

CAN ANXIETY BE GOOD FOR YOU?

Emotions have a function – they tell us things about our situation, and they serve as a call to action. Anxiety can function to alert us to potential threats in our environment, and that we need to take protective action. In fact, a certain amount of anxiety is useful, if not essential, for us to grasp the vital importance of a particular task at hand, or a decision to be made.

So, if you are preparing for something important like a major presentation or event, or an exam of some kind, or facing a big decision like buying a house or a car, or choosing an investment, it makes sense to expect some anxiety. It can be helpful, in fact, to alert your mind to the risk and provide some extra mental focus to think through your choices. If you just leapt in without assessing the risk, you could make some pretty serious mistakes. If you didn't prepare for the presentation or exam, because you felt no anxiety, it is sure to end badly for you!

One way to think about anxiety, is that it's like an alarm system for your home or car. Getting rid of all traces of anxiety would be like successfully dismantling this security system. Things may be quieter and more relaxed, but you wouldn't know you were in trouble until it was too late.

Anxiety about health can actually be helpful if it's channelled well. It pushes you to get that lump or strange mole checked out, or to talk to medical professionals about symptoms you can't explain. It can also push you to seek support when you are facing an overwhelming situation like being retrenched or after a trauma.

Can you have too much anxiety?

Your mind can become overwhelmed and unable to think with too much anxiety. It can take the form of acute anxiety, like panic or a more ongoing form with endless worry. It's hard to think clearly when this level of anxiety is going on, and it's equally difficult to separate real from imagined threat, so you can't effectively deal with the situation. This leads to more anxiety, and the cycle continues.

Instead of focusing on the worry, rather ask yourself:

- What is there to worry about?
- What aspect of the choice has not been fully considered?
- What risk have you not been sufficiently mindful of?

It's useful to do an inventory of your typical worries, from time to time, to get a sense of whether they're realistic or not, and need to be addressed or not. It's also good to be aware of the particular situations that make you anxious, and whether you could benefit from some help in dealing with them. You may not always need professional help to deal with it, but it can help to be more familiar with your internal states and more mindful of what they might be trying to tell you. Contact the Healthy Company support line for further professional assistance or advice.

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