

# Anxiety Toolbox

## Stressors



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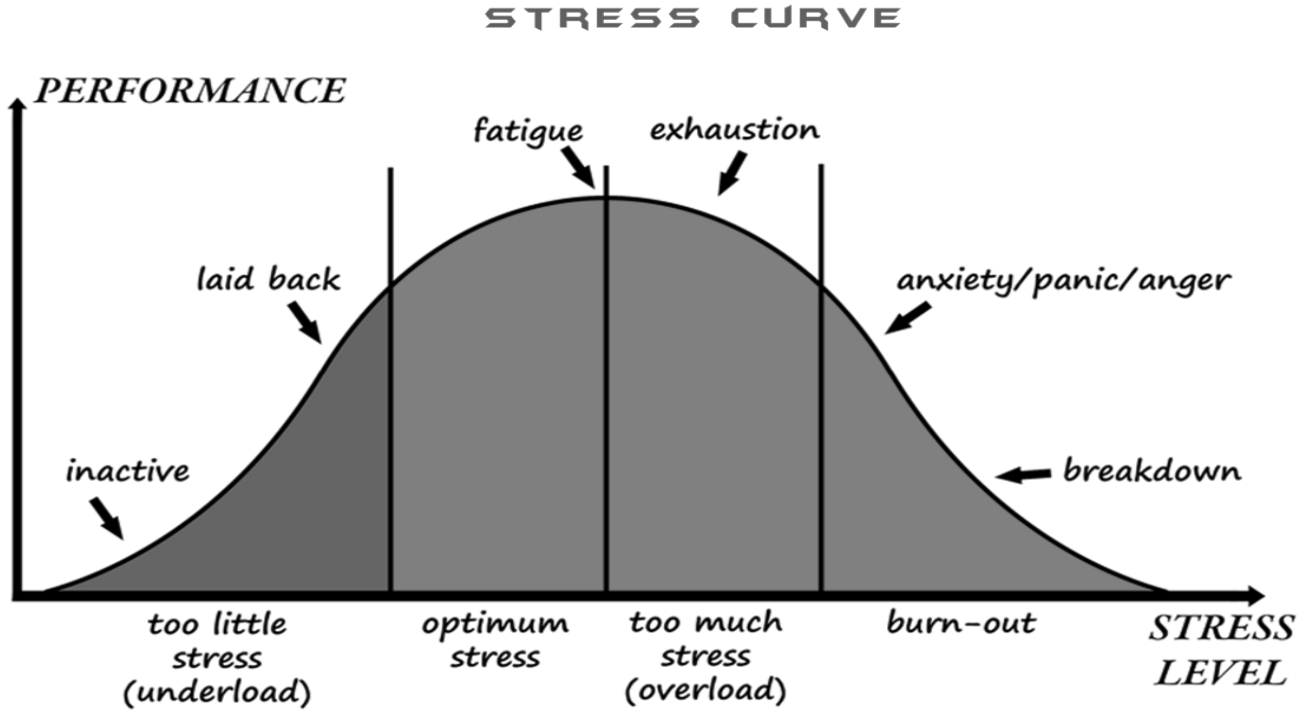
Revised January 2021

## Stress versus Anxiety

Everyday Anxiety (Stress)	Anxiety Disorder
In response to a known environmental factor	In response to an unknown source or in response to the experience of stress
Symptoms go away when the stressor goes away	Symptoms remain despite no identifiable stressor
Worry about living away from home for the first time, passing a class, a romantic breakup, or other important life events	Constant and unsubstantiated worry that causes significant distress and interferes with your daily life
Embarrassment or self-consciousness in an uncomfortable or awkward social situation; feeling nervous about meeting new people	Avoidance of social situations due to fear of being judged, embarrassed, or humiliated
Feeling nervous or sweating before a big test, class presentation, stage performance, or other significant event	Panic attacks that seem out of the blue and preoccupation with the fear of having another one
Realistic fear of a dangerous object, place, or situation (e.g. fear of poisonous snakes)	Irrational fear or avoidance of an object, place, or situation that poses little or no threat of danger (e.g. fear of elevators)
Making sure that you are healthy and living in a safe environment	Performing uncontrollable repetitive actions, such as excessive cleaning, checking, touching or arranging

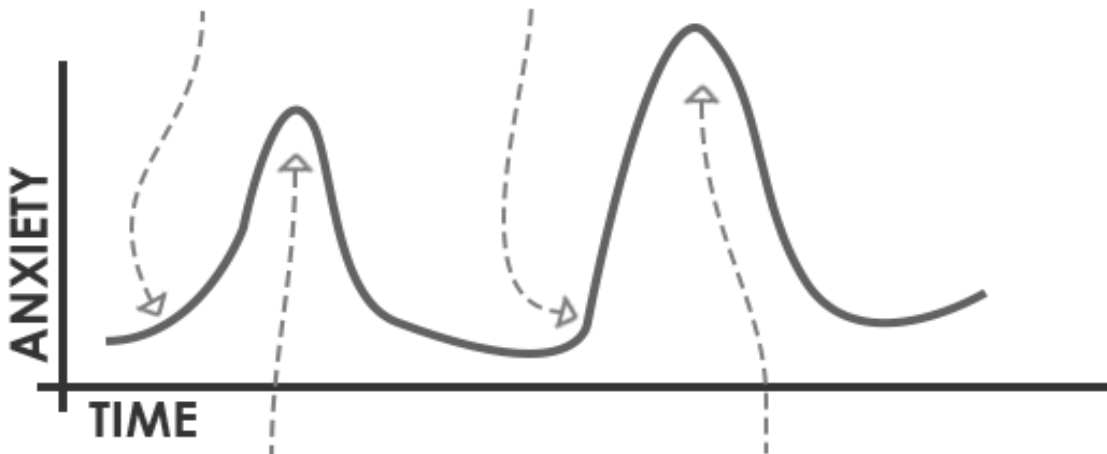
Adapted from: <http://www.adaa.org/understanding-anxiety>

# Yerkes Dodson Model of Stress Arousal & Performance



## Anxiety - Avoidance Roller Coaster

(A person is confronted with an anxiety-producing situation which leads to an uncomfortable sense of worry and agitation.)

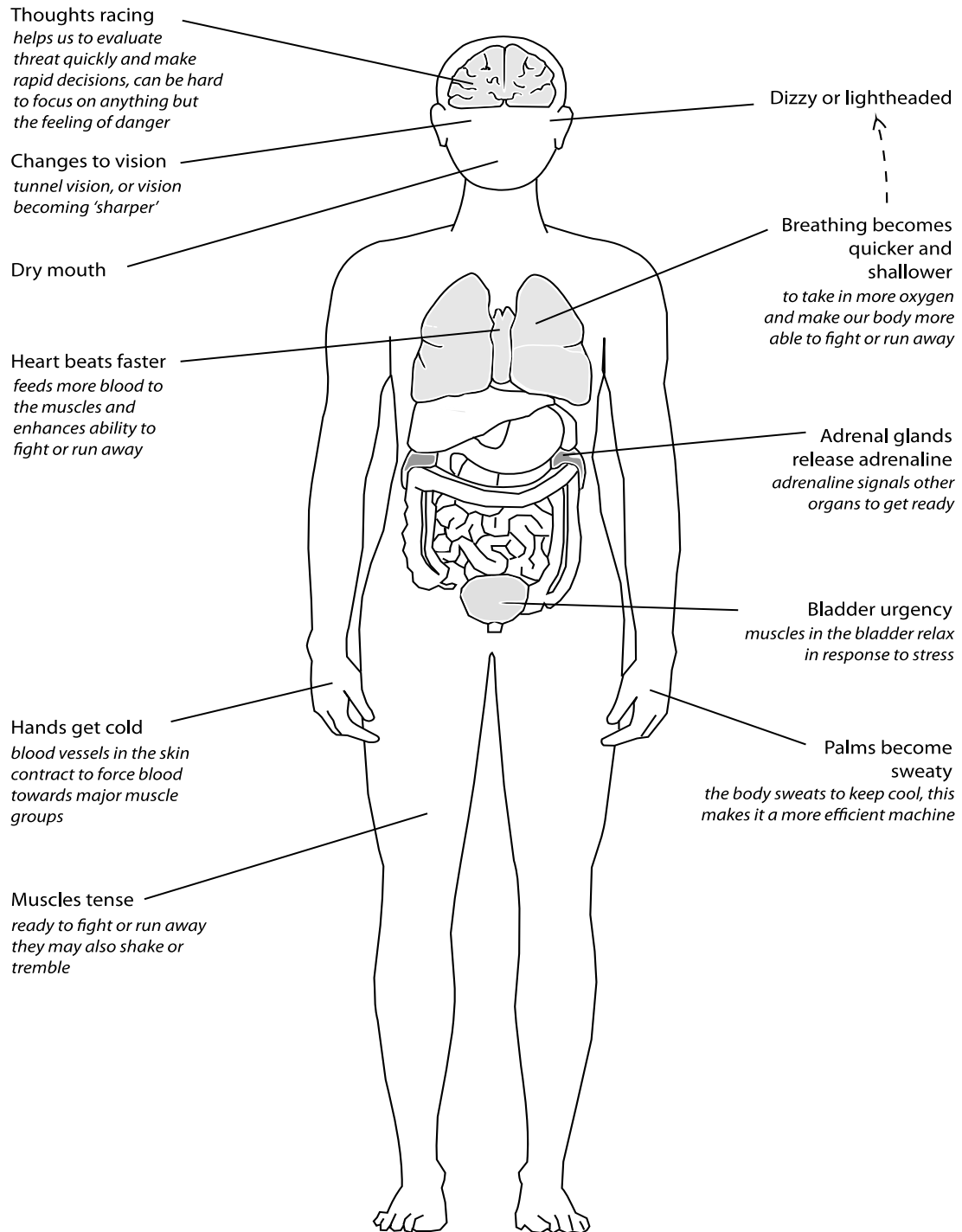


(The anxiety-producing situation is avoided, and the person receives a feeling of relief. However, next time the anxiety will be worse.)

Adapted from- <http://www.therapistaid.com/therapy-guide/cbt-for-anxiety>

## Threat System (Fight or Flight)

The 'fight or flight' response gets the body ready to fight or run away. Once a threat is detected your body responds automatically. All of the changes happen for good reasons, but may be experienced as uncomfortable when they happen in 'safe' situations.



## Common Anxiety Symptoms

### Physical Symptoms

- Increased heart rate
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain or pressure
- Choking sensation
- Dizziness, lightheadedness
- Sweating, hot flashes, chills
- Nausea, upset stomach, diarrhea
- Trembling, shaking
- Weakness, unsteadiness, faintness
- Tense muscles, rigidity
- Dry mouth
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### Behavioral Symptoms

- Avoidance** of threat cues or situations
- Escape**, flight
- Pursuit of safety, reassurance
- Restlessness, agitation, pacing
- Hyperventilation
- Freezing**, motionlessness
- Difficulty speaking
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### Cognitive Symptoms

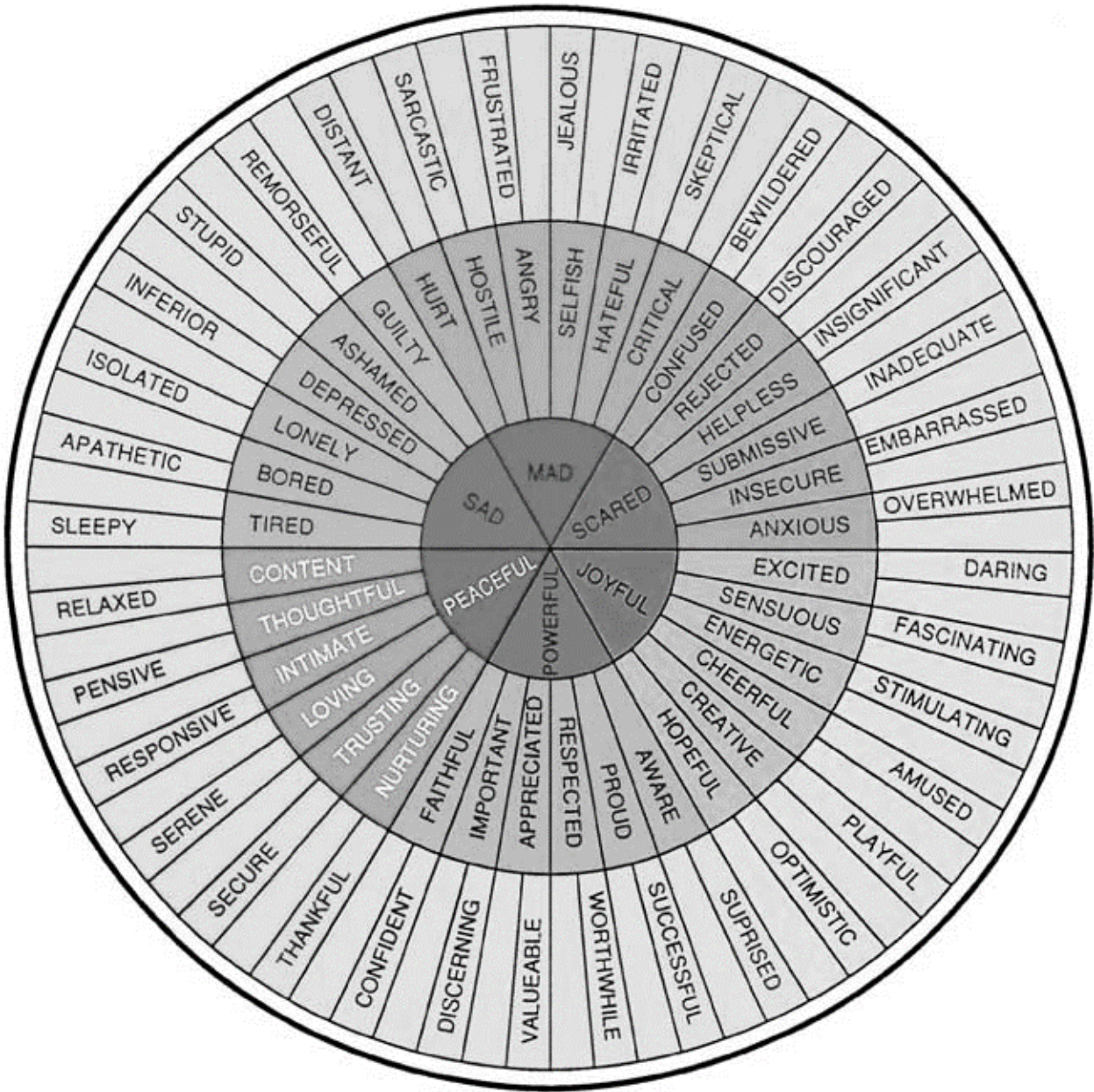
- Fear of losing control, being unable to cope
- Fear of physical injury or death
- Fear of “going crazy”
- Fear of negative evaluations by others
- Frightening thoughts, images, or memories
- Perceptions of unreality or detachment
- Poor concentration, confusion, distractibility
- Narrowing of attention, hypervigilance for threat
- Poor memory
- Difficulty in reasoning, loss of objectivity
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### Emotional Symptoms

- Feeling nervous, tense, wound up
- Feeling frightened, fearful, terrified
- Being edgy, jumpy, jittery
- Being impatient, frustrated
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Adapted from *The Anxiety and Worry Workbook* by Clark and Beck

# Feelings Wheel



## Cross Sectional Formulation (example entry)

### **Situation** (*When? Where? What? With whom? What did you feel anxious about?*)

A student invited me to a party in my residence hall, but I didn't know her very well and felt anxious about going.

### **Physical** (*When anxious, what physical sensations did you experience? What did you notice in your body?*)

Heart racing, tight chest, shallow breathing, hot

### **Emotional** (*What emotions came up for you when you felt anxious?*)

Scared, ashamed, Lonely, agitated, nervous

### **Cognitive** (*What went through your mind when you felt anxious? What did that say or mean about you or the situation?*)

I won't know anyone at the party and will feel awkward. No one will like me because I'm so socially awkward. I won't have fun. But if I say no, this person won't like me and I wouldn't make friends.

### **Behavioral** (*What was your first instinct and/or automatic response? What did you do and/or avoid doing at the time?*)

My first instinct was to say no. I avoided saying no but telling her that I would think about it. I never got back to her. I didn't go to the party.



# Cross Sectional Formulation

**Situation** (*When? Where? What? With whom? What did you feel anxious about?*)

**Physical** (*When anxious, what physical sensations did you experience? What did you notice in your body?*)

**Emotional** (*What emotions came up for you when you felt anxious?*)

**Cognitive** (*What went through your mind when you felt anxious? What did that say or mean about you or the situation?*)

**Behavioral** (*What was your first instinct and/or automatic response? What did you do and/or avoid doing at the time?*)



## **Breathing Exercises**

### **Belly (or Diaphragmatic) Breathing**

You can do this exercise in any position, but it is helpful to do this exercise while lying down when first learning belly breathing.

1. Lie comfortably on your back, with a pillow under your head, your knees bent and your back flat. You can stretch your legs out if that's more comfortable.
2. Place one hand on your belly and one hand on your upper chest.
3. Inhale slowly and expand your belly as you breathe so that your lower hand moves with your belly. The hand on your chest should remain as still as possible.
4. Slowly exhale, focusing on the movement of your belly and lower hand as it returns to its original position.
5. Repeat steps 3 & 4 for several minutes, always focusing on the movement of the belly as you breathe. If your mind wanders, gently bring your attention back to your breathing.

### **Breath-Counting Exercise**

This exercise focuses on the use of counting with the rhythm of the breath. Start with a short period of time and gradually increase the time. Set a timer so that you do not have to worry about when to stop.

1. Find a comfortable position. Take several deep breaths and settle into yourself. You may either close your eyes or keep them open, depending on your own comfort. If you keep them open, fix them on an object or a spot on the floor about four feet in front of you. Your eyes may be either focused or unfocused.
2. Take deep, comfortable breaths. Notice your inhalation. The pause between inhaling and exhaling, your exhalation, and the pause before starting again.
3. As you inhale, count, "one..." As you exhale, count, "two..." Inhale, "three..." Exhale, "four..." Continue until you reach 10 then start over.
4. If you lose count, simply begin with "one" on your next inhalation.
5. If you notice your mind has wandered, gently notice this, and return your focus back to counting your breath.
6. If you notice any body sensations catching your attention, focus on that sensation until it fades. Then return your attention back to counting your breaths.

# Cross Sectional Formulation

**Situation** (*When? Where? What? With whom? What did you feel anxious about?*)

**Physical** (*When anxious, what physical sensations did you experience? What did you notice in your body?*)

**Emotional** (*What emotions came up for you when you felt anxious?*)

**Cognitive** (*What went through your mind when you felt anxious? What did that say or mean about you or the situation?*)

**Behavioral** (*What was your first instinct and/or automatic response? What did you do and/or avoid doing at the time?*)