



Fear and Anxiety

Fear



Fear often goes hand in hand with anxiety. Fear can be described as the thought process and anxiety as the outcome of the fear (often demonstrated in physical symptoms such as sweaty palms, increase in number of breaths per minute, shortness of breath, a sick feeling in the stomach and so on). There are many levels of fear, such as fear of failure, fear of success, fear of pain (e.g. crossing the road and being hit by a car), fear of the unknown (e.g. death) and panic attacks.

Below is a description and treatments for two common fears, the fear of success and panic attacks.

Panic Attacks

Panic attacks are quite common (affecting approximately 2.4 million people each year) and can occur in response to a traumatic event (in the form of Post Traumatic Stress)¹. For instance, if you've been involved in a car accident, you may feel your heart race and begin to fear stepping into a perfectly safe car in the future. This fear can generalize to different vehicles and if left untreated, can be quite debilitating. There are a number of very effective treatments for panic attacks, which a trained psychologist can assist with, to treat the root of the anxious feelings. **If you are experiencing severe panic attacks search for a trained psychologist or counsellor via the Australian Psychological Society website: <http://www.aps.org.au>**

Fear of Success

On the surface this fear can appear quite superficial. You may ask, "how can someone be afraid of achieving their dreams?" Fear of success is a very common experience when people have been in pursuit of a goal and are unprepared when they achieve it. For instance, you may wish to be a singer, then as you approach success, you start to panic about living up to other people's expectations. At this point you may begin to feel a rush of anxiety and/or depression and allow these feelings to distract your performance, stop you taking any steps forward, or cloud your judgement - resulting in missing out on potentially positive experiences. Believe it or not, it's much easier to wallow in mediocrity, rather than take a risk, as you don't have to be accountable for your actions or live up to other people's expectations. However, if you allow fear to stop you achieving your goals and desires, you will always be unhappy and very frustrated with life.

It's important to work on how you will cope with success as much as it is to enjoy your journey along the way. Visualise your success and how you want to feel and behave when your time comes. It's also important to remember why you are striving to achieve a goal and to remember that other people's expectations are not a real measure of your success. You can't control what other people think and feel and at the end of the day, it's only your opinion of yourself that really counts. You can outline what success means to you and reward yourself each step of the way. Further, although it may seem frustrating at times when you're struggling week after week and can't see the end result, however, this journey will make you stronger and better able to cope with the pressures of high level success later on in life.

Reference: Saxbe, D. (2006). *The fear of fear itself*, Sussex Publishers, In Psychology Today (www.psychologytoday.com/articles/index).

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