When I was developing my programs for anxiety, this struck me as very odd. It made no more sense to me to ask someone to learn to cope with their anxiety in a better way by putting them directly into the situation that **CAUSED** the anxiety then it would be for a military general to try and teach the troops to march during the battle. Soldiers are taught to march on command during peacetime, so when needed, they can march in war without thought or hesitation and rely on their training. **The learning is done BEFORE the battle, not DURING.**

Based upon this concept of over-learning BEFORE the battle is why I put so much effort into pioneering the advanced audio sessions that I include with my programs. They allow you to put on headphones in a place where you feel safe and secure and begin "practicing without pressure" the tactics you'll be learning



throughout the program so you can become proficient with them prior to them ever being needed. I'm confident that by using the audio sessions in conjunction with the program material I developed allows you to quickly learn the skills you need in a way that can make them automatic. From that point forward, just like a professional basketball player can relax and make perfect free throws in the midst of chaos, **you'll be able to put into action the strategies that allow you to conquer your anxiety and panic when you're actively going through even the most severe stress response.**

If you're using one of my programs that includes this type of audio resource (I consider it so critical to treatment all my programs include it), then it's easy and you can refer to your program manual itself for instructions on how best to incorporate the audio into your recovery. If you're NOT using one of my programs that takes advantage of this concept, what you can do instead is focus on taking the smallest steps possible in facing your feared situations so as NOT to elicit a full-blown fight or flight reaction, which can set you back and negatively train your amygdala further. This is easier to accomplish with some fears than others, for instance, it's very difficult to face your fear of flying or of driving on the highway a "little bit", which is why I engineered the audios I offer, but you can still attempt to implement the concept to some lesser degree without the structure of my programs if you choose to.

These are only two concepts I think you need to be aware of, I obviously get far more in-depth in my programs themselves, but I think being mindful of them and their impacts on your recovery from anxiety will help you evaluate any treatment you may be



considering and implement whatever your decision is most effectively.

Now there's a few more things you need to know, and I think this next section may be the most important of all....

Phase Three: Moving Forward

By this point, you're probably able to see your anxiety more clearly than you have before, and you realize that it's not a "thing" you need to be fearful of, but a largely unnecessary reaction and process that you can learn to **END**.

You've learned how recent scientific advances in nuclear medicine have shown us the crucial role your amygdala plays, why you experience the thoughts and sensations you do when you get anxious, and how you're actually **OVERPROTECTING** yourself when you get anxious or have a panic attack.

Now you see how what you may have been trying to do to cope with your fear hasn't worked and may have even been making it worse by trapping you in a repetitive cycle of anxiety that becomes more difficult every day it's allowed to continue. It's not your fault, it's your instinctual response, but as you're now aware, you can't always trust your instincts...

I explained how you can harness the power of checklists to overcome the cognitive overload anxiety brings and how to incorporate over-learning into your treatment plan to overlay the negative associations your amygdala has and make falling **OUT OF** anxiety as quick and easy as falling into it.

All that is fantastic and important to know, but if nothing is done with it, it's useless. Now that you have more information, your next step has to be to **TAKE ACTION** with it.

I already told you in the beginning of the report how I struggled with anxiety and severe panic attacks for years myself and overcame it completely. As I write this, I write from a place of

understanding and empathy for how difficult it can be to live with anxiety, and how frightening it can be to even consider confronting it.

There's something you need to know...

If I was able to conquer my anxiety, YOU can. I'm not different, better, or smarter than you. I was **EXACTLY** where you are now. Believe me, I remember every moment of my struggle. I know what it's like to dream of what you COULD BE, but aren't. I can relate to the intense fear that you'll never be different than you are now and your one shot at the life you want will pass you by. As much as I know how that feels, I also know it **DOESN'T HAVE TO BE THAT WAY**. Something brought you here, to this very moment, reading **THIS** sentence, right now. Maybe this isn't how you're supposed to be. Maybe this is the point that you can change the direction of your life. **Maybe the moment you've been waiting for and dreaming about is RIGHT NOW.**

It can be.

The only difference between where you are now with your anxiety and where I am is that I learned new things that allowed me to move past my anxiety and panic attacks and lead a much better and fulfilling life. I don't make decisions to accommodate my fears anymore, I'm not held back or limited, and every day to me is like an exciting new adventure...not something I need to endure or "get through". Plain and simple, I'm happy. Free. **You can be too.**

I want you to think about what you could accomplish and how much happiness you could experience from life if you **DIDN'T** have to put so much energy into your anxiety. How much better of a spouse, parent, or friend could you be if you could just let it all go? What would you attempt if you had nothing to fear?

Now I want you to consider how the next 10 years of your life will look if you stay the way you are.

What you've been doing up until this point **DOESN'T WORK**, if it did you wouldn't be reading this right now. It's time to join the others like you from all corners of the globe who are putting their anxiety, fear, and panic attacks behind them and moving on with their lives.

If you're ready to start the next chapter of your life, the one WITHOUT anxiety, fear, or panic, you can [read more about getting started with my Panic Puzzle Program by clicking here.](#) It's already helped people just like you start leading the lives they dreamed of, and my work has been featured in magazines like Psychology Today and Natural Health, and even on TV on CNN, MSNBC, CNBC, the Discovery Health Channel, and more. **People around the world use and recommend my programs for one reason and one reason only, THEY WORK.**

For a full list of my available programs, and to pick which may be best for you, go to the next page.

Remember, your once upon a time story can start right now...

Available Programs by Rich Presta

(Click a Program Title to Learn More)

[The Panic Puzzle Program](#) - Overcome your anxiety, fear, and panic attacks with what we consider the most advanced, comprehensive, and effective treatment program available, the original Panic Puzzle Program.

[The Driving Fear Program](#) - The Driving Fear Program is the leading program for conquering fear or anxiety while driving, having been used successfully by literally thousands of people all over the world.

[The Anxiety-Free Child Program](#) - One of the most acclaimed programs for children struggling with fear or anxiety, the Anxiety-Free Child Program is one of the most widely recommended programs of it's type anywhere.

[The Takeoff Today Program](#) - Fly comfortably with the help of the Takeoff Today Program, complete with resources to use in-flight to aid in relaxation and confidence. Foreword by Jeffrey Skiles, co-pilot of Flight 1549 "The Miracle on the Hudson"..