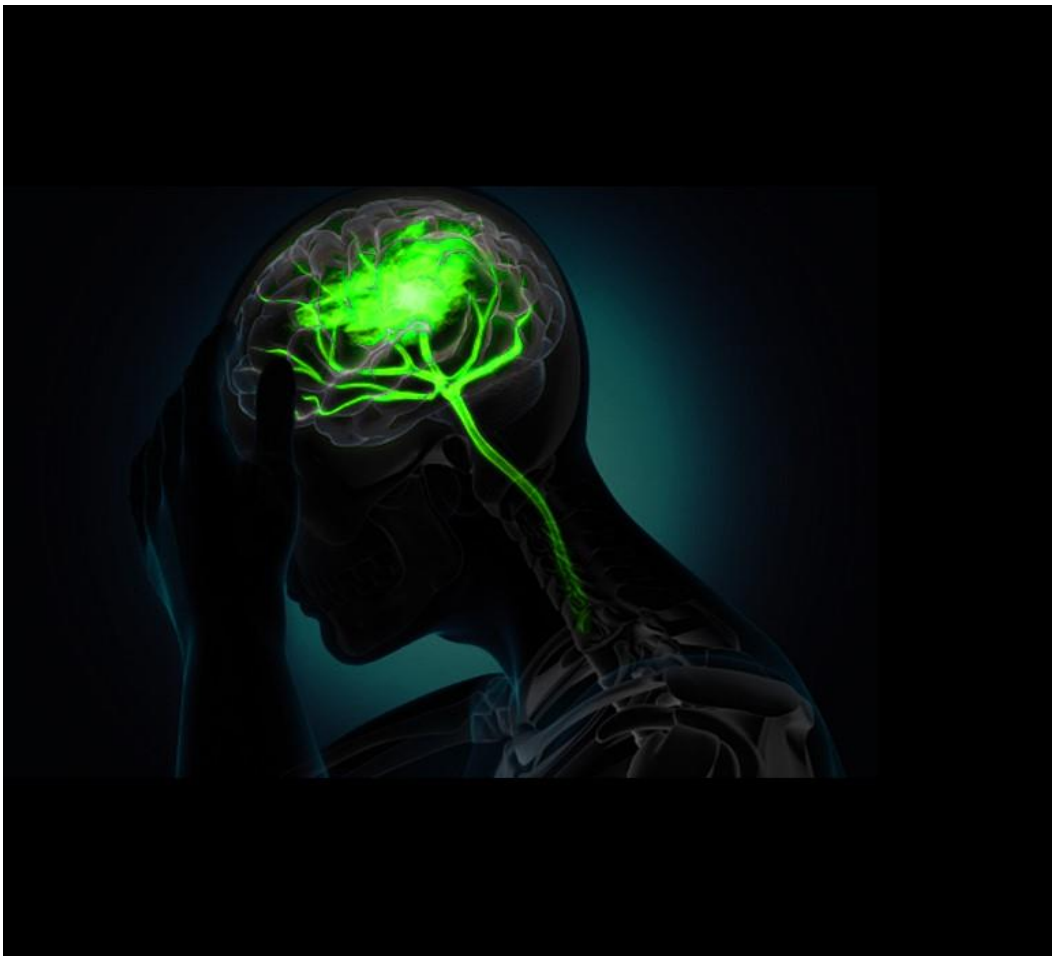


The Earth Is Not Flat: The Experts Aren't Right

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Your subconscious *already knows* how
to prevent anxiety, distress, and depression.



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Introduction

Many new studies present anxiety in a way that leaves no doubt it is a conscious process, and that much if not most, anxiety can be prevented.

The first sentence in [this study](#) defines anxiety as “a mental state characterized by an intense sense of tension, worry or apprehension, *relative to something adverse **that might happen in the future.***”

The next two conclude anxiety has an understandable cause, instead of saying anxiety and stress are natural, normal, unavoidable, and incurable.

[Traumatic life events biggest cause of anxiety, depression](#), “while we can't change a person's family history or their life experiences, it is possible to *help a person to change the way they think* and to teach them positive coping strategies that can mitigate and reduce stress levels.”

[Common Mental Health Disorders Caused by Adversity, not Chemistry?](#) “Emerging research suggests some of the most common mental disorders including anxiety, depression, and PTSD, *might not be disorders at all, rather a response to adversity.*”

[Or this last study](#) about *using a Psychiatric Service Dog to interrupt anxiety and PTSD*. This study really supports the interruptible nature of anxiety. Let me see, the dog doesn't charge by the hour, is available 24/7, and helps me a lot.

After that comment, I need to make sure [a disclaimer](#) is available.

What "Stress" Really Is: And How You Can Eliminate Most Of It

Hans Selye, the "*Father of Stress*," explained exactly what stress is and gave us the key to preventing what we have come to call stress and managing the times when our distress is unavoidable.

Selye was a Physiologist, not a psychiatrist. He studied what was actually going on in the body, instead of imagining what might be happening in someone's mind. His work gave us the answers we needed. He told us **Stress is "the work of living the body must do."**

Since the psychiatrists had chosen to focus only on the negative aspects of stress, Selye spent a lot of time trying to get them to understand that their focus was only half of the story about stress.

He said there are **two kinds of stress**. We have all heard about good stress and bad stress, but not what the differences are.

All of the experts tell us is that some stress is good for us but too much is bad. What that shows us is that the experts obviously don't read a lot, they just accept what another Expert taught them. We do that too, don't we?

But Selye told us EXACTLY what the difference is, and the difference is half of the key to being able to stop the process. It is the Understanding of WHY we are able control the mental part of the stress process

Stress, by itself, is just "the work." Our body does not actually have an opinion about the work our body is doing. That opinion happens in our brain..

Eustress, "*good stress*," is work we like. We are enjoying "the work" we are doing." It is creating chemicals that make us feel "good" and we perceive "the work," whatever it is we are doing as *positive*. If we are really *enjoying what we are doing*, we might be exhausted, but we

keep doing it because we feel so good, we do not want to stop. And when we wake up the next morning ready to go do it again.

Distress, "*bad stress*," is work we do not like. We have an aversion to "the work" we are doing. It is creating chemicals that make us feel "bad" and we perceive "the work" as *negative*. If the work is something we do not like, we may be exhausted just by thinking about having to do it.

Let's consider our job, or our profession, as possible examples of good stress or bad stress.

If we like our job, we usually sleep well and we wake up ready to go, ready for another day doing work we feel has value with people we like, and we anticipate enjoying the day.

If we do not like our job, we usually do not sleep well, we wake up tired, and we are anticipating suffering through another day in a job we cannot stand.

So, both *Eustress* and *Distress* are, simply put, the stories we tell ourselves, our opinions, about "the work" we are either doing or are going to do.

*But, who decides whether we like something or not? Who decides the qualities we assign to the things we perceive? We each do. We are the one who decides whether it is *Eustress*, *Stress*, or *Distress*, and we manifest those decisions in the mental stories we tell ourselves about "the work."*

We are not really interested in avoiding what we like to do, are we? We enjoy the feelings of *Eustress*.

What we are all interested in is eliminating all the *Distress* we can, and Viktor Frankl told us how.

Viktor Frankl said, "The brain is a stimulus-response organ, but between stimulus and response there is a space. In that *space* lies our ability to choose, and in our choice lies our freedom."

The “space” Frankl was talking about really does exist. [Benjamin Libet’s](#) famous study showed there is a **half second space between a stimulus arriving in our conscious brain and our choice of how we are going to respond to that stimulus.** We should all be grateful he did.

His work gives us neuroscientific evidence why Viktor Frankl’s famous quote is so much more than just accurate, it is **the “How” part of the key to being able to prevent nearly all our negative emotions by empowering us to stop them before they get out of control and cause us problems.**

So, this is what “distress” really is. Distress is anxiety about a specific event in our future. That’s not a very big difference, is it?

There is a *huge difference*, however, **between fear and anxiety.**

Understanding the difference will provide you with the “knowledge” you need to be able to start using the skills that can prevent most of your anxiety and distress, and empower you to manage them during the times in your life when they are unavoidable.

Fear and Anxiety Are Not The Same: The Difference Can Set You Free

Fear and Anxiety are actually very different.

Even though they may feel the same, they are different in four ways.

- 1. their origins are different,*
- 2. they take place at different times in the thinking sequence,*
- 3. they are processed by different parts of the brain.*
- 4. One is completely automatic and the other is consciously created.*

Fear developed to alert us to possible danger. **When there is danger the Fight or flight reaction is triggered. The fear alert is one** of the most ancient brain systems and it is completely automatic.

If someone comes up behind you and startles you so badly you spill your drink or do something you haven't done since you were a toddler, it's really not your fault. It actually "scared" you. *Your old brain thought there was danger* and your fight-or-flight system was responsible for your reaction. Conscious involvement was not part of the process.

We do not want to eliminate the danger alert system because it has allowed us to evolve to this point, and still helps us avoid most situations that are actually dangerous.

Fear is what saved your life when you weren't watching and stepped out in front of a car. Your ancient brain saw danger, took control of your brain, and got you safely back on the curb.

Anxiety, on the other hand, is not automatic. It is a conscious process.

A study by [Stephane Ciocchi and Thomas Klausberger](#), shows the anxious information is not sent directly to the old brain's fear center but rather to the prefrontal cortex, our modern brain's control center, for further processing and for decision-making.

Anxiety is the feeling we get when we *imagine* or *predict*, an *unwanted negative outcome* in a future event. *Conscious involvement is required* for both creation and maintenance.

Not too long ago, I had a nine-year-old patient who was too anxious to let the nurse start an IV before his operation. I explained I would use a mask to put him to sleep, but he had to breathe the anesthetic and not fight it, or us.

A little way into the process of going to sleep, he started fidgeting, so I asked him what was wrong. He said, "I'm scared" and fidgets more. I asked "What are you scared of?" He didn't answer. He just kept wiggling. So, I said, "Tell me what you're scared of."

He stops wiggling, looks up at me, and says, "I'm scared of feeling scared."

I was stunned, absolutely amazed. This nine-year-old had just summed up everything about the fundamental nature of anxiety and negative emotions in five words.

Of course, we now know he wasn't really "scared," he was extremely anxious. He was *anxious about feeling anxious*.

Anxiety is a *story* about **a negative future** that we do not want. This is the actual basis for all negative emotions.

Anxiety is the primary negative emotion. Every other negative emotion is anxiety, it is just about different kind of negative future. Angry, sad, failure, shame, guilt, uncertainty, hopeless, and helpless are all different kinds of futures we can predict.

In another lesson. I asked the question, ***what goes on in our brains when we think our future might not turn out the way we want it to?***

Anxiety is what happens. There are *three general outcomes that our anxious stories predict will happen.*

***You will not get what you want
You will get something you do not want
You will lose something you have.***

Anxiety, as you can now see, is the opposite of our current misguided concept of success. Anxiety means potential, or probable, failure.

You can imagine how stories about any one of those can easily produce the other negative emotions such as anger, sadness, depression, shame, guilt, lack, loss, — or even just more anxiety.

If you suffer from anxiety or any other negative emotion, you have what the nine-year-old had. You are scared of being scared. But, by now, you understand that “scared” is not the word that correctly describes what was bothering the nine-year-old.

What he was feeling was not related to danger, was it? It was the feeling being produced by his extreme anxiety. It’s a horrible feeling, and none of us want to feel that way.

Panic attacks are the same. People who have panic attacks are most anxious about having *another panic attack*. They feel like they are going to die. But they aren’t, are they? It is the feeling of *extreme anxiety*, produced by the chemicals our brain is releasing in during the attack.

Once again, what is anxiety? It’s a story you’re telling yourself that predicts a future you don’t want. Anxiety can become a *general expectation about your future. It can become a subconscious habit.*

A lot of anxiety is believing we won't know what to do next. Almost all the time we know exactly what we should do, but we often build a big story around the decision and suffer because of the drama.

The drama can become so severe that physical symptoms arise and force us to change our lives, often not for the better.

The emotions we want to control, the emotions we need to control, and the emotions we can control, are the negative emotions we consciously create.

Allowing negative emotions to control our thinking is the root cause of nearly all of our problems.

Most of your negative emotions will vanish when you quit telling yourself negative stories.

To help you get control of your negative emotions quickly, the next lesson will explain in detail the difference between Stress and Anxiety which will explain why the same skill can be used to prevent or stop either one.

Anxiety vs Stress

Anxiety is the feeling we experience when our mental story is

Anticipating

Predicting

Imagining

Expecting

"a" *future outcome that will be*

Unwanted

Adverse

Negative

The future is not specific, only "a" future. We have created a subconscious habit that predicts "my future will be something I don't want.

Distress, "bad stress," is the feeling we experience when our brain is telling us a story that is predicting the outcome of a "very specific" future event will be something I do not want. There is a reason, an event, you can point to that you are anxious about. Maybe you haven't studied for an exam, and are expecting to fail it, for example. That is a specific future, a specific event.

The aspect of anxiety used by the experts to define it as a “mental illness” is that those feelings are not about anything specific. Having no cause for anxious feelings somehow makes it an “illness,” so stress is not an illness.

From this point on, I am going to talk about anxiety because the same process creates all negative emotions, including distress.

Any website offering expert advice about anxiety or distress will give you the same advice about what you should do for your anxiety, AFTER you figure out you are anxious or stressed.

Their tips all say both can be managed by regular exercise, meditation or other relaxation techniques, structured timeouts, seeking support from loved ones, or learning new coping strategies. All these tips tell you to do something other than what you are distressed about, and you will feel better.

And they are all exactly right. While you are doing whatever technique works for you, you are focused on what you are doing. Your current focus is distracting you from focusing on the problem that is creating your anxiety.

Distraction techniques work, **but** the distracting activities have *nothing to do with solving the problem that is actually causing your anxious thoughts*, do they?

The experts say fear, anxiety, and stress are all “natural, and unavoidable.” They are not correct, are they?

Remember, Anxiety and Stress are not the same. They are Not Synonyms.

The differences empower us to use processes built into our brain to prevent anxiety because anxiety is consciously created.

To get control of your negative emotions quickly, the next lesson will teach you a skill called *CHANGE THE CHANNEL*. It is a quick and easy way to interrupt your anxious or distressing thinking habit and quickly get back in control of your thoughts.

How to Stop Anxiety Before It Becomes A Problem

The following procedure, call it a tool if you like, is extremely effective for helping you quickly take control, and change what is going on in your brain. It uses the process for change, the space, that is built into your brain.

If you practice the procedure, you will quickly learn how to interrupt the negative thinking habits that are so upsetting and waste so much time. The entire time required to complete the process is about FIVE SECONDS.

When confronted by a potentially negative situation or negative thoughts, instead of becoming emotionally involved and creating a new one or calling up a rerun of a distressing story full of negative emotions, here is a reliable, quick, and easy tool that will stop your distress in its tracks.

Change the Channel

Telling and re-telling yourself negative stories is like watching a movie you know will make you miserable. You wouldn't watch the movie, would you? You would either *Change the Channel* or turn off the TV.

The story, the movie, is being generated in your own brain. Since it is your story and you are in absolute control of your own programming, you can *Change the Channel* by thinking about something else.

Here is the *Change the Channel* tool in the form that, if you practice regularly for at least two weeks, and preferably a month, will yield good results.

As soon as you realize you are becoming anxious or distressed by a negative story you are telling yourself, STOP

Physically look around to see if there is danger present. If there is, run. If there is no danger you know the feelings are being generated in your brain by your story.

The physical act of looking for danger physically interrupts your automatic thinking habit. Looking around is extremely important, especially in the beginning.

Looking around also accesses the space between your thoughts and gives you the opportunity to change what you are thinking about.

Access the space so you can choose something else to think about, to choose a different story.

Pick something neutral or a pleasant memory. Don't try to change to positive thinking because in the moment you are changing from the negativity of distress to neutral you are very unlikely to believe anything positive can happen.

After practicing this for a while, when negative feelings begin to creep in, a simple reminder to *Change the Channel* is often all that is needed to stop the process. Some people use statements such as: I don't need to go there. I can choose where I want to go.

Change the Channel also works well when you don't feel distressed but find your focus is drifting off a task you need to get done. Looking around is just as necessary even when you know there is no danger because it breaks the wandering mind habit and again creates that space in which you can consciously decide where your focus will be.

Remember this. Every time you successfully *Change the Channel* you are establishing an incredibly important, and powerful, new habit. Your new habit will keep you more in control of your thoughts.

The Reconsolidation Process

If you have memories that are really bothersome, there is another process you can use that will remove much of the negative energy in the memory.

Use Change-The Channel and focus on the neutral Channel for a few minutes, then switch to another neutral Channel for a few minutes more.

Keep switching neutral Channels for about ten minutes. It will significantly decrease the negative energy stored in the old story. This is a process is called reconsolidation.

To read about this technique and why it is so effective, here is a link to an excellent article by Bruce Ecker that dives deeper into the [reconsolidation technique](#).