

Healthy & Resilient You

When Life Gives You Anxiety, **Make Lemonade**

How to be constructively anxious



Have you ever been at a party where that one guest seemed bent on bringing down the vibe? You're not even sure they were invited in the first place, but wherever you turn, there they are. All twitchy and sour-faced. Ruining everyone's fun and refusing to leave.

Anxiety is like that unwelcome guest. Not always invited, but here anyway, making life unpleasant and uncomfortable for millions of us every year.





It's estimated that as many as 62% of us regularly experience anxiety. When unaddressed, routine anxiety can become more serious, with the Anxiety and Depression Association of America estimating that 31% of all U.S. adults will experience an anxiety disorder at some point in their lives.

Why, Anxiety? Why?

Basically, anxiety is our psychological and physical response to worry or fear. Like other [natural stress responses](#), it serves a useful purpose when it motivates us to avoid danger, make reasonable contingency plans, or take positive action.

However, anxiety becomes problematic when it's habitually focused on things we can't control.

CONSTANT, UNFOCUSED ANXIETY CAN:

-  Distort reality, making things routinely appear worse than they are
-  Frighten us into avoiding necessary or enjoyable activities
-  Make us speak or act negatively, harming our self-esteem and relationships
-  Cause us to be indecisive or to act against our own interests

To avoid these problematic anxiety traps, it's helpful to recognize that it comes in two different forms.

Constructive vs. Unconstructive Anxiety

Constructive Anxiety

- Has a solvable problem
- Is focused on one problem at a time
- Lasts 10 minutes or less
- Focuses on influence over control

Unconstructive Anxiety

- Has no solution
- Focuses on multiple or spiraling problems at once
- Is persistent or constant
- Fantasizes about absolute control

Example 1: Say you have an important presentation at work tomorrow, and a big storm is expected during your commute.

Constructive anxiety says, "OK, I'll get up early, check my weather and traffic apps, and pick the best departure time and route. Done."

Unconstructive anxiety says, "What if the whole world floods, and even if I get to work without dying, the rain ruins both my laptop and flash drive backup, and my hair is a mess, and I'm covered in mud, and...and. Let's make a blanket fort, binge-eat junk food, and imagine all the things that could (im) possibly go wrong."

Example 2: Say a recent political event or poll didn't go so well for your chosen party or candidate.

Constructive anxiety says, "OK, I can't magically fix this, but I can confirm that I'm registered to vote and research ways to donate or volunteer to try to make a difference. Done."

Unconstructive anxiety says, "If my candidate/party loses, everything will change for the worst, all I hold dear will be gone, the world will end, and...and. Let's make a blanket fort, binge-eat junk food, and watch cable news endlessly while having imaginary debates with the 'other side.'"

Those unconstructive examples may sound a little tongue-in-cheek, but they're not that off-base. The point is that unconstructive anxiety is often illogical, and when it spirals, that's when it causes the most trouble.

Say No to Anxiety and Yes to Action

Here are some techniques that can help you differentiate between the two types of anxiety and focus on productive, positive solutions.



Acknowledge, Don't Avoid – Viewing anxiety as normal/routine can reduce its power to paralyze you. When you feel anxious, examine it mindfully and calmly and try to understand where it's coming from rather than getting caught up in it.



Question the Unlikely – If your anxiety puts you in a fear spiral, take a deep breath and ask yourself calmly if what you're imagining is likely to happen or if it's the anxiety making things look worse than they are. If a bad outcome is likely, what's the first step you might take to keep going in the aftermath?



Mind Your Influence – What about this situation (if anything) can you control? If it's out of your control, is there anything you can do to influence the outcome or take a positive action? [Focus on those things within your power](#) and use mindfulness to [let go of anything that isn't](#).



Reframe and Motivate – If you're anxious about something, that means it matters to you. When looked at that way, anxiety isn't bad; it's trying to tell you something important. [Engage a growth mindset](#) by thinking about the challenge as an opportunity instead of a problem and using that perspective to inspire action.

PRO TIP



Visit eM Life for these expert-guided mindfulness sessions: [Skills to Thrive in Anxious Times](#) and [Mindfully Managing Anxiety Series](#). (First-time visitors will need to create a no cost eM Life login through [Concern's Digital Hub](#).)

Finally, please remember that if anxiety feels overwhelming or is negatively impacting your quality of life, Concern is here 24/7 to connect you with the right support.

For customized tools and resources, visit Concern's Digital Hub by logging in to employees.concernhealth.com, and selecting the "Get Services" button in the upper right menu.

This newsletter is intended for informational purposes only, and should not be used to replace professional advice.

If you find your level of stress is impacting your wellbeing, you can contact us for additional help and support.

Call: 800.344.4222
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