

'Anxiety is getting on top of me!'

Angst and how to deal with it by Dr Peter Hughes...

In the world of worry, A-list angst is the real celebrity. This is academy-award winning anxiety, the kind that destroys our ability to think or act with any real sense of purpose. It fizzes our minds and keeps us stuck in an unpleasant emotional place. Anyone can suffer from this but women are the real stars of the show. They are four times more likely to suffer from anxiety disorders than men, twice as likely to suffer from depression and three times more likely to get Seasonal Affective Disorder. Whatever the biology, the psychology of A-list angst is well-known: you will tend to exaggerate negative possibilities, ignore any reasonable or

positive alternatives and assume the worst-case will happen. It goes something like this:

"I have just lost my job and I don't know what to do next and I must be a hopeless person for losing my job in the first place and who would ever want me and more bad things are sure to happen to me and I am such a worthless, useless person and where is that chocolate bar when I need it!" So how do you beat A-list angst? Here are a few suggestions:



Be grateful:

Worrying always has your best intentions at heart so be grateful that your brain is trying to warn you of potential dangers, even if it is being a little too enthusiastic. Then think of three other things you've got to be grateful for.

Choose the time and place:

Get in control of your worrying by setting a time and place every day when you will worry. When the time is up, move on.

Take responsibility:

You can't change what you can't control, so take responsibility for your own anxiety. You're doing it and always remember it is a choice you are making. You could choose to do something else but you're not.

Know the pay-off:

Anxiety always has a pay-off and you want what it gives you. It may be that worrying gives you the excuse you need to comfort eat or it may be that being helpless means someone will have to rescue you and give you the attention you crave.

Congratulate yourself:

As an A-list worrier, give yourself a pat on the back for being really, really good at something. You do worrying really well and you know you have your best intentions at heart. But as you know, it has its downside, so write down three other behaviours you could choose to do that will give you the same pay-off as worrying.



Take a deep breath:

When you are anxious your breathing will be fast and shallow. To calm yourself, breathe in deeply to the count of three, hold for three and breathe out to the count of three.

Distract yourself:

Use worrying as a trigger to do something else. Pick up a book or a magazine. Do a crossword or a puzzle. Best of all, do some physical exercise, even if it's just walking but make it fast walking with your head held high.

It really hasn't happened:

If you're anxious or frightened then what you're anxious or frightened about hasn't happened yet – otherwise you wouldn't be worried about it! So challenge your thoughts and ask yourself: what's the worst that can happen? How would I cope if it happened? What's the most constructive response I can give right now?

Know your habits:

Learn your 'anxiety habit' because when it happens it comes in peaks and troughs so be aware about the different coping strategies you use. These are the patterns of your behaviour and you'll find you do the same thing over and over again. Once you learn this, write down three new behaviours you could use and try them out.



A-list angst is a choice you make. You do it and you want what it gives you. The solution is to get what it gives you in other, more physically, emotionally and spiritually rewarding ways. 'I have had a great many troubles,' wrote Mark Twain, 'but most of them never happened.' Yours won't either. And if they do, you know you can cope if you want to.

Dr. Peter Hughes is the Managing Partner of Cognition, the first and perhaps only communications agency to integrate psychology with marketing. Dr Hughes has a unique combination of practical, commercial experience and academic expertise in psychology and communications. For more information on Cognition, visit Cognition's website www.cognitiongroup.co.uk or call 01926 330800.