

CHLOE BROTHERIDGE

THE ANXIETY SOLUTION

A Quieter Mind
A Calmer You

Simple
steps for
managing
anxiety

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The Anxiety Solution

A Quieter Mind, A Calmer You

Chloe Brotheridge, BSc, DipH, DipNLP, HC, is a clinical hypnotherapist and nutritionist who specializes in helping people who suffer from anxiety. Chloe has her own practice in London and has helped hundreds of sufferers overcome severe anxiety.

Having experienced severe anxiety and panic attacks first hand since her teens, and having found her own path to inner healing, Chloe now feels privileged to be able to share with others the transformative tools and techniques she used herself to achieve a sense of control and inner peace.

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Penguin
Random House
UK

First published 2017

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Set in Garamond MT and Gotham
Typeset by Penguin Books

Printed in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-0-718-18715-6

www.greenpenguin.co.uk



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To my family: Mum, Dad, Livi, Charlotte, Granny and Aidan. Thanks for being so wonderful.

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Acknowledgements



A big, huge thank you to the team at Michael Joseph for being so welcoming and lovely. To my editor, Fenella Bates, for your incredible enthusiasm and support from day one. Your positive attitude and excitement about the book was so encouraging.

To Valeria Huerta, my book agent – thank you for everything! I'm forever grateful for all your help and kindness.

To Katy Sunnassee for your smart insights, fantastic editing and being an absolute pleasure to work with. Thank you to Helen Coyle, my copy-editor, for all your incredible help and great work.

Thank you, Mum, for teaching me so much about love and for always being there. Dad, thank you for being the world's wisest, funniest and most patient man. You guys are everything to me.

Thanks to Livi and Charlotte for being such sweethearts. I love you to infinity and beyond.

Thank you to Aidan, my favourite person – for teaching me that 'I am OK', for being my biggest cheerleader and for never saying a mean word, even when you were mad at me!

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Thanks to Bonnie S, for simultaneously being the wisest and the most fun person ever, ever, ever. Bonnie B for all the chats, laughs and love. Will for being a great friend, dance partner and bringer of the fun. Josie, thanks for the BEST walks and talks. And to Lucy, I love you!

Thanks to Auntie Vicky and Uncle Ian, who I'll always look up to – for all the advice and encouragement; and to Annie G for all the love and great company.

Thank you to all my clients for being so brave and inspiring and for teaching me so much. Special thanks to those who've allowed me to share their stories in this book.

And finally, thanks to you, the reader. You are amazing, strong, lovable and so, so enough. Please don't forget that! Here's to a Calmer You.

Chloe x

Book Bonuses



Visit www.calmer-you.com/bonus to claim your free bonuses, including audio tracks covering self-hypnosis for relaxation, mindfulness meditation and guided relaxation, plus lots of other useful stuff.

Talking about and sharing your experiences is incredibly important! Join me and other people going through similar things as you in our Facebook group, where you can give and receive support: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/calmeryou/>

Disclaimer

If you suspect you have anxiety or any other mental health issue, it's essential to speak to your doctor and follow their advice. I also recommend working with a therapist for one-to-one, tailored advice and support. Check with your doctor before starting any exercise or supplement regime.

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CHAPTER 1

Let me introduce myself



When you change the way you look at things,
the things you look at change.

WAYNE DYER

I've been anxious for as long as I can remember. My parents tell me I was a seriously cautious kid, clinging to the banister as I gingerly made my way down stairs. At ballet classes I would cry in the corner, too inhibited to take part. Although I was confident with people I knew and trusted, talking to new people felt impossible. I feared being told off or making a mistake and dreaded that I would be found out for not being good enough. When something did go wrong – however trivial – I found it hard to cope. On what I thought was my first day at Brownies I discovered that in fact I'd gone on the wrong day and that I wasn't expected. I remember feeling an overpowering sense of shame and embarrassment, as if I'd done something truly awful.

As a young child I had a lot of tantrums and meltdowns. I was a sensitive kid and not very good at handling my own feelings. I was very lucky to have wonderful

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parents but as the eldest child of three, I felt a lot of pressure to be a ‘good girl’. Increasingly, I kept my emotions hidden, so as not to upset Mum, but would then end up having huge, explosive tantrums (usually in public places like shopping centres!).

I first noticed the true signs of anxiety as a teenager. A combination of hormones, deep-seated self-esteem issues, repressed feelings, forays into drinking alcohol and late-night partying culminated in my first panic attack, at the age of fifteen.

During a panic attack your body reacts to what it perceives as a threat. More often than not it’s your nervous system overreacting to something that in fact is no threat at all. Triggers can range from giving a speech to too much caffeine, feeling hot and claustrophobic to being overwhelmingly stressed. Sometimes, though, attacks seem to happen for no reason at all. The horrible symptoms – tingling fingers, tight chest, a sensation of impending doom – that feel like a threat to your life, are really the result of your body pumping adrenaline into your muscles so that you can either run away or fight off the threat. In prehistoric times, when predators posed a real danger to mankind, this fight-or-flight response was what would have saved your ass. Nowadays, a journey on the tube or a looming work deadline can trigger the same response, except in these cases, *there’s nowhere to run to, and no need.*

My first attack took place at a friend’s house. Nothing in particular had triggered it so it was a total shock and I had no idea how to respond. It was the worst feeling

Let me introduce myself

of my life. My heart raced and my chest tightened. I literally thought I was dying. (I later discovered that everyone who's experienced a panic attack has the same feeling of dread.) I prayed. I begged my friend to call an ambulance. I genuinely thought, '*this is it*'. The term 'panic attack' hadn't even entered my vocabulary at that age. It wasn't as if we'd learnt about them in school. The only explanation that made any sense to me in my worked up state was that I was having a heart attack and death was *certain*.

That first attack lasted for several hours and only subsided when my body became so exhausted that I was able to fall asleep.

Afterwards I couldn't shake the feeling that my body and brain had let me down and that this uncontrollable *thing* could strike at any moment. I no longer felt safe in my own body. Like many people with anxiety, I became overly focused on how I felt physically, concluding that any changes or new sensations must be a serious problem. What followed was years of anxious feelings and obsessive worrying. I tried to self-medicate with alcohol and food and by attempting to control every detail of my life. Mum eventually suggested I see the college counsellor, whose condescending advice consisted of a chirpy 'Don't panic!' and not a lot else. It took another ten years for me to realize I needed help and to seek professional counselling.

Bouts of anxiety continued when I went to university. It's really hard to enjoy your life when you're locked in a

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cycle of worry and feel unable to escape. I worried about money, my weight, and that there was something wrong with me. But I didn't want to share my thoughts or feelings with anyone. I'd buried them so deep that it was hard for me to even connect with them, let alone really feel them. If someone had asked me at the time how I felt, I honestly wouldn't have been able to answer – I was numb. And while, on the surface, I seemed to function well, bubbling beneath was a lot of tension, repressed emotion and almost constant overthinking.

Then there was the fact that I'd always felt incredibly uncomfortable and nervous around men, so I found relationships difficult. I'd put on a front and play it cool but inside I was desperately insecure and unable to let anyone in or open up to anybody. It wasn't until I met my current boyfriend, when I was twenty-three, that I learnt to relax enough to be myself and enjoy a relationship.

After university I worked as a nutritionist in the NHS and my primary method for managing anxiety was avoidance. I would stay firmly in my comfort zone with people I knew so that I felt safe. When my friends went on their annual skiing holidays I would stay at home. I was far too afraid to try something so dangerous. I knew things weren't right but I didn't know what to do. I spent three years on and off in counselling, which was invaluable for getting to know myself better, and I had periods when I felt better, but my anxiety never really went away.

Things came to a head when my workload dramatically increased. As well as working full time, I had been train-

ing as a hypnotherapist and was now pushing to set up my own therapy practice during the evenings. A cocktail of social media envy – comparing myself unfavourably to other women I felt had achieved so much more than I had – and pressure on myself to ‘be better’ and ‘be more productive’, fuelled my deep-seated fear that I would never be good enough. In short, I was burning out. For weeks at a time I would get home at 10 p.m., crawl into bed and cry, my brain and body still buzzing with thoughts about my endless to-do list. I developed Irritable Bowel Syndrome, a condition often associated with anxiety. I was completely miserable. I knew I needed to detox my mind and my life, but I didn’t know how.

Then, in 2013, I was at a yoga studio when my attention was drawn to a quote up on the wall. It read, ‘Set peace of mind as your highest priority and organize your life around it.’ It hit me immediately that this was what I needed to do. ‘Being productive’ and trying to feel worthy by working hard had been my priority, but it wasn’t making me happy. In fact, it was destroying my peace of mind.

Right then, I vowed to make changes. I quit my job in the NHS to focus on my own business. I made meditation and going for walks a non-negotiable part of every day and tried to be kinder to myself, rather than constantly pushing and pressurizing myself. Writing became another cathartic daily practice and I devoured every book I could find on anxiety and personal development. I used my skills as a hypnotherapist and nutritionist to work on

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my mind and detox my body by cutting out refined carbs and booze. With the space I'd created in my life, and my new kinder-to-me attitude, I began venturing out of my comfort zone to try all the things I had previously been scared to do, in the process teaching myself that I *could* cope.

Needless to say, I felt loads better. It took about six months but it was so worth it. Ironically, I thought that stepping back and being less busy so I could calm my mind would have a detrimental effect on my work. I imagined I would suffer financially, but it turned out that the opposite was true. My work life actually *improved* as my ability to calmly focus and offer the best of myself increased.

For years, I believed that fear and worry were ingrained in my psyche – a permanent part of who I was. Anxiety can amp us into such a fearful state that it's impossible to see a way out. It's exhausting, frustrating and terrifying, like being stuck in a suffocating glass box, feeling sick as you gaze at the world, wondering what it's like to feel 'normal'. I'm here to tell you that it doesn't have to be this way. The truth is, your natural state is one of calmness and confidence – and I'm going to teach you how to get there. We'll explore why we're so anxious in the first place and I'll show you practical ways to detox the rubbish – I'm talking beliefs, behaviours and thought patterns – while adding in lots of positive stuff. I'm going to share all the techniques and insights I used on myself and now use with my clients. You can use them, too, to

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bring your brain and body back into balance and become your calmest, happiest self.

Throughout the book there are short exercises you can experiment with as you're reading. They're a great way to really understand the more theoretical stuff and begin to work out what works best for you. The final chapter contains the Anxiety Solution Toolkit. This is the in-depth guide to all my tried and trusted self-help techniques. There's space for you to note your own anxiety triggers and a Q&A section covering some of the more common panic-making scenarios, along with suggestions for techniques that might be particularly helpful. The more you interact with this book – trying out the exercises, the meditations and affirmations – the more you will get out of it. It's designed to be inspiring and informative but, above all, practical, so please do throw yourself into doing the work so you can discover for yourself just how powerful these tools really are.

I don't believe in 'curing' anxiety completely. After all, it's a normal human emotion that we all experience from time to time. But I do believe you can strip away the things that detract from your inner peace. You can create a life centred on your own values and goals rather than being swept up in a storm of social media madness, self-imposed pressure and unnecessary worry.

It's time to alight from the anxiety train and begin your new journey towards contentment and clarity. I'm excited for you to get started. Let's go!

CHAPTER 2

Why are we all so worried?



I am an old man and have known a great many troubles, but most of them have never happened.

MARK TWAIN

If you suffer from anxiety, then a typical day can feel like one long struggle not to slip into panic. There's a sort of buzz going on in your brain, and it's not the good kind. You shower, inhale your breakfast and get the train to work. Your mind is busy in its own internal nightmare. As your tensed-up, crunchy-shouldered body goes through the motions of your day, your brain is set to overthinking autopilot. Your heart races in your chest – a thumping, erratic reminder that you can't cope. Before you even get to the office you've mentally played out today's stressful meeting, felt defensive as you had an argument with your boss about a deadline and sensed a wave of dread wash over you as you imagine tackling that ever-growing mound of emails. Not to mention worrying about everything from sorting out the boiler to creating your own online media empire by the end of the month!

Why are we all so worried?

Truth is, all of this happened in your mind as you stood in line at Starbucks.

In our modern world, scenarios such as this have become commonplace. I can guarantee that at least some of those people in the queue with you will be going through the same repetitive thinking. It's becoming the norm for us to feel anxious. We're chronically worried: about cash, our relationship or lack thereof, the housing market, not being good enough, the people we love, whether we'll have babies, what to eat, what not to eat, wars, natural disasters, politics and the economy, the shape and proportions of our bodies and the lines on our faces.

Young women and anxiety

According to the Mental Health Foundation's 2014 report 'Living with Anxiety', 22 per cent of women in the UK feel anxious 'most of the time'.¹ A 2016 review by researchers at Cambridge University found that women are twice as likely to experience anxiety as men, with those under thirty-five most affected.² Research has demonstrated that at the age of eleven, boys and girls are equally likely to be anxious but by the time they're fifteen, girls are in the lead.³

So what's the explanation for this massive difference in the way women and men experience anxiety? Part of it seems to be down to biology. Women's brains (in particular the amygdala, which governs emotion and responds

to stress) are more likely than men's to fire up at a stressful event.⁴ But there are also a host of social, cultural and political factors that make women particularly prone to anxiety. Women are more likely to experience physical and sexual abuse than men.⁵ There is also pressure on women, both from ourselves and society, to 'have it all' – the fantastic career, a great body, a rewarding relationship – and then balance babies, boardrooms, buying property and often taking on the brunt of caring for parents as we, and they, get older. Not to mention the fact that women are paid less than men in 90 per cent of all sectors, according to the UK government's 2015 report.⁶ Then there's the fact that our hormones fluctuate monthly, which can cause more stress and anxiety.

We are also, annoyingly, more likely to ruminate over our problems while men are more likely to take action to solve them.⁷ It looks as if this is down to the way we're raised. Dr Lynn Buska of the American Psychological Association told the *Guardian* in 2013, 'As girls, we're taught to think more about relationships and subvert our needs towards the group's needs or towards others. Whereas boys are socialized earlier on to be more assertive and expressive about their needs.'⁸ In other words, in order to help lower our stress levels we need to take care of ourselves, express our needs and be a bit more 'selfish'. Taking a more active role in how we cope with things rather than putting up with stress or fretting about it will certainly help. (And if all this sounds daunting, don't worry; this book is stuffed with tips on how to do it!)

Why are we all so worried?

A key factor is a sort of ‘learnt helplessness’ that can result from differences in the way boys and girls are treated by parents, teachers and others. Boys are more often told to ‘toughen up’ if they slip and fall or make a mistake. Girls are typically given more compassionate attention.

I vividly remember Mum scooping me on to her knee and cooing ‘poor baby’ – when I was eighteen years old! All because I’d been struggling with something at college. I’m pretty sure she’d respond in the same way now if I scraped my knee. And while this is very loving (thanks, Mum!), it can result in a sense of helplessness. If we’re not allowed to discover that we can cope when life feels difficult or things are going wrong, we end up uncertain of our abilities. We don’t trust ourselves to be able to fix things, or simply get through them. Many young women have not developed the internal coping mechanisms and confidence to handle challenges.

There’s an irony here because we women spend a lot of time trying to hold it all together and, often, we do a very good job of it. At least from the outside. The problem is that even if we’re managing pretty well we often fear that we’re about to fail. Or we’re convinced we’re not doing well *enough*. Everywhere I go, whether it’s to a party, a work event or a yoga class, when the subject of what I do for a living comes up there will always be at least one woman, often many more, who leans in and, in a hushed voice, confesses her own struggles with anxiety. These women, who appear cool, calm and together, tell me that actually

they're a hot mess of worry and self-doubt. There is an epidemic of anxiety happening out there, a lot of it behind closed doors and inside buzzing brains.

How can you tell whether you have anxiety?

When I talk to people about their anxiety they often tell me that they don't want to make a fuss, or that they feel bad because they know there are so many others with worse problems. They believe they ought to be able to pull themselves together. All this puts extra strain on them and makes them feel more anxious.

The first thing to say is that, if you are suffering, then there is a problem and you deserve to get help. If anxiety or worry or panic affect your daily life or are causing you distress, please don't suffer in silence.

If you suspect you may have anxiety it's essential to have it diagnosed by your GP. They will be able to help you decide if therapy or medication is a good option, and also distinguish anxiety from other issues such as depression.

Secondly, all anxiety is normal – you're certainly not 'abnormal' if you have it. Some people experience persistent anxiety no matter what is going on in their lives. For others it's triggered by certain situations such as social events. Other people will experience temporary spells of anxiety, for example when going through a big change in their life or before an exam.

You can't self-diagnose anxiety but, in the interests of