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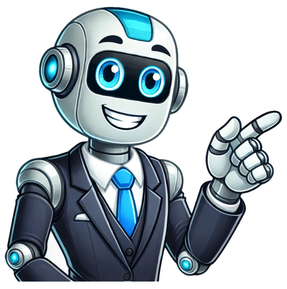

AT LAST A LIFE Anxiety and Panic Free By Paul David Acknowledgements This book is for all of you who are suffering from Anxiety and Panic, something I believe every doctor should have a better understanding of. In my opinion, too much needless suffering is caused through ignorance of the subject and a lack of helpful information when we first seek help. I am not condemning the medical profession but I believe that anxiety really is a specialised subject and, as I found out, not enough people are sufficiently qualified or equipped to help. It is for this very reason that I have written this book and set up my own website in the hope that I can bring far more awareness to the subject and help those, who like me, found help and guidance so hard to come by. My website, www.anxietynomore.co.uk, has now grown into something far bigger than I ever imagined and receives thousands of unique hits a month, which just goes to show how widespread this problem is. My heart goes out to all of you who suffer and I wish each and every one of you success in your recovery. Hopefully, what I have written in this book will finally bring you the answers you so desperately seek. I would like to thank my partner for helping me to achieve my goal of helping others. When I left my job, she never complained, but just told me to follow what I believed in. She has been with me every step of the way and I thank her for that. More than anyone, I thank my mother, who suffered with me through those ten years. She was the only person I felt I could turn to in my darkest days; the only person I knew would not judge me. She never told me to pull myself together; she just listened, watched the tears of frustration and never once gave me anything but support. She has helped and supported me in writing my book and setting up my website. She has supported me all my life and is the nicest person anyone could wish to meet. Mum you are a wonderful person and I dedicate this book to you. -1- Copyright © Paul David 2006 This book is the copyright of Paul David. It is only available in the UK through www.anxietynomore.co.uk. If you receive the book from any other source then please let me know, so that I can take the necessary legal action. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system without the prior written permission of the copyright owner. -2- FOREWORD As you read through this book, you may find some parts with which you can really identify and others with which you may not. It has been written to reach out to all of you who have suffered from all aspects and the various levels of anxiety, so there should be something here for everyone. Sometimes the only difference between individuals is the length of time they have suffered. Well, I can assure you that no matter how long you have suffered, you can recover and this book will show you how. I also run a blog and have lost count of the number of people I have spoken to and helped who have recovered or are on their way to recovering. I have included many of these communications in this book in the hope that people will read something in there that they can identify with and which will give them a better understanding and hope for the future. You will see references throughout these writings to an earlier edition of this book which was originally written in 2006 before being updated in 2009. I have had wonderful feedback over the years from people telling me how the information contained herein has changed their life. I even receive emails from GPs and therapists, telling me that they have recommended my work to their patients and it is something I am very proud of. I never wanted to write just another book on the subject, I wanted this book to be the only point of -3- reference people would ever need and it means as much to me as the person who is reading it to know that it helps. My main consideration when writing this book was to make it as easy as possible to read and understand; to get my message across and break through all the jargon that you may have read and found hard to understand in the past. Every page is packed with what I believe to be the best information I gathered during and beyond my recovery. When I finally found the answers I was looking for, I knew that I had a chance of recovery because, for once, my condition had been explained to me and it all made sense. I had finally been given an explanation for why I felt like I did, and was shown a road to recovery that not only made sense, but also felt right. I am now fully recovered and I know that if I had not found the information that I am now going to pass on to you now, I would still be searching for the answers others still crave. I was just like you, the very people who are reading this book, thinking "yes, you got better, but I cannot; you must be stronger than me; you have not got the problems that I have". Well, I've lost count of the number of times I said this to myself and my anxiety ruled my life for ten years. It was so bad that I had to give up my job; I lost friends and had no social life. I was constantly crying and frustrated with the person I had become. Most days I just did not want to get out of bed in a morning. Yes, that person really was me and as I look back, it is still hard to -4- believe that I was this person. Anxiety robbed me of everything - my personality, my social life and my ability to be normal. Trust me, no matter how bad you feel or how far you have sunk into the depths of despair, you have the power within you to recover. You may also have been through every so-called cure out there and thrown money at treatment after treatment that never worked. Well that was me, I tried it all and nothing worked. I lost heart, I thought I would never get better, but I did. So read on and discover what I believe is the only true way to reach recovery. All that I learnt during my recovery and beyond is written for you in this book and by the time you reach the last chapter, you will have discovered what it took me years to learn. -5- Contents

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Chapter 1 My Story Firstly, I would like to introduce myself. My name is Paul, I live in England and I suffered from anxiety for ten years. I am now fully recovered and this is my story. My first encounter with anxiety happened when I was 22 years old. I was young and, I suppose, naive and I started to dabble in drugs nothing too heavy, I was just taking them socially. I thought I was doing myself no harm, until, as inevitably happens, they took over my life and I reached the point were I relied on them just to get through the day. I started to see changes in my personality that I did not like. I would feel as though I was somewhere else. I did not want to talk to people and felt depressed for no reason, but the thing that scared me most was I started to panic. My whole body would shake and my heart would beat so fast, I was scared I was dying. This was the beginning of ten years of anxiety! It was at this point that I did what most people do and went to see my doctor. I will never forget that first meeting with him. I sat there chatting at what seemed like one hundred miles an hour and my hands were shaking. I just thought, "I don't know what is wrong with me but, you're a doctor, you should know; just give me my magic pill and I will be on my way". Well, as I sat there, I was given no explanation as to what was wrong with me. The doctor just seemed to stare at me with a blank expression on his face, wondering why I was so agitated and talking so fast. He listened and then just told me to take it easy and come back in a few weeks. That was it – no explanation, nothing - but I knew it would take more than a week at home to cure me. I left the doctor's surgery and spent all week trying to figure out what was wrong and why this was happening to me. I decided that if the doctor did not know, it must be something very serious. This was the beginning of my long journey, during which time I spent months being shifted from one doctor to the next and one therapist -7- to another. I had needles put in me, was given different medication and once was even persuaded to part with my money to buy a contraption to wear round my neck and so many other so called cures, but nothing worked. From one day to the next, my mind was racing around, trying to figure out why I felt the way I did, but I always hit a brick wall and still could not find any answers. The only thing I knew for sure was that I was getting worse, not better, as the years passed. I constantly asked myself the question "When will somebody finally be able to tell me what's wrong with me?" This went on for ten years - yes, ten years - during which time I lost friends, my job and my whole personality. Most of my family did not understand why I had changed from being a confident person into someone who they hardly recognised. How could they know what was wrong with me when even I didn't know? I am sure that some of you reading this will have experienced the same personality disintegration as I did. Some of the most common symptoms I suffered are listed below: 1. Feeling strange, unreal, not with it. 2. Depression. 3. Shaking hands. 4. Fast heartbeat. 5. No interest in anything. 6. Tired and weary. 7. Tight band around my head. 8. Unable to concentrate. 9. Irritable 10. Mind constantly racing -8- I had many more, but these were the most common symptoms. I could have saved myself ten years of suffering if only I had been given the right advice from the very beginning and an explanation as to why I felt the way I did. Now I can explain every one of these symptoms away as 'Anxiety' - a condition that I think all doctors need to have a better understanding of, so that they can help to prevent so many years of unnecessary suffering. If you suffer from any or all of the above, don't despair. In the next few chapters, I will try to explain to you why you feel like you do and reassure you that you are not going mad, but feel no different from thousands if not millions of others who are experiencing the same symptoms and thinking that they are the only person in the world who feels like this. Recovery is different for each individual. People who have suffered for a long period of time can be more entrenched in an anxiety habit than someone who has suffered over a shorter time period. A person who suffers from panic attacks, depersonalisation and anxiety may take longer to recover than someone who just suffers mild panic or anxiety. If only I had known what I know now when I first became anxious, my recovery would have happened far sooner. No matter what level of anxiety or panic you have reached, full recovery is possible for everyone. If anyone should know that, it is me. I suffered from every symptom of stress and anxiety and I struggled with them for 10 years. I tried method after method and medication after medication, only to get nowhere, I felt like I was just going round in circles from one disappointment to another. It was only after I learnt about anxiety and panic and put this knowledge into practice, that I was able to lead myself back to a life free from stress, panic and anxiety. Full recovery requires the correct information, an application of it and a little patience. Most have suffered for so long that they just want to be better now. Well, I was the same. I also wanted instant success. Unfortunately, our body takes time to recover; this is only natural, we have been through so much. Most of us did not begin to feel like we do overnight; it was a gradual process and this process takes time to -9- reverse. But, trust me, what a journey it can be and it is well worth the wait. I have had many people come to me for help, almost in tears as they see no way out. Fast forward a few months and they cannot believe how far they have come. So don't despair if you feel you have hit rock bottom or have suffered for a long time, no matter how you feel or how much anxiety has taken over your life, the real you is just waiting to resurface. - 10 -

Chapter 2 SO WHAT ARE THESE FEELINGS I FEEL? In my experience, there are normally three stages leading to how you eventually feel. Firstly, there is what is known as muscular fatigue (tired nerves) where you feel that you are dragging your tired body around all day, going through the motions of living, but having little or no interest in anything. This stage can come from a relationship break up or maybe bereavement, but it is usually created by long term stress and worry, which gradually tires your muscles and your whole nervous system takes a battering, causing the feelings mentioned above. I have been asked many times why anxiety sufferers feel so tired. The answer is that adrenalin affects your body by making it work much faster than normal and can totally drain the energy from your muscles. This is the reason your limbs may ache or you feel so tired and emotionally spent at times. This usually leads to the next stage - mental fatigue/tired mind. This is where people feel that they cannot detach themselves from their thoughts. They have a hyper awareness of how they are feeling and feel strange, sometimes described as feeling as if they are living on another planet. I have lost count of the number of times I have had to convince people they are not going mad. So if the above describes how you feel, trust me, you are not going mad. It is a just a tired old mind, battered with worry and bewildered by how you are feeling. The reason for this is that you have started to worry about the way you feel. You have entered this stage by all the ceaseless pondering, all the endless days of thinking "What's wrong with me" and "Why do I feel like I do?" until such thoughts run automatically all day and your tired mind can no longer cope with all this information. It reaches overload and in order to protect itself draws on its inbuilt safety mechanism to shut down. This is why you feel strange at times. It is nothing to worry about and is just your mind - 11 - telling you that enough is enough. Your mind can actually make you feel more tired than the muscles you use. It can drain you of all emotional energy and your thinking can become laboured and confused. You may find it hard to talk, as though you have to place each word in a sentence. This can then lead to the third stage, which is emotional fatigue. This is the one that hurt me the most and is the one thing that can eventually strip you of your confidence. This stage comes when you feel that there is no hope and you will never get better. Day-by-day, your confidence can disappear and you may not even feel like getting dressed in the morning. "What's the point when I feel like this?" you may ask. Your spirit also seems to fade and you question how you ever became the person you are now, how you ever came to feel like this. You may have experienced only one of these three stages or you may have felt, or be feeling, all three. However, like me, you can recover from all of them, no matter how far you think you may have sunk. Your body is waiting to recover, it wants to recover and all of these stages can be reversed, until eventually you become the person you once were. Anxiety is not an illness; it is a condition, brought on mainly by long term stress or worry and is your body's way of telling you that it is overworked. Your body is like a car that needs looking after in order to run properly. It also has its own limits on how far it can be pushed. I am contacted by more business men/women and people in the medical field than any other profession. These are people that tend to be under a great deal of stress at work. They don't listen to their body and they overdo things, which leads to anxiety. Think of it like this. It I went out and bought a blender that had a maximum running speed of 1000 rpm, but I was not happy with this and wanted it to go faster, so I tweak it up and make it go at double that speed. What would happen? The motor would burn out and it would quickly break down as it was never designed to go at this speed. I have overworked it! Well, it is exactly the same with your body and this is why you feel anxious. Your nerves have become bad through over use and the - 12 - stress and worry you have been piling on has taken its toll. That is why it is so important to take your symptoms with a pinch of salt and not get stressed or worry about them. If you allow yourself to worry and get stressed, you are working your body far too hard, a body that is crying out to be left alone. Let me explain…… You may have reached the point of suffering through too much stress or worry. That makes sense. But why does it continue? The answer is anxiety has then become your new problem and you now have something else to worry about. Just when your body needs a rest, it takes on more worrying thoughts and more stress about how you are feeling. 'What is wrong with me?', 'Why do I feel like this?' You may become bewildered and lost, and each day becomes a battle as you try to think and fight your way out of this hell. This extra stress and worry makes you feel worse, so you worry more and you fight more. Anxiety may be the last thing you think of at night and the first thing on your mind when you wake. Anxiety has become you. I am sure many people can relate to this. Do you see now why we stay in the cycle? This is the reason people find themselves going around in circles and getting nowhere, falling deeper into the condition, because they do the opposite of everything they should do. But with such a lack of information and help out there, what else can we do but fight this condition? In your desperation to get better, you have actually created the opposite effect and done everything your body wanted you not to do. - 13 -

Chapter 3 THE BREAKTHROUGH We can all experience anxiety at some point in our lives. There is a whole new range of stresses on society today. Finding the money to pay the mortgage, stress at work, an up and coming event - all of these things can contribute towards making us feel anxious and stressed. A certain amount of stress is only natural. The problems arise when it is continuous and our mind and body never get a rest from this endless onslaught of worry, which in turn can cause our nerves to become sensitised. Sensitisation of your nerves means that they become easily triggered and the slightest thing - something as simple as a door slamming - may bring a sweep of panic. The weeks/months of worry and stress have caused your nerves to constantly vibrate or become 'bad' and this can create feelings of anxiety for no real reason. Now you must be wondering how I managed to discover the key to recovery, the key that, had I known about it all those years ago, would have helped me to get better so much earlier. The day came after ten years of suffering. It came as I was seeing yet another therapist at my local hospital who, once again, could not give me any answers and did nothing to make me feel any better. The appointment lasted twenty minutes, during which time I told her my problems, she listened, asked about medication and if I wanted to try a new magic pill, and then I was on my way. I was given no explanation as to why I felt like I did and I don't even think I heard the word anxiety mentioned. However, this particular therapist had been told of someone in another town who was supposed to be an expert on the subject of anxiety, and she asked me if I would like her to make me an appointment to visit. I agreed to go as I was desperate and was willing to try anything. I gained no more hope from the prospect of attending this meeting than I did from any of the other meetings I'd had with other so called experts. - 14 - Much to my surprise, this meeting turned out to be very different from any of the others. In fact, I can remember the therapist's first words to me. He said: "Paul, you will never get better until you stop trying to get better" This statement made no sense to me at the time, but over the next few months, it was to be the very statement that helped me recover. It meant more to me than anything anyone else had ever said to me in the previous ten years. During our meeting, I knew there was a real chance, a real hope that I would recover. For the first time, what he had said to me not only made sense, it also felt right. Of all the other treatments I had tried over the years and boy did I try them all, not one of them felt right. I would pay the money and go through the motions, but they certainly never made me feel any better and I was never given any explanation as to why I felt like I did, something my present therapist had managed to achieve on my first meeting. Every book I had bought on the subject was thrown in the bin, every treatment I was having at the time stopped. I knew I would never need them again and I now realise how much rubbish is written on the subject and how many useless treatments there are from people who just want to make money out of other people's suffering. Not only did this therapist help me to recover by showing me the right path, it was through his help that I was motivated to begin studying the whole subject of anxiety and panic, so that I would leave no stone unturned in trying to help others who suffered in the same way as I did. What I discovered is what I am now going to pass on to you in this book. In my opinion, it is the only path that leads to success, so, read on, and you too can also have "A LIFE AT LAST" Footnote: Before I go on, I would like to explain why all these so called cures did not work. I tried treatments like acupuncture, homeopathy, hypnosis and many more. The reason they did not work is because I was trying to rid myself of how I felt instantly. This is the problem; so many people just want this 'dreadful thing to go away'. They go from one treatment to another, sometimes spending a small fortune doing the exact opposite of what they should be doing, which is allowing themselves to feel the way they do. - 15 -

Chapter 4 Understanding Anxiety A key point is to understand that our body can only take so much stress and worry before it becomes run down, stressed, emotionally drained and feels totally battered. In fact, in most cases, too much continuous stress and worry is what brings on anxiety in the first place. This could be caused by the loss of a loved one, personal problems and working long hours without taking time out to relax. It could be caused by stress at work or any number of the many daily pressures with which we are often faced. Our body can only take so much and this is where the word breakdown comes in. The trouble then is that when we first feel the symptoms of anxiety, these 'feelings' can then become our new daily problem. Now, not only do we feel stressed out, but we don't understand why we feel like we do. It may frighten us and we can feel like we are losing it or going mad. Now we may worry daily about how we feel and question it deeply. We may feel frustrated and fill ourselves with self pity. In our attempts to find answers, we have exhausted every avenue and nothing is helping, in fact we feel worse then ever. The way we feel has now become us This is a very common cycle and something I certainly did. The main reason that we are trapped in this cycle is because we don't understand why we feel like we do. We become completely bewildered and what else can we do but to blindly try and figure a way out of this hell? In fact the worse we feel, the more we fight and the more frustrated and bewildered we become. It's a vicious cycle, but one that is easy to reverse. The anxiety cycle is like pouring petrol on a fire and it will never go out until we stop adding more fuel to it. It's a circle we need to break. A very important element in discovering the key to recovery is understanding why we feel like we do. "Why is it so important?" you may ask. "I just want it all to go away". - 16 - Well, it is so important because it takes the whole fear out of how you feel, and fear, together with the lack of understanding of why you feel like you do, keep you ill. If you fear something, it is bound to dominate your life. If you don't understand what's happening, you will continue to go round in circles constantly thinking and worrying about your symptoms and how you feel. What I aim to do is help you to take the fear out of your illness, so that your day is not dominated by the fear of how you feel. Fear is the main factor that is prolonging your illness - fear of your disturbing symptoms, fear that you will never recover and there is no hope for you. In most cases, all that is really wrong with you is tired and over sensitised nerves causing you to feel anxious and irritable. You may also have a tired mind that gives you a feeling of detachment from the world around you. You may have expected a more detailed explanation of the way you feel - I know I did - but this is the reason you feel like you do. There are many causes of tired nerves, but they are usually the result of a build up of stress causing them to become sensitised. Although sudden sensitisation can occur and it has been known to happen after an accident or some other shock, in my experience, it is usually caused by a build up of stress. Once our sensitised nerves reach the point where they are on red alert, we can feel irritable for no reason. Some people refer to it as feeling as if there is a constant electric current running through their body - this is sensitised nerves. They then begin to worry about how they feel and sensitise their nerves even further. The result is that their heart may beat faster and their hands may shake. They may feel as though they have to gasp for air. Some people complain of feeling as if there is a lump in their throat and they have trouble swallowing. Some may feel unbalanced and light headed, or have the sensation of having a tight band around their head. Panic comes easily to some people, and for others, appears for no reason at all. If I had to describe myself, I would say that I felt most of the symptoms listed above and many others not mentioned. On the anxiety scale, I registered very high, but no two people will experience exactly the same symptoms. I had no trouble swallowing and did not feel unbalanced, but I have heard of these symptoms so often and feel that it is important to include them. - 17 - The point is, no matter what symptoms you are experiencing or what stage you feel you are at, they all come under the same umbrella and recovery is possible for all of you. I am forever telling people not to separate each symptom and worry about them individually. You may feel many symptoms with anxiety and there is no need to feel the need to unravel them all, just place them all under the same umbrella of anxiety. The aim is to lessen the time you worry and obsess about how you are feeling and just go about your daily life, however you feel. When I recovered, all symptoms faded at the same time. Think of it as flu, you have a few symptoms, but you don't worry about them all individually. Well, have the same attitude towards anxiety. Another symptom people often mention is a feeling of detachment from the outside world, almost like they are living in a dream. One of the main reasons people feel dull and unresponsive and unable to connect with the outside world is because they are suffering from a tired mind. They have thoughts running around in their head all day and feel so emotionally spent. The tired mind comes from all the "What's wrong with me? Why do I feel like I do? What if it's something really serious?" Day in, day out, they continue this constant battle with themselves as they mentally search for a way out of this hell, longing to be the person they were before this terrible thing came along and never giving their mind and body one minute's rest. No wonder their mind is fatigued when they are thrashing themselves like this, day after day. The more they struggle with how they feel, trying to be the person they were before all of this happened, the more tension they add to their already oversensitised nerves and the more their mind tires. Let me explain by going back to that statement: "You will not get better until you stop trying to get better". What does it mean? Well, let's say that someone came to me and said "Paul I have these strange feelings all day, like pins and needles, and I can't concentrate. I feel unreal and I just don't know what to do. I feel anxious all day. What should I do? " - 18 - The answer is "Nothing" "Nothing?" "Yes, nothing. Just allow yourself to feel like this. By doing nothing you will give your tired mind and nerves the chance to heal". "But surely I should fight it", you say. "I must get the better of this thing". "Okay, go ahead then, but you have been doing this for years and it has not helped". "What do you mean then?" "I mean you can't control your body. Your nerves and mind are tired of you running around trying to find answers, worrying and obsessing about how you are feeling. You are just keeping yourself ill by adding fear and worry." Let me ask you a question. "When you break your leg, what do you do?" "Erm, well, it goes in a pot and I rest it and let it heal". "Well, why on earth don't you do that with your nerves then? You don't say, 'my leg hurts, I must stop it hurting' and then start running around in your mind every day, trying to think of ways you can stop it hurting and tensing against the pain." This is the key! At first I feared my feelings because I did not know what they were or why I felt the way I did, until I was told: "All that is wrong with you is your mind is tired because of all the endless thinking you do, day in, day out. It is receiving an overload of information and can't cope with it, so it shuts down like a safety mechanism. That's why you feel odd at times, as if you are on another planet. Your mind is just very tired. You are not going mad and these feelings will fade when you stop this pointless daily pondering. All the strange feelings you experience are caused by tired nerves, exhausted by the constant pressure you put on them - all the 'oh my Gods' and 'what ifs?' - 19 - These feelings cannot be controlled. There is no magic pill out there. Your nerves need rest and will heal themselves if only you give them the chance. Just like the rest of your body, your tired mind and nerves will heal themselves". Even when I had been convinced that all these feelings I was experiencing came from something as simple as tired nerves and a tired mind, I still had to remind myself at times, but once I understood what was wrong with me, a lot of the fear disappeared. Oh, yes, it still felt awful, but not as bad as before because I had stopped all the 'What's wrong with me'? Why do I feel like this? There must be a way". Finally, someone had explained to me what the problem was. I lost a lot of the fear of my symptoms that day and saw them in a different light. A lot of recovery is to do with losing your fear of a symptom. While you still fear it, it is bound to dominate your day. You need to take the fear out of how you feel, so you can start to move towards your feelings instead of continually running away from them, as you may have been doing up until now. Look at it like this: If you have a cold, you don't worry about it. It does not bother you because you understand it and why it's there, so although it is a slight annoyance, you pay little attention to it and don't let it bother you too much. This is the stage I reached with my feelings of anxiety. This change in attitude came through less fear and a better understanding of my symptoms and was the reason my body started to heal. With understanding comes less fear and less adrenalin, the very things that prolong your illness. I also stopped hiding away from how I felt and the difference was amazing! If I felt bad, I felt bad! You need to get up in the morning and say "However I feel, I feel, AND MEAN IT. One of the reasons I recovered is because I did the very thing I teach. I stopped making it my daily aim to get better. I may repeat this often, but I want to really get my point across. You don't have to search for recovery, rather let recovery come to you. I used to go to work and feel odd and anxious, but instead of worrying about it and trying to make it right, I just got on with the task in hand. I found it hard to concentrate at times and my attention kept reverting back to me and how I was feeling, but I just got on with my day. Anxiety was losing its hold on me. This is the way forward. - 20 - When you realise that there is no outside miracle cure and recovery comes from within, this can be a relief in itself. You no longer have to go from one treatment to another, hoping that elusive cure, the one you must have missed, is out there. This search for an instant cure is the one thing that keeps people ill. I was one of those people, certain that the quick answer must be out there somewhere. I now know this is not true and I wasted a lot of time and money trying to find it. Several people have asked me and how long it took before I recovered. The day I could say I recovered was the day that anxiety and its symptoms did not bother me any more. I had lost my fear of all my symptoms and knew it was only a matter of time until my body found its balance again and my symptoms faded. I knew then that I could never suffer again. At one point, the mere mention of the word "anxiety" would send me into a panic, but I had learnt enough not to be scared of it any more. Basically, I had de-sensitised. Some of my symptoms still lingered, but they had lessened and just did not bother me. Eventually my body just repaired itself and I have now become the person I was before I ever became anxious all those years ago. My recovery took some time with plenty of ups and downs and although I did not have all the information you have here, I used the same method. I saw someone who was fantastic for me and this person's words put me on the right track. Also, during my recovery, I was advised to pick up a book by Claire Weekes. She also had an influence on me and my findings. But my real progress came from a combination of knowledge and trial and error. Also there is no better education than coming through anxiety. The only people I have ever respected on the subject are the people who have actually been through it and come out the other side. In the beginning I really just had to work it all out for myself. When I knew I was on the right track, I began to study the whole subject and was able to make my own mind up about what was good information and what was bad. When the penny dropped and I understood things fully, improvement came quite quickly. When you have spent ten years getting worse, then you know when you are on the right track. - 21 -

Chapter 5 GIVE UP THE FIGHT Firstly, let me explain the reason why so many people actually stay in the cycle of anxiety and, in many cases, feel they are getting worse. It is because they are fighting a constant battle to feel better and lose their symptoms. They may spend all day trying to 'rid' themselves of how they feel; fighting the feelings and trying to push them away. They may attempt to unravel the whole day, trying to work out what they did wrong or why they felt like they did. They may spend the whole time in deep thought, trying to find a way out of this hell and breaking down from time to time, as they see no way out. The harder they try to escape from their mental torment, the worse they feel, believing that no one understands and finding little or no help wherever they turn. I know this person was me. I thought so deeply each day, I was losing touch with the world around me. I fought these feelings and let them frustrate me so much that my anxiety certainly got worse. I thought of nothing else each day but getting better. I spent my whole time acting through it, hoping no one would notice how I felt and every day was a constant battle. I never once thought about doing anything else but fighting and trying to work out why I felt this way. What else could I do but fight and figure it out for myself, when I was given no advice or explanation for how I felt? Little did I know that I was doing the exact opposite of what I should be doing. Rather than run away and try to rid yourself of how you feel, I want you to actually go towards your feelings. Don't run away from them or hide away. For once realise it's okay to have anxiety. Remember, it's only natural in the circumstances to feel the way you do. If your nerves and mind are tired, there is not a single thing you can do to make it all go away instantly. Maybe you find yourself withdrawing from the feelings, running away and not daring to face this big monster you have created in your - 22 - mind, thinking that if you face this thing head on, it will swallow you up and you will somehow get worse. Well, guess what? You won't! It is the very avoidance of the way you feel that holds you back. How much respect do you give a feeling, if you keep avoiding it? It will always be the enemy, the thing to shy away from and avoid at all costs. Below is an example of the moment of realisation received from a sufferer and my response to her: "After reading all the great information in your book, I am beginning to understand a few things that I was doing wrong. For instance, when I was feeling on edge, like not feeling quite right, like something was going to happen, I would have a couple of drinks to make the feelings go away. I realise that by doing this I was running away from my feelings and not facing them. Well, for the last week or so, I've stopped doing that and I'm beginning to feel better, not completely 100% but a lot better than of late." My reply was: Marie, that was a wonderful insight into the fact that you were running away from your feelings and not facing them. While ever we shy away from or try and control how we feel, we are building up the respect we give to those feelings, like they must be avoided at all costs. We can never move forward with this attitude. Once you face them and nothing happens, they lose your respect. "Is that it"? you may say. However, you can't do this until you do allow and go towards your feelings. To lose any fear, you must be willing to feel it. This is how I unmasked a lot of my anxiety and was no longer bluffed by it. This is a very important part of recovery. We get stuck in a cycle because we avoid anywhere where we think we may feel uncomfortable. It's our natural instinct, but it is also the reason we stay stuck in a cycle. The only way to break this cycle is to quite happily go towards these places and feel anything. If we feel anxious, then so be it. It's only a feeling after all. This is exactly what I did and in time these places were just like any other, because I willingly went towards them. I de-sensitised to them. I honestly could not care less how I felt, as I knew that this was the only way to - 23 - move forward. I could never hide away at home and just wish it all away. Paul So, let these feelings come and don't try to stop them. Allow yourself to feel the way that you do? Some people falsely believe that if they do this, they will somehow lose a grip on themselves and that they must hold everything together. You don't need to fight and think your way back to recovery; you need to let recovery come to you. Okay, I will use my own true life case to explain what I experienced and all that I did wrong. I once walked around thinking deeply about how I felt. I was constantly worrying and questioning why I was getting worse and not better. I just kept going around in circles trying to figure a way out of this hell. I tried to keep a grip on myself when talking with others, acting a part throughout the day in an attempt to make sure that nobody noticed how I was feeling. I also felt angry and frustrated about how I felt, wondering when this thing would go away, and I was full of self-pity. Can you see how much extra stress and pressure I was putting myself under each day? Even a healthy body would have struggled to cope, never mind a body that suffered with anxiety. It makes total sense to me now why I got worse and not better over the years. I was thrashing by body daily, constantly trying to do something about it. Eventually I just gave up and said "it's time to accept that, however I feel, I feel". Okay, I still felt awful at times and this was understandable, but I did not feel as bad, and for once during my suffering, I was giving my body the break it so craved. If I could begin to learn to let go and give a free reign to my feelings, then I had no need to constantly try and figure it all out. I would no longer need to worry daily about how I was feeling and had no need to fight or try to push feelings away. Do you see that for once I had given myself a break and a chance not to add more and more stress to an already tired body? I had taken a step back and trusted in my own body's healing system, the best healing system that exists. My body could not begin to recover until I began to give up this daily battle - 24 - that I had created with myself and this is when the statement "You will never get better until you stop trying" made so much sense to me. It was once my daily aim to 'get rid' of how I was feeling. If my body could speak it would have said "Paul please step out of the way; leave me alone and let me heal myself". What I am saying is let anxiety be part of your day and stop worrying/obsessing about it. Say it's okay to feel like this for the time being. I am not saying you have to like it, just don't create a monster out of it. Also, give your body and mind as much space as it needs to heal itself. Too many people are far too impatient and want instant success. I wanted instant success for 10 years and never found it. So I was very willing to give myself time to recover. I had been through so much; it made sense that it was going to take time. I just aimed for progress and was happy with this. I never demanded or expected anything, which, looking back, helped me so much. Remember, your body takes time to adjust and each day that you no longer fight how you feel and just go with it, you give your body another day to recover and repair itself. A broken leg will not heal in a day and neither will your nerves, but for the first time you will have started to give them the rest they so crave. Think about this: If fighting worked, you would be cured by now. So why not try the opposite? Abandon yourself to how you feel. Holding on to yourself and trying to keep a grip on this thing, just adds more tension. You may find yourself running away from your symptoms, telling yourself that you must not face them or you will sink deeper into the pit of anxiety. Or you may try to push them away and stop them coming, but this is all wrong. The only way to de-sensitise is to go towards these feelings instead of shying away from them. This is the only way to recover. By doing this, you are accepting them for what they are - just strange feelings. You may just find that nothing is going to happen to you and that when you let them come, the feelings are not as bad as you let yourself believe. In allowing them to come, you automatically relax your body and don't add any more tension. Can you see that by letting them come, you are on the way to not fearing them any more? You have brought down the barriers that have been holding you back for so long. Face the feelings and let them come, until it does not matter if they are there or not. I - 25 - blindly thought I had to get rid of my anxiety symptoms at all costs and that there must be a quick fix that had eluded me. Setbacks I have helped people to go with how they feel and everything is going well for them. They are improving and feeling better, only to wake up one morning and suddenly find they have a bad day. This can cause them to lose hope, they feel as if they are back at square one and start questioning everything all over again. Please don't fall into this trap. Under normal circumstances, we feel happier on some days than others; we don't know why, we just do. So why be surprised if on some days we feel more anxious than others? We don't question why we are happier on some days than others, so why question the reason we feel more nervous and tense on some days than others? You just have to let the bad days go and use them as another opportunity to practice letting go and allowing feelings to be there. Allowing the sensations of anxiety/panic to go on without making any attempt to stop them, hide from them or stress or worry over them is really the way to lose them. In short, just live your life and don't let anxiety make your decisions for you. Don't let it stop you having a life. I will refer to other people's words from time to time because I believe it helps to read what others have to say, particularly those who have been through the same experiences and come out the other side. These are from real people that I have helped in the past and it shows just how many of them have come through once they received the right help and guidance. Below is a post taken from my blog from Scarlet, who is now fully recovered, and it sums up exactly what I want to get across. Here she talks about the need to just live your life and not let anxiety make choices for you. Sitting at home hoping and wishing you will feel better just does not work. You just need to put Paul's advice into practice as often as you can in order to get off the 'hamster wheel' of anxiety and get on with 'normal' everyday living. Even when you don't feel like it, go out, go - 26 - to work, down to the pub, cycling, whatever you fancy doing. Don't be put off by inappropriate feelings or thoughts … do it anyway. For normal feelings to return we have to live as normal a life as possible. I made the mistake for the first year, of sitting and waiting to get well before I actually 'lived', thinking this was the way to do it. It took me the best part of a year to find out this was totally wrong. My anxiety levels shot up during this time also. I ended up ruminating all day and became almost housebound. Scarlet is right and this is something I try to get across early. Don't hide away indoors, don't wait until you feel better to go out and live your life. Don't put off anything because of how you feel. Just live your life regardless of how you feel. You may even feel worse when you first do this because you are coming out of your comfort zones, but it is the actual doing that begins to take the edge off feelings. Normal feelings begin to override the feelings of strangeness. For normal feelings to return, we have to live as normal a life as possible; nothing is gained by hiding away. I always went everywhere at will no matter how I felt. I knew that this was the only way to move forward and I never allowed anxiety to make my decisions for me. Yes, sometimes I really felt like hiding away, but I never did. Sometimes I felt uncomfortable in certain situations, but I thought 'so what, this is not me forever'. I knew deep down that putting myself in situations that I had avoided in the past would help me to recover. Avoidance just creates more problems and what was I actually avoiding anyway? It was nothing more than a feeling, a feeling that had once dominated my life. But I made the decision to no longer let it, and what a difference that had on my life. I am not saying I started running around like a headless chicken, I just started socialising more. I went running, took the dog for a walk, went swimming and just began to live again. Yes, at first it was strange and sometimes I had to drag myself there, but I always went. Eventually I felt more and more comfortable and more and more at one with the world around me. I had stopped sitting at home brooding, hoping that a miracle would come along and rid me of how I was feeling. One thing I quickly learnt is that the road to recovery is not all plain sailing. There are ups and downs. You should enjoy the good days - 27 - and don't get too depressed about the bad. The most important thing to remember is that in order to get better, you may have to live alongside the old you for a while, including the feelings of dread and anxiousness. This can't be avoided, but while you are doing this a new you will begin to emerge, ready to rise to the surface. Below is part of an email from someone I helped. She was in a deep hole when she first came across my site and read my book. At the time of writing she is well on her way to recovery and in her own words '1000 times better'. The statement below is so very true and something I tried to get across to her very quickly – it is the 'trying to control' the anxiety that ultimately keeps us in the cycle. Hi Paul, I was having a think yesterday about how far I have come. There were times when I thought I was trapped with anxiety forever… but thinking about it, all the 'fighting to control' is what trapped me and not the actual symptoms. If I had left the stress induced symptoms alone then I would have never ended up in the state I did! But I persevered and now I am seeing big results. I don't ever worry about whether or not I will recover now - it's like it's inbuilt that I just know I will. She had finally got it. It was the fighting, trying to control the anxiety that made her sink deeper into the condition. If she had just got on with her day accepting the anxiety induced symptoms, her life would have been far easier. But she did the exact opposite and spent her day trying to 'rid' herself of the way she felt and trying to think and fight her way better. I told her from a very early stage "When you wake up in a morning, don't make it your daily aim to rid yourself of your anxiety". It is a fight you will lose for sure as there is no battle to fight. Looking back to my own suffering, I don't think there was a day that I did not try and rid myself of how I was feeling. This was obviously getting me nowhere, so I had to try a new approach. I began to realise that if doing this was making me worse, maybe then I should do the opposite. Referring back to the stress induced symptoms she mentioned, she also sees them for what they are. She has changed her attitude and understands that however she feels it is just an off shoot of anxiety stress related symptoms as she puts it. Symptoms that used to - 28 - bother her and fill her with so much dread and fear no longer have the edge anymore as she understands why she feels like she does. I used to have many symptoms when I suffered, but once the anxiety left so did the symptoms and none hung around. At the time I thought I had to deal with each one separately, but this was not the case. I also received the following email, which I would like to share with you. It came from someone who was going through recovery, but could not seem to get over that final hurdle. Hello Paul, I just wondered if you could help me. With your help, I have been able to banish so many of my symptoms, but what I can't seem to do is get over that final hurdle to recovery. I seem to have hit a brick wall now and even though I can do so much more and feel so much better, I still find myself being anxious in certain places and wondered if I should just maybe not go there until my body fully repairs itself? Like I say, I feel much better and full recovery seems so close, but I can't seem to get over this last stage and don't seem to be making any progress. I just wondered if you could explain why? Regards Ian My reply was: Hi Ian, I also went through this and felt the same frustration of being so close to recovery, but not being able to get over that final hurdle that I felt was in front of me. Here is how I overcame this. I felt so close to recovery and had come so far, that I decided I would stay in to help reach my goal of recovery, thinking this would take me over that final hurdle, as long as I did not put myself in the situations that still made me feel uncomfortable. I did not stay in because I wanted to stay in. I did it because I felt so close to - 29 - recovery and did not want to risk feeling bad again. Like you, I also did not like how it made me feel, so I set up camp in my safe haven called home thinking this would take me over that final hurdle. I soon learned that it did not, and one day I said to myself: "Anxiety, you still hold the power over me to influence what I do, but today its stops. I am going to embrace you and take away that power. You

serious. You go home and question everything that happened to you and you can't understand it. Not only that, but you then start worrying that it will happen again. “Oh no, what if I feel like that again?” you say to - 34 - yourself. Now you really are caught in a trap because your whole day/week is going to be lived in fear of another feeling of panic coming. You might as well have a big hat on that says, “Panic, please come again”, because fear brings panic and your day is going to be full of fear. The more the cup fills, the more you fill it with “Oh, my God, what if? What’s happening to me”? This continues all day, every day, and all because of that one day when your body was just releasing an overflow of adrenalin. Now what? Your mind starts racing around and all the worrying thoughts come rushing in. “I might panic when I go out, and what if I see someone I know? Now I am going to stop in. I am safe within these four walls.” The only difference inside these four walls is your attitude -THAT’S ALL. You don't worry inside, so you feel a lot better. But, oh dear, when you go out, off you go again: “Oh, I don’t know if I can do it”. “What if”? “No, I can’t do it”, “I’m going back”, I am safe here” These statements can be the first step towards never going out at all. Believe me, more often than not all of this was caused by the events of that one day and not having an understanding of what was happening the first time you felt like this. If only someone had explained to you exactly what was happening, you could have been spared all those years of suffering - so simple, but true. My own recovery from these feelings of panic came because I understood what was happening and I began to lose my fear of how I felt. Eventually if just turned into a feeling that I was no longer bluffed into running away from. This is the stage you really need to reach, where you no longer fear another attack - easier said than done when all you may have done so far is avoid and run away from how you feel. Although I only had one severe attack, I had many episodes where I wanted to run away or escape. I remember a being on a flight where I was really poorly on the way out. Flying had never bothered me in the past and I had no problem with this. But I was extremely poorly on this flight and just wanted to get off. I really thought I was going to faint. I finally - 35 - reached my destination and was poorly for 4 days and had to see a local doctor. Well, on the way back, I was in the airport and I started with all the ‘What if I feel poorly again’ I became so anxious that I reached the point where I said to my partner ‘I can’t get on’. After speaking to a lady representing the aircraft company, I was told that the plane would have to be held up while they pulled my baggage off. Then all of a sudden I thought: “if I don’t fly, then once again I am giving in to how I feel. Whatever happens, happens”. So I just got on that plane and I flew back with no problems at all. Fear did surface a little as I stepped on, but I just thought ‘come on then, I don’t care’. I arrived at my destination and was so proud of myself for having passed through all those negative thoughts. Fear surfaced, but it died down as it always does. It was only adrenalin being released into my system and could not harm me. That day gave me so much confidence for the future and it was better just to see it through and discover that there really was nothing to fear. I used to feel very uncomfortable in social situations, but always stayed put and allowed myself to feel anything. What was the worst thing that could happen anyway? I knew that if I felt uncomfortable it didn’t matter, I could cope. It was just a feeling, something I had been through many times before. As time goes by everything becomes easier and as you allow yourself to go through difficult situations over and over again, you gain the confidence of knowing that nothing will happen. It is important to accept that the feelings you feel are caused by excess adrenalin and I will say this again because this is all it is, a release of adrenalin. Your body may be sensitised, which is why you may get a stronger reaction to this release of excess adrenalin than a healthy body, but that truly is all it is. The technique is to come out of your safety zone and try to see panic through without attempting to control it or put a stop to it and just go with the feelings. Let your hands shake. Let yourself feel unbalanced. Allow your heart to beat if it wishes. All that’s happening is your body is releasing adrenalin, creating a feeling that can do you no harm. Are you really willing to let a feeling dominate your life? - 36 - When you start to move towards these feelings and say “Okay, come on, do your worst. Do what you have to do, I no longer care”, you stop adding fear to fear. Instead of avoiding or running away, I used to say: “Okay, I am not going to get in your way. Just get on with it as I am very busy today” and to my surprise nothing really happened. Fear rose purely through habit and then died down. I thought: ‘Is that it? Is that what I have been running away from and avoiding for so long?’ When I started to do this I soon realised there was no dark place in which I would lose control. This can take practice and I am not pretending it is easy, but it is the way forward. The key point to remember is that when the fear ‘peaks’ and you feel the need to escape, the need to escape just comes from your in built fight or flight mechanism. I just went against these instincts to escape, as there was nothing to run away from. I stayed put or carried on with what I was doing and after the peak, there was always calm - nothing happened. What confidence that gave me for the future. I knew that if I felt like that again I could cope and my confidence just grew and grew. I am not telling you to go here and there, putting yourself in every difficult situation straight away. Small strides will do at first, as long as you go out with the attitude that you are going to allow yourself to feel any feelings that may surface, not caring if they do or they don’t. If you do this, you will have dealt with yourself and not the situation you find yourself in. In time it will not matter where you find yourself and every situation will be like all the others. You will realise for the first time that you do have some control over the way you feel and that there is hope of overcoming these feelings. ‘Feel them and be free’ was always my motto. To expand on this, I once watched a T.V programme that caught my attention. The program started with a woman who had been burgled and met the person face to face. Two years down the line she never went out, was constantly living in fear and suffered with anxiety/panic etc. This was having a terrible impact on her life and she wanted help. There was a doctor/therapist speaking on the same programme and he talked a lot of sense. He happened to mention something that had a huge impact on me and with which I could identify. He said ‘I went through something very similar, but I refused to let it rule my life’ He went on to explain that he understood the concept that if he did not get straight back out there and face his fears, he would encounter far greater problems, so he - 37 - went towards what he feared and refused to hide. He was actually mugged and wanted to get straight back out there, realising that it was better to do this than allow the problem to grow. The most important thing is he did it straight away rather than build up any avoidance behaviour habits that could cause more problems in the future. His advice made so much sense to me. He went on to say: ‘The answer to your problems lies within you and you have to go towards what you fear to get your life back’. He never said it was easy, but suggested that the habit this lady had developed of refusing to go out and needing someone with her constantly, were counter productive and she needed to do the exact opposite in order to move on from this experience. What she did wrong was to never allow herself to feel any fear or try to get through it. For her it was about avoiding fear at all costs. She would ring her boyfriend 20 times a day and when he got back he was never allowed to go out. She would not go out because of how she felt and the problem just escalated. What she needed to do was feel those feelings of fear and insecurity and go through them. She only need take little steps, like not ringing her boyfriend so much, but she had to feel some fear and discomfort in order to release herself from her prison. Only then would she begin to feel more comfortable. She could never expect to live life with someone constantly by her side. I am not blaming this lady, she was just going along with her instincts, but it was avoidance behaviour that led to her having no life and needing constant security. I want you to remember the following statement because it is very important ‘To release yourself from fear, you have to become present to the experience of fear itself rather than simply trying to get rid of it or running away’ I always went towards any uncomfortable situations and refused to get into avoidance behaviour, even during the days when I had little knowledge, because I knew that this was the worst thing I could do. Trust me, this is what de-sensitises you. I know we want the easy way out, but I realised that if I didn’t do everything at will and allow myself to feel some fear, then my life would just become more and more restricted. If that was the case then the opposite had to be true - to release myself from a life of fear I had to experience it. - 38 - I once had to go to a job interview and as the time for the interview drew near, I thought ‘I can’t do this’ and felt extremely anxious’. I then had a realisation: ‘I would have felt like this in the days before I suffered from anxiety, but I would not have let it bother me as anyone would feel like this before an interview. Also my nerves were sensitised so the feelings may be a little stronger than most, but they’re the same feelings, it’s only my attitude to them that has changed.’ So I just carried on and went to the interview. Once I was in the room and got chatting, I soon felt a lot calmer. Once again I nearly let a common feeling of excess adrenalin (which is all it was) bluff me into avoidance. The more I went towards my feelings of fear the easier things became. I was beginning to build up a real inner confidence and have a far better understanding of how my body worked and reacted Avoid your fear and they will grow, move towards them and they will subside. This condition wants you to hide away, don’t let that happen. A lot of people caught up in the cycle of panic have merely been tricked by their mind into avoidance. It has tricked them because a healthy body which is not affected by anxiety only feels the effects of adrenalin when faced with danger. This is our body’s way of preparing us to escape or act, otherwise known as the ‘fight or flight’ syndrome. Once the danger has passed, our attitude changes, the adrenalin subsides and we begin to calm down. The people who first felt panic for what they believed to be no real reason may have been worrying for weeks/months about a particular problem, not knowing that the adrenalin cup was filling up and about to overflow. Those first feelings of panic may have had them scurrying for home wondering what had just happened. Then they may inadvertently believe that it was the place that made them panic and avoid going there again. But now, not only do they avoid this place, but they may also fear another attack coming. Every time they go out, they start watching their body, tuning in, waiting for a sign that tells them it is happening again. With all this worry, is it any wonder that the cup overflows again and the feelings return? Then it is not the place that worries them any more, it is just the fear of how - 39 - they will feel. They may just decide to stay at home within the safety of their own four walls and avoid going anywhere. They are now caught up in what I call the full fear cycle. This cycle is the only thing that keeps feelings of panic alive, the reason why people can suffer for years. They need to understand why they feel like they do and have a plan of recovery that can break the cycle of fear. So, the next time you go out, just say to yourself: “If I feel panicky, I feel panicky” these feelings are just caused by the effects of adrenalin on sensitised nerves and that’s it, nothing else. Nothing dreadful is going to happen it never does”. Don’t add fear to fear with all the “Oh my God, I must get out of here”. “What’s going to happen?” etc. Trust me when I say that nothing dreadful is going to happen to you, it’s just the effects of excess adrenalin. Again your body may be sensitised, which may exaggerate these feelings, making you feel unbalanced and causing your hands to shake, but don’t worry, the feelings will calm down, they always do. Don’t try to control them or stop them coming but just stay calm in your attitude towards your feelings. Move towards your feelings of fear and see them through. Say: “Okay, come on, do your worst. I no longer care”. What have you to lose? You won’t collapse or die. Just build up that ‘whatever’ attitude. There is no point of no return and peace is always waiting at the other side. You would be amazed at the amount of people who go ahead, face their fears and say “Paul I did it and nothing happened. I felt a bit anxious and panicky, but the feelings calmed down after they had hit their peak. I was even inviting them to come again”. I often felt fear rise, which I knew was just the effects of excess adrenalin on sensitised nerves and it truly did not bother me at time went by. I just saw it as a feeling and understood it. I knew the fear was not real and I no longer cared if I felt it or not - my fear had gone. That is the stage you get to when you see things through and don’t spend your time running away from situations. You need to go through the storm to reach the calm, until one day you get to the point where you can say, “It doesn’t matter any more if panic comes”. This is your aim. Try to embrace your fears instead of avoiding them and you may find you only thought you could not do something and you realise that your body had tricked you into believing this. This method brings so many rewards. Avoidance just - 40 - brings more feelings of failure, more feelings of hopelessness and continued suffering. At first, you may feel worse when practising this way - putting yourself into situations and places that you feared - but this is understandable. Up until now, you have been avoiding these situations and places, letting your world become smaller and smaller, but now you are trying to broaden your horizons, and coming out of your safety zone is the way to do this. So don’t feel disheartened if you feel more exhausted than ever when you do go out there; this is only to be expected. Even if you fall off the bike from time to time, just brush yourself down and try again. Some days may be better than others. Don’t question why - they just are. It is the same as any other feeling. Some days we feel sad, some days we don’t, but we never question why. How we feel can differ from day to day, so don’t waste time and energy trying to work out why one day was better than the next. If you do breathing exercises to calm you down, then that’s fine, use them. I used to slowly take big, deep breaths, and not fast, shallow breaths, even though this is what you tend to do when you feel panicky. Sometimes I found that just a calm attitude saw me through when I felt panicky, but if you feel yourself getting breathless, then just take long deep breaths and don’t gulp for air. It never surprises me when people come back to me and say, “I did it! I felt a little fear, yes, but it was not too bad. I really did it! Now I understand. I just thought I could not do it.” They may only have driven around the block in the car, but their achievement has shown them that there is a light at the end of the tunnel and given them the confidence to believe that they can get better and live life to the full again. So there really is no point of no return. I have seen so many come through once they have decided not to let these feelings dominate their life anymore. They have gone through them enough times to no longer let them bother them. The people who maybe cry at home, wondering why they can no longer do what they did before because of these feelings, need to know that there is a light at the end of the tunnel and they can go back to how things were before all - 41 - this happened. You can do anything, as long as you no longer run away from how you feel. This is the way forward, no one can hope to hide away at home, hoping for that miracle where they wake up and no longer feel any fear. Trust in what worked for me. I never took the easy way out. I wanted to live again and I was not going to let these feelings hold me back. If I had to feel them to recover, then so be it. Anything was better than having no life at all. - 42 - Chapter 7 UNDERSTANDING FEELINGS OF UNREALITY Feeling Strange The one question I get asked more than any other is, “Why do I feel strange/unreal. It’s as though I am detached from people. I feel like a shell walking around in a dream?” Many people find this the hardest thing to accept. Okay, I feel anxious and can see that my nerves are tired; that makes sense. What doesn’t make sense is this dull head, feeling like I am under water, not with it, I feel detached from the rest of the world around me as if I am going mad. This can’t be due to me being anxious, can it? This must be something else. First of all, let me clear up one thing, which is something that I get asked so often. “No, you are not going mad”. This feeling comes from being constantly worried about your own problems. You are so used to watching yourself, questioning your illness, day in, day out, that you start to feel detached from the outside world. You may find that when you talk to people it feels as though you are somewhere else. You can hear them, but what they are saying just is not sinking in. Your thoughts are more inward than outward looking, causing you to focus on yourself while trying to follow the conversation. I took some convincing of this when I was anxious and this feeling of strangeness was the last thing to disappear. Now I know that it was caused by nothing more than a tired mind because I am living proof. I felt so detached that I could not read a book or follow a conversation. I felt as if I was taking part in some sort of movie, having to act my way through the day. I just could not connect with people or anything outside of my own little world. I now know that I was just in the habit of watching myself all day and was so concerned about how I felt and how I could get better, that I had no interest in the outside world. My anxiety consumed me. I was living my life, while at the same time watching myself and doing neither very well. When I was talking to people, my thoughts were - 43 - constantly on myself and I found it hard to listen to, or concentrate on, the other person’s conversation. Is it any wonder we can’t follow a conversation when we are so concerned about how we feel? We have become withdrawn into ourselves and our mind becomes worn out and tired with all the ceaseless pondering about how we feel, day in day out. Everything feels grey and muzzy, our mind becomes less resilient and concentration can be so hard to achieve. The more we brood about our feelings, the more tired our mind becomes, continuing this cycle. A person who has suffered may have spent months, even years, studying the problem. Is it any wonder their mind feels dull, unresponsive and so very tired? Even someone with a healthy mind would struggle with this, yet we keep on thrashing our already tired mind, day in day out. Just as your arms and legs can tire with overuse, so can your mind. Sometimes you feel so tired and spent that you have to drag your weary body around with you. This is as much a tiredness of the mind as it is a tiredness of the body. If we over exert ourselves, we rest our arms and legs. Imagine how weary they would get if we just kept on going, as tired as our mind is now perhaps. You only have to go on a forum on the subject to see the many posts nearly all stemming from people worrying about their symptoms. Questions that regularly appear are: Am I going mad? Is this more than just anxiety? When will this ever end? Why do I seem to be getting worse and not better? It really pains me to see people suffer in this way, as they just crave for answers to their condition and are unable to find them. This in turn sets them on the worry merry-go-round that continues the cycle of anxiety. I will give you one vital piece of advice: YOU MUST NOT WASTE ANYTIME TRYING TO WORK ANY OF IT OUT. This helps to make your mind so much more flexible and gives it the breaks it needs. There is nothing to work out. If you do what I say and just carry on with your day however you feel, allowing yourself to feel - 44 - anxious if need be, then what is there to say? You may feel your mind chatter away but that’s fine, this is only habit. Let it ramble on. With time this subsides when we stop all the constant worrying and questioning about how we feel. An explanation like this helped me to recover from this habit. I knew that I did not have to keep running around in my mind all day, looking for answers, questioning every feeling I felt. This is one thing that I constantly have to reassure people about as they are convinced it has to be more than this. The main reason people want an answer is because they find this one of the hardest things to accept. They believe there must be an immediate answer for them. But, remember this: A healthy mind would not be able to feel like you do in one day and neither can your tired mind recover in a day. You did not start to feel like this overnight. It may have taken you months, or even years, to reach the dull, unresponsive mind you have now, so don’t expect it to be responsive and clear overnight. Someone who came to me who is now fully recovered said ‘I did not wake one day recovered, it was a transition’, and this is exactly what it is - the old you comes back in layers. So don’t despair, in time it can and will return to the normal clear mind you once had as long as you step out of the way and give it a rest from all this worrying introspection. I have said all the things you are probably saying, e.g. “It won’t. I know nothing else but this now. This is me”. Yes, and at one point, you could probably never imagine feeling like you do now. I will not lie to you and tell you that if you accept this strangeness for two weeks, it will go! Never, ever put a time limit on how long it will take for the feelings to go away. It took me a few months before I was totally back to normal and achieved the clear mind I have now, a mind that allows me to think and function just like I could before I developed a tired mind (notice I say this often because that’s what it is). Recovery comes at its own pace, but I did notice myself gradually improving and becoming more alert, less clogged up. Recovering can be just as rewarding as the actual recovery and the little improvements that you will begin to notice help to build up your confidence. - 45 - All those treatments that promise to make you feel better within two weeks, offering the new miracle cure, just give false hope. It just can’t happen because it takes time to recover, to thaw out and feel emotions again. If there were a miracle cure out there, we would all know about it and someone would be very rich!! What you must do, for the time being, is accept this muzzy head and the feelings of strangeness. Do not question them, but accept their true cause which is the constant worrying about the very symptom itself. The less we concern ourselves with how we feel, the more we let other things into our day. This is how to integrate back into normal living, which is impossible while you spend all of your day worrying and obsessing about how you feel. You need to care less about how you are feeling and the more you do this, the more you allow other good things in. At first you may still find your attention reverting back to you and how you are feeling. It will do through memory and habit, but the more you involve yourself with other things, the more outward looking you will become and the cloud will begin to lift. It may only be for a few fleeting moments at first, but in time it will begin to lift more and more. In my case, I began to understand why I felt this detachment from people. I believed what I was told and then I stopped worrying about feeling strange. I went into difficult situations, which meant talking to people and friends, expecting to feel strange and detached. My motto was: “If I feel strange, I feel strange”. I stopped worrying about it and trying to analyse the feelings. I still felt them, but I stopped worrying about them, and because I stopped anxiously watching myself, I found I could follow a bit more of people’s conversation. As time went by, I started to become more interested in what they were saying, rather than worrying about myself. I had started to connect with the outside world again. Can you see how this happened? My habit of watching myself in these situations lessened and not worrying about how strange I felt replaced the habit of worrying about how I felt. It became my new habit. If you are in similar situations, truly accept the strangeness you feel and do not question any of it. It is temporary and not important. Even if you have not felt like that for a while and it returns – don’t worry about it. Memory alone can bring it back, but just live with it for now and, in time, the accepting gives your mind the rest it needs and enables it to become clearer and more responsive. - 46 - What you must not do is try and force normal feelings. You must wait for normal feeling to return of their own accord, which, in time, they will. In your efforts not to feel the way you do and by questioning why you do, day in, day out, you have been burdening yourself with more thoughts and putting more pressure on your already tired mind. I used to say, “My mind is a little tired at the moment, there is nothing I can do about it and worrying about it does not help. Anyway, it will not be there when I recover”. The mere acceptance of this condition can bring with it a mind that feels clearer than it has done in months. You may feel normal for a while and believe that you are fully recovered, only to suddenly feel engulfed again by feelings of detachment and disorientation. This is normal; it takes time for your mind to adjust. Just experiencing a brief moment of clear thinking is enough for you to know that you are on the right path. To sum up this chapter, accepting feeling strange means not trying to work out why you feel like you do, not trying to get rid of these feelings and not running away from them. It’s about being prepared to carry on with your life despite them and understanding that it’s totally normal in the circumstances to feel this way. - 47 - Chapter 8 SCARY/IRRATIONAL THOUGHTS This is another symptom of anxiety that crops up quite often, so let me try to give you an explanation. "Why do I seem to have so many thoughts in a day and why are my thoughts so irrational and scary?” you may ask. Well, don’t worry, you are not ‘losing it’ or going insane, this is just another off-shoot of anxiety. The reason you seem to have your attention on yourself all day and it feels like there are endless thoughts running through your mind is twofold. 1. It is all the confusion about how you feel. Your mind spends all day looking for answers and trying to find a way out of this hell. Some people may even stay up all night, reflecting on the whole day and trying to figure everything out. Eventually, thinking just becomes automatic; it becomes a habit. All day, every day, these thoughts seem to enter your head before you even think them. Look at it this way: when people meditate, they stop thinking for hours on end, until it becomes a habit and they can go all day without a worrying thought. This is why they feel so refreshed. Not you, your thoughts just carry on and on, and when your mind is tired, as it is now, it grabs hold of every thought, pulling them in and making them stick. 2. Why are some thoughts so bad? When you are in an anxious state, emotions seem to be tenfold, everything magnifies and a little problem becomes massive. Something that you could dismiss when you were healthy, can stick around all day. Anxiety is really just caused by adrenalin that needs an outlet, a release if you like, and this includes manifesting itself into scary, - 48 - strange thoughts. They are not important and should be seen for what they are - anxiety just playing its tricks. Below are just some of the irrational thoughts on anxiety that I have come across. I call them the ‘what ifs’! What if no one can cure me? What if it’s not anxiety, but a different mental problem? What if my old self is lost forever? What if there is something else wrong with me - brain tumour etc? What if I lose control? What if I can't breathe? What if I have to live like this for the rest of my life? What if this feeling never goes away? What if it’s just me that feels like this? What if I'll never be able to enjoy the things I used to? What if I have an attack and pass out? What if I cannot be the person I used to be? You may have asked some of the above questions or recognise a fear you have. Well, I did too. It was always ‘yes, but what if?’ Well, all of these ‘what ifs’ usually amount to nothing. They prove to be just an overactive mind playing its tricks on you. Thoughts seem to come uninvited and always hold such power when we are anxious. Also, a lack of understanding of anxiety can bring these fears. Like me, you may have suffered for a long time without anyone explaining to you why you feel like you do and you may not even have been told that it is anxiety. Can you see why these fears can build up in people? A lack of understanding of their condition, - 49 - coupled with the habit of always thinking the worst compounds their fears. Add this to a tired mind that has lost a lot of its resilience and you have a whole host of ‘what ifs?’ Some people worry to the extent that they believe everything they feel is life threatening. A headache becomes a brain tumour; a stomach ache can become cancer and so on. No matter how many times their doctor tells them there is nothing wrong with them, they are never quite convinced. If this is you, then realise these thoughts of illness are just figments of your imagination, mainly created by your anxious state. Everything becomes magnified when we are anxious. Let these thoughts go. Don’t react to them and see them for what they are - thoughts that carry no weight whatsoever, no matter how loud they shout. I truly let my mind chatter if it must. I allowed myself to think anything and just did not react. The thoughts were not real, but just built up through my anxious state. The more we try to push them away, the longer they linger and the stronger their impact. When we welcome and give room to unwanted thoughts, they lose their significance and quickly diminish. When you attach a false sense of importance to a thought, it will often appear more serious than it is. Remember they are just thoughts and are of no significance. Pay them no respect. Just say to them: “come if you wish, it’s just anxiety playing its tricks. Just as my legs wobble when I drink alcohol, with anxiety I may have silly irrational thoughts but they’re not real”. The following statement came from a lady who did as I advised and clearly explains what I’m saying: “I really did have no control over my own mind before. The more I tried to over control the less control I had.” This is very true. In my case, the more I tried to stop thinking or felt the need to take every thought seriously and unravel it, the less control I felt I had. It was only when I took my thoughts with a pinch of salt and just got on with my day, whatever the chatter, that I noticed a big improvement. They no longer had the fuel of fear to keep them going. - 50 - The best way to alleviate these intrusive thoughts is to allow them their space by NOT trying to force them out. Why not try following a negative/scary thought through and ask yourself the question “What is the worst thing that could happen? Then ask yourself if it is really going to happen? Is this thought rational in any way? If you do this, you may find the answer to a thought you have been so frightened of, so that next time these thoughts enter your head, deep down inside there will be a part of you that can see them for what they really are and let them go. Some people say they have thoughts about harming people close to them. They know that they won’t, but the thought is there at times. Again, this is just adrenalin finding a release and creating these thoughts. That’s all it is, so don’t worry or feel guilty for thinking them, just see them for what they are - anxiety letting off a little steam. If you are having trouble sleeping, then this can be caused by your mind being too active when your head hits the pillow. If you are caught in this trap, try not to go to bed analysing the day, trying to unravel it all and hitting one brick wall after another. However your day has been, just accept it. There is nothing to work out. You may find it hard to switch off the constant thoughts that fill your mind, but don’t try. Just let the thoughts come and let them go. Don’t grasp them like they are important - they’re not. You may even find you will drop off to sleep more quickly and get the rest your tired body so craves. What do you do then? I found an explanation for the reason why I felt like I did and I believed it. This in itself brought a lot of my fears to a halt. I realised that these scary thoughts would continue to come for a while. Not only did my anxiety bring them, it had also become my habit to think them, but I learned that all I needed to do was to pay them no respect. I saw them for what they were - just thoughts, brought on by anxiety and habit. They were not important. I know that giving little respect to a thought that seems so bad and comes with such force is hard, but realise it is only the state you are - 51 - in that magnifies them and makes them seem important. Accept they are only thoughts that hold no power and can do you no harm. Just let all negative, destructive thoughts float away. Smile at them if you like. You have total control over how much respect you pay them. Do not try and get rid off scary thoughts or stop them coming. By doing this, you are telling them that they are important, which they are not. I often get asked ‘How I do I stop thinking in a certain way’. My reply is “DON’T try”. If it’s not important whether your thoughts are scary or not, why try to stop them. The way to lose them is to give them their space. Fighting thoughts and trying to rid yourself of them is the wrong thing to do. It is a battle you will lose for sure. Some people say they only have to hear something on the news about a new illness and they are convinced they have it. Many can't understand why they get such a reaction to some bad news which may not even concern them. The answer to this is simple and sums this chapter up. Your body is just in a sensitised state at the moment and this is the only reason that thoughts exaggerate themselves. This section from an email sums up what I am trying to say. Hi Paul, I understand now about the need to not let thoughts bother me or doubt and question them. Whatever goes on in my head is fine. I realise that in my present state I SHOULD have anxious thoughts, I am anxious after all. I have learnt to not accept the thought as truth and accept it as just a thought brought on by my anxious state. Thank you for your explanation. I also explained that when anxiety fades, so do the anxious thoughts, but the above is exactly what I wanted to hear. It just needed an explanation that he could understand and relate to. The following explanation came on my blog from a lady I had been helping. She had recovered and decided to post how she managed to get over this particular symptom of anxiety. I understand now that all that we are doing is tuning into our over active imagination, which has probably always been there and popped various thoughts into our mind, but in the - 52 - past we’ve always ignored them. It’s as if once you have suffered from anxiety you listen to every negative thought and then question why it’s there and why it won’t go away, whereas if you just ignore it, it actually does goes away. What I am trying to say to give some help and support to people is try not to over analyse everything, question every thought, or worry what’s wrong with you. There is actually nothing wrong with any of us, we’re all human and naturally experience thoughts, feelings, and moods, so just accept them and try not to question them or consider them as being weird. I receive a lot of visits to my site from ladies who have recently been through a pregnancy and then go on to suffer with irrational thoughts. This lady is now fully recovered. Here is her story: I understand now that a negative reaction to just one thought can lead you into a downward spiral of obsessive thinking. It did for me. I was 7 months pregnant at the time and had never encountered anything like it before in my life/nor with my first child who was 9 at the time. I was on bed rest for pregnancy complications and had ‘normal’ pregnancy worries, but it was very difficult being alone all day. Then, out of the blue, something was said which I couldn’t get out of my mind and this lead to obsessive thoughts about my unborn baby’s health, which then developed into more obscure obsessive thoughts about harming my own child. I was in such a bad state I walked to the local hospital and they kept me in for 3 months. At the time, I hadn’t found this site, and had never heard of antenatal anxiety/depression before, so didn’t know what I had. I thought it was the deterioration of my mental health and that I was becoming schizophrenic or going crazy. The hospital weren’t much help to be honest, and I spent much of my day on my own in bed obsessing, and became afraid to leave my hospital room. I convinced myself that I was a bad mother, would never be - 53 - able to look after my own child, and would need psychiatric treatment for the rest of my life. Then when my baby was born, they sent me packing with my newborn and some ADs, which I took for 4 months…and very little else. During the first year I plodded along without knowing (or believing) what was actually wrong with me really, and I avoided ‘normal’ situations with which I felt uncomfortable. In hindsight, this was the wrong thing to do, as it wasn’t until I actually faced my fears that I started to recover. But, of course I didn’t know this is what was necessary to recover. I thought I needed to rest and one day I would wake up and be back to normal, but it never happened. It was a very difficult year, and I had the most terrible thoughts which I couldn’t control and I walked around with DP for most of the day, barely functioning really, trapped in my own little world with my terrible thoughts. It was after the first year that I came across very helpful information on the internet and read stories of those who had recovered. I joined a forum for those suffering from Post Natal Depression and this has helped me enormously. This is when I came across Paul as well, and the start of my recovery began. What you must do is NOT avoid your fears. In fact if you fear something, DO MORE OF IT, pay no heed to the intrusive thoughts, they are not actions. When a thought enters your head, the moment a negative emotion is attached to it and you are probably having that sickly feeling in the pit of your stomach, you need to get rid of this emotion and adopt a ‘whatever’, ‘as if’ attitude to your thoughts. It takes time and effort, but the rewards are huge and if you can recreate this new emotion - a ‘don’t care’ emotion - then you will be able to dismiss the thoughts as utter rubbish and they will diminish. At the moment, the fear - 54 - you feel for the thoughts is what is keeping them coming. Once the fear has gone they will have no hold over you whatsoever and you can also adopt this new attitude to chronic worries as well. At first, this don’t care/whatever attitude may ‘feel’ false as if you are having to fake it, but like one doctor said in an article I read, you need to ‘fake it to make it’. Kiss, cuddle, smile, talk to your kids/grandkids, even if you have no feeling or inappropriate feelings/thoughts, and it will come naturally in time. This is so very true and I can personally vouch for it. You must practice the behaviour you want to achieve - in your case it means no ‘negative’ emotion attached to an intrusive thought. I promise you that in time, if you just follow these few behaviour changes, you will notice less obsessive/intrusive thoughts. It won’t happen overnight because you will have doubts to begin with, but in the weeks and months ahead, your mind will slowly clear and you will begin to notice a difference. At the height of my suffering, I was pushing my baby in his pram to pick up my other son from school and I saw a knitting needle on the ground. I immediately panicked and went into a series of ‘what if’ thoughts. Following is the dialogue I had in my mind at that time: “Oh no, I wish I hadn’t seen that” “Mustn’t look at it as I might pick it up” “What if I pick it up” “What if I do something to my baby with it in an irrational moment”, as I imagined myself doing something terrible. “What if people knew what I was thinking. They might take my kids away from me” “What if I’m like those I see on the news” “What if I am like this forever and never recover” I am having heart palpitations by this time and have made myself scared to death - 55 - “What if they lock me up in a psychiatric ward and I never come out again” “What if I never see my kids again” “I am a waste of space and not fit to be a mother” Just look at my irrational thought pattern. I don’t remember the exact thoughts I had during this scenario, but they were in a similar vein to the ones I have mentioned and in fact lots of my thoughts contained elements of the above. What I should have said to myself (with a contemptuous response) when I saw that knitting needle was “What a load of rubbish, as if” and I should have walked on. This would have saved me from spiralling into what was a downward spiral of continual obsessive thoughts for the rest of the day and making myself utterly miserable. I suffered more with paranoid thinking than scary thoughts. I became a people pleaser, worried about what everyone thought about me. I may have said something to someone and then I would spend my day worrying about whether or not I had upset them. Again it was my anxious state making me think this way. I began to understand this and let these paranoid thoughts go. They were not real and so they were getting no respect from me. I stopped being a people pleaser, stopped worrying about what people thought and stopped worrying in case I had upset someone. I was back in control and not my anxious thinking. This helped me so much in the future and brought some much needed confidence back. Here is an email I received that I wanted to share with you, again from someone who suffered after her pregnancy. Hi Paul, I am suffering from post natal depression according to my doctors, but I don’t feel depressed. I feel anxious all the time, my head is racing with scary, irrational, bizarre thoughts and visions and I got so bad that I couldn’t be on my own with my children because the thoughts would always come and scare the hell out of me. Your site and your book, especially the section about obsessive thoughts, have helped me so much. I cried when I read it! I seriously thought I was - 56 - going mad or turning into a nasty person thinking such awful scary things about me and my loved ones. These frightening thoughts raced around my mind all day and the anxiety and panic would flare up as soon as I let a thought scare me. They are still there now and sometimes still do scare me a little as they seem to come from nowhere at times, but with your advice I am learning to just let them be and it has helped me so much. For once I can see light at the end of the tunnel. I no longer let a thought stop me doing something; in fact I go against them. If a silly, intrusive thought comes telling me not to do something, I do it all the more and I feel I am back in control. This has been a real insight to me and I can only thank you. My reply was: TRUST me with a capital T, that there is absolutely nothing wrong with you. This is very common with anxiety and it is all the hormones and stress that cause these thoughts. Anxiety just needs a release and this manifests itself in strange, scary thoughts. TRUST me 100% and just do as you say. Smile at them if you wish. Say 'yes, as if' it’s just my anxiety finding an escape route. I had such thoughts and just paid them no respect. In time, without the fuel of fear, my anxiety levels dropped and became weaker and weaker. I was so used to not letting them bother me that they just became a very slight annoyance and lost their importance. Regards Paul In the past I have helped people voluntarily, answered emails and also run a blog. Below are some of the posts, replies and conversations from that time which I thought were worth saving. A lot of the replies are from people who have recovered or were well on their way to recovery. A few words from Diane, who started to really understand the message I was passing on to her. The post comes from my personal blog. - 57 - I remember a few months back reading a post from a lady who said something like “today I have done as Paul says and finally given up the fight” and she mentioned that she was now ready to let the anxiety be there for as long as it needed to be. I would read and re-read that post because it gave me a lot of hope. I can finally say that after two years of suffering from anxiety, I think I am at that place and truly understand what this lady was saying. I used to wonder how I would get there or when I would find peace. Lately I have been focusing on just living my life for me and not the anxiety and then the other day as I was walking up to the front door of my house, I felt this sense of calm and understanding. The anxiety was still there but I truly felt as though it was OK. It was there but it meant nothing and it wasn’t going to hurt me. I have since experienced moments in the day when I realize I don’t feel it at all and there is a feeling of space in my chest where there was once a painful tightening. It really takes practice too to spot when I automatically start adding fear to my anxiety symptoms, but I am getting much better at that too. My mind still churns out some silly thoughts and the sleeping thing is at times not great, but all of this is starting to not matter that much. I was making recovery way too important and just focusing on how to rid myself of how I felt instead of just living and seeing what came along naturally, I was definitely trying to fight my way to recovery! I am sure that there are going to be moments in the future when I will need to re-learn this, but I have more confidence in my ability to come through it now. John’s story, again a post from my blog: Anxiety just does not seem to matter to me anymore. If, for whatever reason, I feel a wave of anxiety, I just let ‘whatever’ happen to me and I have definitely had many rewards during recovery. At the moments when we are feeling at our worst, we have a choice. We can either (a) make ourselves worse by worrying, fighting and trying to think our way out, or (b) let - 58 - ‘whatever’ happen to us and with a small amount of time we’re fine again. It always sorts itself out. Regarding what Paul said about little things not bothering him anymore, I have realised how much I have worried in my life about silly, insignificant things. If somebody spills a pint down your new jeans - aah, it’s slightly annoying but it really doesn’t matter. It starts raining as soon as you’ve put the washing out …bummer, but at the end of the day these things happen. This is my new attitude to many aspects of my life, and the best thing is I don’t have to try, it’s coming naturally! Another point I’d like to mention is that recently my girlfriend has been really stressed about exams and revision and has been losing sleep through stress and worry. One day she said to me, ‘I’m lost; whatever I try to do I just can’t get to sleep’. So I said to her, don’t try to get to sleep, just let everything go and if you sleep well then great and if you don’t, you don’t. She couldn’t believe that something as simple as ‘not doing anything’ had eased her sleeping troubles. It felt strange to be the teacher instead of the pupil on anxiety, ha ha! Now that I have finally let go of the battle, I know it is not one that can be won. It is no longer important to rid myself of the anxiety. When I have bad thoughts or feel anxious, it’s not important to me to try to rid myself of them anymore. I don’t feel the need to repeat sayings in my head, such as ‘I accept this’, hoping that if I believed it enough this awful thing would go away. I can’t explain it so I won’t try, but I am feeling positive. I have finally let go of the battle and found peace regardless of the fact that I still have anxiety. Each day was a struggle before, wondering when this awful feeling would go away. Now I couldn’t care less if it takes months or years and I truly mean that. I know 100% and believe this thing will pass in its own time when my body has recovered. Anxiety may have filled the past few years with fear, but the future is mine now and I am - 59 - not going to spend a single day worrying whether or not it is going to be there. I also believe that striving for acceptance of this condition can become a battle in itself. As soon as I let go and started to live anyway with this thing beside me, the acceptance of my condition came to me automatically. Below is an email from Jeff, someone that was almost housebound when he first read my book and landed on my site. This e-mail is not to question anything. This e-mail is not to try to figure anything out. This e-mail is just a response to everything you have been helping me with. Paul, you have saved my life and helped me begin to recover. The physical feelings of anxiety are SLOWLY beginning to subside. Believe me when I say it is slow, but I cannot explain it, I just feel different, and a good different at that. I have faith in myself now. It's crazy; it's very difficult at first. How in the hell am I supposed to get through the day with how I feel? If I just accept it and go on with my day, this will overtake me. I must try to control it so that it does not do that! That is the attitude I used to have. I was just stressing my tired body out more! So I finally said ENOUGH IS ENOUGH! I woke up this past Monday morning and I said to myself, "Okay Jeff, you may feel crappy today, but you have these things you need to do at work. You need to get the binders done, you have to make all these copies, you have XYZ projects to work on, get these things done and don't just sit at your desk all day and worry about the way you are feeling". My goodness was it hard to do that. It was so hard because I have being doing the opposite for so long. Then I did it on Tuesday, and Wednesday, and Thursday, and today! I went out with my roommates on Wednesday and Thursday night, and not because I floated there, but because I actually WANTED to! And tonight I look forward to the

apprehensive about going anywhere and my nerves had settled as I had not bombarded them with worry and self pity. Freed from the daily onslaught it used to receive, my mind had begun to clear and my confidence had returned. I had proved I could do anything and that I was in charge and not my anxiety. I was beginning to take charge again and the old me was returning. By living like the average man in the street, I was becoming like the average man in the street. I was getting my life back. Paul I do try to include my own real life situations in the hope that it will help people to understand a little more, as I believe that it is much better than just writing down information. The following post is entitled “Taking a Break from Anxiety” I hope everyone enjoyed a bit of ‘off topic’ in the last post. We did seem to go back on topic from time to time, but we shared some stories and some laughs and got to know a little more about each - 72 - other. This was not just an off topic subject, it was also designed to give people a break and leads me on to my next topic. I know Scarlet has mentioned the need to take a break to others and I have mentioned it a lot in my book and in the past, so I thought that if I put up a post about it and explained it in a little more detail, it may help people. It is very important to take some time out from the subject of anxiety. It’s great to finally find helpful information and read up on this topic, but sometimes people can immerse themselves far too much in the subject, searching on Google for symptom after symptom and spending hours looking for the answers that will make it all go away. People who have been here for a while will know that last year I set up a forum and within a few weeks closed it down. Not only had I taken on too much, but I felt that in the long run it was not helping people on here. I have never liked forums as they can become addictive and people spend far too much time on them, talking about their problems and trying to help others with theirs. They reading about other people’s symptoms, day in, day out, and miss out on the vital time outs that we need. It is the same if someone is depressed and goes on a forum hearing other people’s stories of depression each day. It tends to just drag you down even further. The mistake so many make is that they chase recovery and don’t let it come to them. By this I mean they will spend hours every day looking up all their symptoms and chasing that elusive cure that will make a symptom go away instantly. I can’t tell you how much time I wasted trying to ‘rid’ myself of anxiety rather than just living with the anxiety there. I never considered just living and allowing my body to regain its balance. I fought with myself daily and as far as I was concerned, I just had to get rid of these feelings. I kept asking myself “Why do I feel like this? Why am I not getting better? Will this ever go away? What if I do this, that and the other – will it help? I never gave myself a break from the subject and made the mistake of trying to fight and think my way better. This has the same effect as hitting a broken leg with a hammer, it will never recover. - 73 - It is also very important to place all symptoms under the umbrella of anxiety and not try to separate and work on each one individually. Nothing saddens me more than people asking for advice here on a certain symptom, then asking about another the day after and then another a week later. I just know that they are going to go round in circles finding something else to worry about and something else to Google. You don’t need to separate each symptom, just see anxiety as one. Worrying about each symptom individually will create 20 different things to worry about. By putting it all under the umbrella of anxiety, you can never have more than one. I went from being a person who did nothing but consume himself with how he felt, hiding away from everything and spending my days feeling sorry for myself, to one who just said ‘enough is enough’. The only way to feel normal again is to live as normal a life as possible. So instead of feeling sorry for myself, I would go for a swim. Instead of worrying about how I felt, I would get my bike out and go for a ride. Instead of spending hours trying to figure a way out of this hell, I would take a walk. Instead of hiding away, I began to socialise again. Doing these things felt odd at first as I was changing a habit I had developed, but by just living my life and not living it trying to rid myself of anxiety each day, I felt the old me returning and I began to feel more normal. My day consisted of something else other than being immersing in how I felt. My mind had been given a break and had something else to concentrate on. I remember going for a swim when I was probably at my worst, full of anxiety and D.P. I just wanted to shut the world away and not go out, but I went. I arrived in the changing rooms and felt weird, but I got changed and went into the pool. I was somewhere else half the time, my mind reverting back to me, but it was OK. I knew that things would not change overnight. I finished my swim and got changed and again felt odd and a little anxious, but that was fine. When I arrived home I was happy that I had done what I did and felt just a little better; nothing major, just a little better. I went every week after that, never demanding or expecting anything, and within a few weeks I felt almost normal at times, when at first it was the other way around. - 74 - I remember when I first felt as though I had recovered, I had an odd feeling of strangeness. That’s because feeling normal felt strange, a bit like a prisoner feels when first freed from jail. My body needed time to adjust to feeling normal. This is what I mean when I say recovery comes in layers. A lot of people don’t want to go through anxiety. They just think ‘yes, yes, that is all well and good, but I would rather have the quick route and find the answer to make it all go away today’. So off they go on their merry way, googling again, going on numerous forums asking questions on how to get rid of this damn thing and they just end up going around in circles, chasing their own tail and getting nowhere. On the subject of forums, some are good, but there are many that are poorly moderated and people who are looking for help often end up trying to help others, the result being that you end up with lots of conflicting advice that helps nobody. Also, as I have previously mentioned, I believe they can become addictive and people can end up spending too much time on there and not just living their life. So, to sum up, live your life however you feel. Don’t let anxiety make decisions for you. Go out and do things. Doing so may seem weird at first, but that’s OK as you are changing a habit. But living a normal life is where normal feelings, emotions and your body’s reactions will return. Do everything you would normally do if you did not have anxiety or depersonalisation. That is the key. It’s OK to have anxiety, its OK to have depersonalisation. This needs to be your attitude which is the opposite of spending your day trying to rid yourself of it. - 75 - Chapter 9 OTHER SYMPTOMS EXPLAINED Here I am going to cover different symptoms which hopefully will help to ease certain worries that people have. It is important to realise that all symptoms subside and merge into one as our anxiety levels go down, so don’t fall into the trap of thinking you have to deal with each symptom individually or that one symptom is more important than the other. Headaches There are two types of headache. Firstly, there is the common headache from which we all suffer from time to time and then there is the headache that can feel as if you have a tight band around your head, which is something I suffered from. The most common question I have been asked when this happens is: "Have I got a brain tumour?” What people need to realise is that our head is full of scalp muscles and when we are tense, these muscles tighten and we develop a headache, or what I would describe as a feeling of tightness around the head. Again, it is nothing to worry about. When you learn to accept this and give it as little attention as possible, you may find it eases as your muscles relax. I always tell people not to try to do anything about it. Symptoms hate to be ignored and this applies to them all. Learn to question none of them. Trouble sleeping Many people tell me they have trouble sleeping when suffering with anxiety and they try everything to get a good nights rest, but to no avail. I also went through this and a lot of this is the result of an over active mind. What I did was to let my mind chatter away if need be and not ‘try’ to get to sleep. I had the attitude that if I sleep, I sleep and if not, well so be it. This attitude of not putting pressure on - 76 - myself to sleep helped enormously and is the advice I give to everyone. Don’t put pressure on yourself to sleep, but just let you mind go where it wants and you may find things much easier. Trouble swallowing Some people say that they have trouble swallowing or feel a constant lump in their throat. Below is some advice I once gave to a lady wanting help with this symptom. Do not try and control your swallowing because by doing this you are fighting and trying to do something about it. It is the same with any symptom. The more of an issue it becomes and the more you fight it, the tougher things can become. If you have a little trouble swallowing then accept that you do and you will find it easier. Don’t try and make your swallowing perfect. Accept the fact that you find it difficult at times and as you automatically relax with this attitude, you may find things become easier. This is quite common as we have many muscles within our throat and when we are anxious, we can find it difficult to swallow. Just take the advice above and see how you go on. Blurred vision A lot of people complain about this and it was one of the more bewildering symptoms that I suffered from also. Everything appears to be covered in a haze or objects look blurred and you feel as if you can’t quite focus on them properly. The reason for this is that our eyes contain muscles and when we are anxious, these muscles tighten which affects our vision and causes the symptoms described above. This is merely our body playing tricks on us and is nothing to worry about. I know this is a sentence that I use often, but it is true. People who are anxious have a tendency to worry about everything, as I did. Everything gets magnified in our tired mind and we need to realise that when we are healthy again, these fears will hold no weight whatsoever. - 77 - Churning stomach/shaking hands You may wonder why I have covered two symptoms in one here, but I feel the explanation for both is so closely related that there is no point in separating them. First of all, let me explain something to you. If anybody, healthy or not, had a job interview or a driving test on any given day, they would probably suffer the symptoms described above. However, they would not see them as too much of a problem as they would expect to feel this way. And that’s the point - these symptoms are just created by our excited nerves. It’s your nerves that make your hands shake and your stomach churn. There is no need to see them as anything different. They are merely there because your nerves are sensitised, so don’t shy away from them or try to control them. Take a look at them and see for yourself. Is it that serious that these feelings, which are only natural in the circumstances, should consume your day? Is it such a bad thing that your stomach should churn or that your hands should shake? If you had sprained your wrist, you would be able to carry on with your day without much attention to it, so why pay attention to something that is only normal in the circumstances. You may find that the less attention you pay to your nerves, the less you excite them. In other words, if your stomach churns, let it churn and if your hands shake, let them shake, paying them as little attention as possible. I used to say “my nerves are sensitised and I am going to feel like this for the time being - it is only natural”. Again, taking the fear out of how you feel helps them to settle and adds no more adrenalin, giving them the space to start to recover, or de-sensitise as I like to describe it. Ringing ears This is another common symptom and one I also went through. It is said that this symptom can be due to a side effect of anti depressants or other medication. The reasons as to why people with anxiety can suffer from time to time with ringing ears are still inconclusive. I put it down to the fact that the body is a little out of balance due to anxiety and stress. As my anxiety left, so did this - 78 - symptom. In fact it did not last long at all and after talking to others who suffered with this symptom, they also spoke of it as being temporary. Feeling guilty A lot of people who suffer from anxiety experience feelings of guilt and somehow think that this means they are weak. This guilt is brought about by the realisation that someone who at one time could do things so easily, now struggles to get through the day. They may be in a relationship, or have children, and feel guilty that they can no longer do the things they once could with their partner or children. They may even fight their way through the day, putting on an act to prove to themselves that this thing will not get the better of them, only to go to bed at night more tired and anxious than ever. Anxiety can affect people from every profession, even doctors, the very people we first go to for help, so let me stress that you have nothing to feel guilty about. Some partners may be very understanding about how you feel, but some may not. They may put pressure on you to ‘pull yourself together’ and the constant strain of trying to cope can tire you further, your partner’s lack of understanding hindering recovery. Thankfully, I did have an understanding partner and I explained to her that the person she could see was not the real me. I asked her to bear with me and told her that I wanted to be the person I once was and that, in time, I would be. I lost a few friends, as I was never available to go out. Certain people at work would snub me as I hardly spoke, but I did not wallow in self-pity! I knew I had to let all this negative stuff go and because of what I had been taught, I was not going to add any more worry to the mix. I also knew that I could sort all those problems out later when I was better. At times, I felt like I was playing a role in a film, acting to try to appear normal while other days attempting to hide how I felt. The pressure I felt trying to maintain this act, day after day, was immense and eventually I stopped trying to be the person I thought I should be. So if you see yourself in this way, learn to put yourself first. You cannot keep trying to be the person you once were. You need to stop putting on an act, admit that you are no longer the person you - 79 - used to be and tell yourself that you don’t have to keep up this pretence any longer. If you have an understanding partner, then great, you have the support you need. If not, I would suggest that you start talking to each other and ask your partner to listen. You can even suggest that they read this and explain to them just how much you need their support while you recover. If they truly care, then they will understand and give you this support. A lot of their anger is caused by frustration, frustration that the person they see is not the person they fell in love with and they want you back as much as you do. A little more understanding from them may give you the freedom to start recovering. Self-pity is another emotion that can drag you further into your illness. Again this stems from a reluctance to accept the way you are as you ask yourself the question ‘Why me?’ Constantly feeling sorry for yourself can only eat away at your self-confidence and cause you to feel more and more depressed about the way you feel. It is very easy to fall into this trap and I cannot stress enough just how important it is to accept how you feel and harbour as little self-pity as possible. Self-pity is a destructive emotion that will only prolong your negative feelings. You don’t need negative thinking during your time of recovery, so let all the negative thoughts go and build on the positives. LOSS OF CONFIDENCE When I was ill, my confidence plummeted. I felt as if I was worthless and had nothing interesting to say. I did not see the point to anything and felt as if I just existed. That is what anxiety does to you. It robs you of your personality, robs you of your confidence and robs you of your identity. My own experience caused me to feel as if my emotions and feelings had become frozen. Some people say they can’t even feel love for the people they really care about and others don’t feel any emotions at all. This is exactly how I felt. Nothing anyone could do or say could make me happy. They could have put a million pounds in front of me and I would not have even smiled. I felt numb and there were times when I thought I would never smile again. My only thought was recovering from the way I felt. I can tell - 80 - those of you who feel like this that your emotions do come back in recovery. Your confidence and personality gradually return in little strips, building up in layers, until eventually you feel like the person you were before you became ill. If you do suffer from a lack of confidence, then there is no better boost to your self-esteem than getting on the road to recovery and feeling the joy that comes with it. If you were a confident person before, that confidence will return or become even greater. I feel more confident now than I was before I became ill. All the hurdles I have passed and the experiences I have come through have helped me to grow into a stronger person. Can I just share with you a sentence that I believe helps to build confidence, and it really works: Never say yes when you mean no, and never say no when you means yes - simple but effective. I am sure most people can identify with this statement. Trying to find a cause Too many people spend too much time trying to find a reason for why they feel like they do, searching for that childhood memory that they believe must have triggered it off in the first place. In some cases, something may have happened in a person’s earlier life that they may need to talk through with a professional and, if this is the case, then it may help to do this before they can start on the road to recovery. In a lot of cases, however, too much importance is placed on finding a root cause. Surely the only thing that really matters is, not why we began to feel like this in the first place, but how to recover. So if you find yourself back tracking in an attempt to find a root cause for the way you feel and you believe that gaining this knowledge is an important part of your recovery, then go ahead and find a professional with whom you can talk things through. If, however, you are like me and it no longer matters how it all started and all you want to do is recover, then let it go, just move on and concentrate on what is important to you - recovery. You have no control over the past but you do have control over your future. - 81 - Chapter 10 WE NEED ONE ROAD One point that I think is extremely important, and I really would like to get through to you all, is that we need one way, one road and one that feels right. You can't have three different therapists, numerous different books and two different programmes all running alongside each other. All this does is to confuse you, putting more pressure on your tired mind, which needs rest more than anything else. Your mind is just too tired to be bombarded with different information every day. Find one way and put all the rest to one side. Find one road, one that feels right, and stick to it. Do you see how this works? Yes, we all want to be better today, not tomorrow, but this is what keeps us ill - impatience. We search around thinking there must be something out there, something we have missed, so we go from one idea to another, praying that each will work and within a couple of weeks/months, we feel we are back to square one. Do not be impatient with yourself, watching the weeks go by and thinking you should be better by now. You are just putting more pressure on yourself. Let your body recover at its own pace and do not watch anxiously for recovery. Just choose one road to follow and stick to it. It stops all that searching around in your mind for an answer, tiring your mind even further and putting you under more stress, when this is the last thing you need. Forget that miracle cure that has eluded you, it is not there. You did not feel like this overnight and you won’t be cured overnight; your body needs time to heal. This statement can sometimes help people as it makes them finally realise they don’t have to keep searching for an answer or looking for that elusive cure - the cure lies within them. Once you are on the road to recovery, it can be great just to experience the improvement in the way you feel. Before I recovered I was the same, searching for that elusive treatment, and I can honestly say that I tried every treatment going and not one of them felt right. At times I felt as though I was taking - 82 - my driving test again as I struggled to learn how to get on the road to recovery, but the more knowledge I gained, the more everything made sense. Recovery will come, but let it happen in its own time. Please do not put a time limit on it. Everybody is different and some people will recover more quickly than others. Trust me, just be patient and your body will take care of itself. Look at it another way: If five million people around the world had a broken leg, not one of them would be healed within 24 hours. If five million people around the world had anxiety not one of them would be anxiety free in 24 hours whatever treatment they found - FACT. But this is what you are asking of yourself when you search for that miracle cure. When I first heard the words “Paul you don’t have to fight this thing”, I felt so relieved. It was such a weight off my shoulders. I said, “Oh my God, that’s such a relief. I thought if I didn’t fight this thing and try to stop it coming, I was somehow failing myself”. It was like the end of a war, the battle with myself was now over and it was such a relief. Can you see how this one sentence took away so much stress from me? It meant I did not have to tense against it and constantly search around in my mind, day in, day out, trying to discover the miracle cure. I could also stop running around from one therapist to another, one treatment to another, wasting more and more money and being deflated yet again as treatment after treatment failed. I am sure most of you will recognise this pattern. It is the people who make it their daily aim to get better, who may find they are getting worse. This makes total sense, as their whole day/week becomes a battle. This is a very important statement to understand. So, don’t try and rush recovery; your body will heal in its own time. Do not fall into the trap that can keep you ill, wanting to escape from the way you feel today. Don’t let impatience hold you back. Even deep into my recovery, old fears kept resurfacing, but I knew that I just needed to let them go and they did not hang around for long! - 83 - Sometimes this new way of thinking will make sense and come easily one day and then the next day it will be gone. This is something that happened to me, but it is just your memory trying to suck you back into old habits. Accept these days and keep practicing the new way until it becomes your new habit. Just stay on the road and as your memory fades your new habits will take over. Trust me, it works. When we seem to go backwards This is one of the most important things and is something I failed at more than anything during my recovery, even when I had been warned about it. Since I have recovered, I now know how important this is. Setbacks - what are they? When I knew I was on the right path, I had days when I felt better than I had ever felt before, but I was warned: “Paul you may have had a week/month of feeling great and think you have finally cracked it, then, wham, you have the worst day/week ever and think you are back at square one. This can happen, so do not think you have not moved forward - you have”. Well, I listened to this advice and what did I do? The exact opposite of what I was told to do. I started questioning it all over again, falling into the trap of telling myself that this was not working. I thought I had recovered and now I felt worse than ever. I did this on numerous occasions, feeling great one week and terrible the next, until it was eventually drummed into me that this was only to be expected and is part and parcel of recovery. Once I started accepting these setbacks, they occurred less frequently; I had finally got it. I now know how much not accepting these setbacks held me back and I cannot stress enough that if, as part of your recovery, you are experiencing days when you feel you have made no progress, then just accept them and don’t let them throw you back. - 84 - It was also explained to me that there was a period when I had felt terrible all the time, so surely this up and down affair should make me realise that for once I was moving forward. Trust me, even during your deepest setback, you never lose what you have learnt or the progress you have made; it is always there stored away. Old memories can still be fresh in your mind and return at the most unexpected times. This is only to be expected, but just let them go. Don’t question why you feel so bad today, when you felt so good last week. It is not important so just accept these days as part of your recovery. Also, when I first received the help necessary to put me on the path to recovery, I was told that I might feel worse in the beginning. I did not understand this because, as far as I was concerned, getting help should have made me feel better. Well, I was wrong again. The reason for this, as I now realise, is that when you are scared of anxiety and in fear of it through lack of understanding, every mention of the word can be enough to make you feel more anxious. So by putting yourself in the front line of battle, you are putting yourselves in situations you may have avoided for a very long time. I was also told that when anxiety has been explained to you and you fear it less, gradually you will be able to think about it and talk about it more without feeling any worse. The more you learn, the less you fear it, which is how it worked for me. That is why I teach understanding, which I believe is one of the most important parts of recovery. I can now talk about anxiety all day and read as much as I like without any bad feelings whatsoever. I have no fear of it anymore and I live in a body that is no longer sensitised and a mind that is no longer worn out through worry. Nerves are easily triggered When people find themselves in a state of anxiety, the slightest noise or incident can trigger their nerves and make them feel anxious. There is a simple explanation for this. When your nerves are tired, they are already vibrating. Compare them to a tuning fork. If you hit a tuning fork on a table, it would vibrate, wouldn’t it? If you hit it again while it was still vibrating, well then it would vibrate even - 85 - more - agreed? Well, in your case, your nerves are the tuning fork and the vibrating is your nerve endings, so another little knock on the table or the slightest trigger sends them off to a higher level. Something that you could just have dismissed when your nerves were healthy, i.e. a sudden shock, maybe a door slamming or just seeing something that slightly scares you, now makes you feel panicky. Because your nerves are sensitised your nerves are on red alert and little fears become exaggerated. A healthy body resembles the tuning fork that has not been hit on the table and is very still. The slight knock on the table would hardly be felt and you would not experience any symptoms. That is why your fears seem out of proportion - your nerves are sensitised and you feel anxious and panicky for very little reason. This is the only difference. Your nerves just need time to calm down, until the slightest knock will no longer send you into a wave of panic. That is what happens when you decide to just get on with your day and not add more worry and fear to how you are feeling, it is the letting go that calms them. It calms the tuning fork so that it does not vibrate as readily and once more your nerves become just like those in a healthy body. The above explanation is one that I used to help me understand. It is the one that helped me to recognise that my bad nerves were just vibrating and, in time, they would calm down, until they vibrated no more. I seem to have lost who I am, how do I begin to feel like me again? This is a question I get asked a lot and the answer is just live your life as normal. Your anxiety wants you to hide away, avoid situations and make excuses. It wants you to become a hermit and a slave to it, but from today I want you to do the opposite and go towards it. It is never caused by the lady you meet in the street. It is never the social situation you have made excuses for. It is all about avoiding a feeling and I know for a fact I recovered because I stopped avoiding and did the exact opposite. I used to hide away at home, hide if it looked like I may have to talk to someone in the street that I knew - 86 - and make excuses not to go places. Eventually the light came on and I decided that I was never going to move forward by acting this way? I knew I had to do the complete opposite of what my instincts told me and just thought ‘I don’t care how I feel - what happens, happens. I am just going to go everywhere at will. This is no life’. So I did go everywhere and interacted with people again. I was putting myself in places and situations that I had not been in for a while. Things gradually improved as my body was saying: ‘Hey there is no danger here. You were avoiding a feeling, not the neighbour, not the friend’s barbecue, just a feeling! There’s no problem here Paul’. As time went by, I began to desensitise, and going places and meeting people just became easier. So keep moving forward. If your anxiety makes you think there’s no point to anything, don’t let it bluff you. I had to go through many things I had once loved doing, feeling anxious and wondering what the point was, but the more you do it, the more normal feelings will return to that area of your life. If you don’t feel like doing something because you’re anxious, just see it as a negative thought caused by your anxiety. Go against it, do what you used to enjoy doing and eventually you will enjoy it again. The worst thing you can do is to tell yourself that you will make an effort to enjoy yourself once the anxiety has gone. You have to go through the motions while still feeling anxious in order to bring back the normal feelings of enjoyment again. Paul How do I stop it? This little section came up because of the amount of emails I receive that start with the phrase ‘Paul, how do I stop it’. Well this is something that I get asked about all the time. Examples of this would be ‘How do I stop these feelings of panic? How do I stop myself thinking scary thoughts? How do I stop feeling anxious? The list goes on and on. What I want to get across is that it is all about ‘don’t do’ than ‘do’. My answer is always the same ‘Don’t try to stop feelings of panic - 87 - coming – just let the adrenalin come without fighting or pushing it away. Don’t try to stop scary thoughts coming - give them their space. Don’t try to stop anxiety coming - you cannot control it anyway. Let the feelings be there and try not to let them frustrate you’. I rarely, if ever, tell anyone to ‘do something about it’ or try and ‘control how you feel’. If you just let feelings and thoughts be there, you stop fighting, worrying, controlling and trying to figure it all out. Basically you stop the very things that keep you in the cycle. Refresh your mind During my recovery, I indulged in too much self-pity, which is easy for me to admit to now. It caused me to refuse to bother with anything - getting dressed, my appearance, going out and meeting friends - and I was generally left feeling sorry for myself. Try not to wallow in any self-pity. It only causes your mind to become less active, when it really needs something to concentrate on and something to freshen it up. The same routine, day in, day out, can make it stale. If you are one of those people who stay in bed or mope around the house all day without getting dressed, this is for you. Just try to take an interest in something, no matter how difficult it is to motivate yourself, and do as much as you feel you can. In my case, I drew a little and went for walks with my dog, which did refresh me and gave me something else to concentrate on apart from myself and how I felt. If you are housebound, I know this may be out of the question so soon, but just get out of that bed in the morning, take a shower and take a little interest in the day, even if it’s just cleaning the bathroom or starting a job around the house, a new hobby, anything that gives you a new focus. Give your day a meaning and you may find it refreshes that dull, tired mind of yours. Doing this breaks up the day and stops you going through the same routine day in, day out. Just as people with healthy minds need to stimulate them, so do those of us who suffer from anxiety. It helps to give you something else to think about and uses a part of your brain that you may not have known existed. It also breaks the chain of habit. Too many people want to hide away at home and just ‘wish it away’. Unfortunately, it does not work like that. Recovery comes through changes and a break in habits and no amount of self-pity - 88 - and wanting something to happen will help. You need to come out of the safety zone and make some changes. What I really don’t want you to do is wallow in self-pity all day, asking yourself “what’s the point?” Just do something you used to enjoy, even if at first it feels like a huge effort. When you are feeling so anxious, everything does feel like an effort. Don’t wait for that moment when you feel like going out, that moment never comes. Do something today and you never know, you just might find you actually enjoy it. The above really helped me to recover. I had become stuck in a rut, going through the same routine every day. Going out and doing something different with my day refreshed my mind and broke through the habit of constantly thinking about myself. My mind became refreshed within its new surroundings and it was given another focus which helped rid it of that dull feeling. It really is important to shake those cobwebs from your mind and give it the chance to refresh itself. People sometimes say “But how can I get up and do things when I feel so numb and empty? I just want to hide away”. My answer is always the same. Go along with the numbness and emptiness, it’s a normal progression of the condition. Don’t wait until you are better to start living. Living your life is what brings back the old you. Accept recovery can take time This is a very important point, so please read through this section very carefully and absorb the contents. No matter how many times I tell people to step back and let recovery take care of itself, they still try to stop symptoms coming and try to rush feeling better. Let me explain something. What I had was a nervous breakdown. This basically occurs because your body can only take so much. When you are going through a prolonged period of stress and worry, your body cannot cope so it shuts down. It has reached breaking point and has said enough is enough. This may lead to feelings of anxiousness, feelings of panic and feelings of detachment. It does - 89 - not matter what the symptoms are, it is your body saying “I can take no more”. This is where the word breakdown comes in, because that is really all it is. Now all your body is asking for is a rest and time to rejuvenate itself. Do we give it that time? No! Through no fault of our own, we then worry about these symptoms, worry we are going mad and wonder why we feel so tired and emotionless. This puts more worry and strain on our already tired body and we may begin to feel worse. We tell ourselves we must get a grip of this thing, so we fight it and worry even more. Well I think you can now see why these symptoms persist. This is exactly what I did for all those years while I suffered. In fact I was worrying because I had been ill for so long and my days were filled with fighting and worry. One day I just accepted that okay, this is me now. I actually understand why I feel like this. I need to give my mind and body a rest. I need to stop trying to make myself feel better and stop worrying about how I feel. So I just started to accept it and, not only that, I also accepted it may take a long time for my body to repair itself. This is exactly what your body needs - ‘a break’. It did take time for me to feel better and it came in layers. Sometimes I experienced the worst day I’d had for a long time, but I never let it bother me. I just accepted the good days and the bad ones equally. What I did notice over time was that my mind became a little clearer. The odd emotion would return and my anxiety eased a little. This is when I finally realised I was doing things the right way and it all made sense to me. The feeling of strangeness was the hardest to accept, but I became an expert at not letting it bother me. So, remember, it does not matter how long it takes to feel better, just start to give your body the well deserved break it so needs and it will take care of itself. - 90 - Chapter 11 BORN TO WORRY Some people have a strong tendency to worry from a very young age. Every day they find something to worry about and as soon as one problem is resolved, they move on to something else. It’s as though they don’t feel happy unless they are worrying. People in this category tend to strive for perfection in their lives, bending this way and that way to please others, putting tremendous pressure on themselves to be perfect, both at work and at home. They are constantly seeking approval from other people and want to be a success, forever plaguing themselves with questions such as: What if I lose my job? What if my new mother in law does not like me? What if my partner gets bored of me and leaves? What if I upset my neighbours with the barbecue on Saturday night? They spend each day worrying about things over which they have no control, but at what cost? All the worrying builds up and can put a tremendous strain on their bodies - day in, day out, worry, worry, worry. When will it ever stop? How often have you heard people say, “I don’t know why I worry, I just do”. What they need to realise is that worrying does not change one situation. That’s right, you can worry about something but the outcome will always be the same, so all that negative energy is a total waste of time. Worry is the most useless, destructive emotion we possess, but as I found out, like any other habit, we can change the worry habit. Those who don’t have a tendency to worry are much calmer people. They mainly enjoy a better, stress free life because they understand this concept. This is not to say that if there is a major drama in your life that you should not worry, this is natural, but do not waste precious energy worrying about those things that are just not worth worrying about. Worry just brings stress, and it was one of the first - 91 - things I stopped doing when I was on the road to recovery. I knew it was just counter productive and it would do me no good at all. The less I worried, the easier it became. Now I have reached the point where, if I know I can’t change an outcome, I just let it go. I just tell myself ‘what will be, will be’ and, nine times out of ten, these worries come to nothing anyway. Below, I have given an example of two different people facing the same scenario. Two friends start a job on the same day in the same office. Mrs X, who tries to please and has a tendency to worry about things and Mrs Y. After they have settled in, their boss approaches Mrs X and says, “Hello Mrs X. I know this is your first day, but I wondered if you would like to come out for a few drinks tomorrow night. We usually get together once a month and tomorrow is that day”. She thinks, “Oh, I can’t, I have promised my friend that I would go round tomorrow as she has just separated from her partner and needs some support, but I don’t want to appear ungrateful and boring on my first day and let my boss down. Oh dear, what shall I do?” She thinks about it and then says, “Yes, OK then, thanks”. Immediately, she starts to worry, thinking, “oh no, what did I say that for? I promised my friend and now I am going to have to let her down.” She is now angry with herself for feeling weak and saying yes. She goes home and rings her friend telling her what has happened and apologises for having to cancel her visit the following evening. Her friend is not really happy and tells her she really needed that chat. When Mrs X comes off the phone, she feels awful and then worries that she has let her friend down, fearing that her friend will have fallen out with her. She hardly has any sleep, worrying about her dilemma, and considers telling her boss that she can’t make it, but worries that doing that would make her feel worse - oh dear! She arrives at work the next day, feeling tired through lack of sleep and guilty for letting her friend down. She goes out with her work colleagues, as arranged, and enjoys none of it. Her mind is elsewhere and she just wants to go home. - 92 - The same day the boss approaches Mrs Y and asks the same question. Mrs Y replies, “No thank you, I have promised my friend I would go round tomorrow and comfort her as she is having a bad time”. Her boss replies “Oh that’s very good of you, no problem at all, we will see you tomorrow”. She then goes round to her friends and they have a good night. Her friend then thanks her, she goes home, has a good nights sleep and is at work the next day, ready and refreshed. There is a story of two very different people facing the same situation. I’m sure I don’t need to tell you what the best approach was. If you see a part of yourself in that story, remember that you can’t please everybody, so don’t try. Don’t strive for perfection; it’s not worth the effort. Just be happy with who you are. Do not worry about things you cannot change and ask yourself the following questions: Has worrying about something ever done me any good? Has worrying ever changed anything? Has worrying ever made me feel better? I think we all know the answer to these questions! To quote a lady who once wrote to me: “Paul I have just realised I can live and survive without worry”. You have more power than you think to change your thought patterns. You may not think so as you probably always see the worst in every situation, but that is just a habit that you have developed and you have the power within you to change. Let’s look at some examples of were we could change our thought patterns: Instead of saying, “Oh, I will never be better, I will always feel like this”, why not say, “Many others have recovered, why not me? I now have the tools to do it”. - 93 - Instead of saying, “I hate feeling like this”, why not say, “Yes, it’s not great, but I can’t do anything about it for now. In time, with a new approach, these feelings will subside, just as they did for the author of this book”. Trust me when I say that positive thinking can become your new habit and in time it will overtake all the negative thinking. Through my recovery I was told the importance of positive thinking and climbing out of the rut of always thinking the worst, but I never understood how thinking positive could make me feel better. Well I am far wiser now and realise how closely your thoughts are connected to the way you feel. A lot of the depression we may feel is because this condition has dragged us down. We have had nothing to think positive about and hence we feel depressed. Well begin to let the positive thoughts back in and you may be surprised by how they can become your new habit and your whole outlook towards the way you feel can improve. It takes a little effort, but being positive instead of negative can have a great impact on how you feel and it can also give you that extra incentive to recover. Also adding positive things into your life can have the same effect. I decided to get fit and went from not being able to run 20 yards to eventually doing a half marathon. I felt great for getting fit and a real sense of achievement when I crossed that line. I am not going to dwell too much on the subject of negative thoughts as it has been written about before, but I want to show you that you do have the power to change the way you think and to feel better about yourself. When you first attempt to alter your thought processes, your positive thinking will feel very weak and come without conviction, but the more you do it, the more it overrides the negative thinking and becomes your new voice, your new habit. Remember positive thinking is far more productive than negative thinking. Think of the child that plays so happily without a care in the world. Well this is because, at that age, they have no reason to worry, so they enjoy life. People who keep this principle going into adult life have the right idea, so next time try and replace the negative thoughts with something more positive - you do have the power. - 94 - Let this be your new motto: It’s time to ‘stop worrying and start living’. Recovery can be an up and down affair I always feel that it is important to let people know that when they are on the road to recovery, it can be a bit of an up and down affair. Sometimes I would think that I had taken one step forward only to take two steps backwards. Here are some of the mistakes I made, so hopefully you can avoid them. You may not come across them all during recovery, but I have included them just in case you do. I felt so good yesterday, why do I feel so bad today? It is often said that recovery means taking two steps forward and one step back, which is basically the way the body recovers. It takes a little patience to allow for this adjustment, but is well worth it. This is why it is imperative that you accept how you feel at any given time and just carry on with your day. Eventually you will wake up and a day will be just a day, with few ups and downs. It will happen once you take that step back and allow your body to find its own sense of balance. It’s funny, isn’t it, how I was always able to accept the good days and not question them, but as soon as I had a bad day, I was back to square one, repeating those old mistakes and believing that there must be something wrong! I also learnt that when I had a good day I expected the following day to be the same, almost putting pressure on myself to make sure it would be. I was constantly watching myself, trying to hold on to how I felt and worrying that if I let go, the good feelings would be gone forever. Well they won’t. Good days come and bad days come, and you need to accept this. Don’t waste time trying to work out why, like I did. Don’t think you are back to square one and start with all the self-pity again. Don’t hold back on your goal of achieving recovery by not allowing yourself to feel how you feel at any particular time. It is not important, as I eventually learnt. - 95 - I remember everything one day and not the next! A lot of people say everything makes sense one day and not the next. I soon discovered that this was caused by the old memories of not being able to cope and being pulled back in to fighting purely through habit. I had spent so long on the wrong road that it was only natural for me to feel lost again. One day I would understand my new direction and the next I wouldn’t. But this was just caused by the habit of doing things the wrong way. That’s why I say re-read if need be until this new point of view becomes you. It is just like going back to school to learn a new subject. You don’t just have one lesson and pretend to know it all. You forget a lot of what you have been taught and you have to revise. It takes time for information to be absorbed and it is no different when you first learn about the right road to recovery. I am losing faith; I want to be better today Sometimes when I encountered certain setbacks, I did not feel like putting any effort into recovery. I suppose I just wanted to ignore the world again and drift back into self-pity and, at times, I was very tempted to give up. Even though I had these moments and you may be having them too, the desire to recover always overcame them and I now thank God that it did. If you find yourself in this situation, please do not wait for the times you feel great to make the effort to do something. No matter how bad you feel, when you have decided to do something, just go ahead and do it. I fell into the trap of thinking “oh, I just don’t want to do that today, I will wait until tomorrow”. Well, most of the time, tomorrow never came because I just wanted to hide away again. I was avoiding situations where I thought I might feel uncomfortable, the very places that would have helped me to recover. Many a time, I remember being asked by friends to go to the racecourse and always refused, as I knew I would not really enjoy it and that I would feel uncomfortable. Then one day I just thought, “no - 96 - matter how I feel, I am going. If I feel uncomfortable or strange, then I do. I don’t want this to hold me back any longer. I need to take a step forward.” This statement helped me many times and is one that I want you to take particular notice of. Your memory and habit work together saying “Don’t go you will feel uncomfortable; you know you will”. These are the very statements that hold you back, you need to go against your instincts and float past these negative thoughts and suggestions. Recovery lies in these places and situations and will never be achieved through avoidance. I went, and even though I didn’t particularly enjoy it, it was not as bad as I thought it would be. I then made it a regular practice and every time I went, I began to feel less uncomfortable, less strange and more able to enjoy it. At first, it was just the unfamiliarity of doing something different that made me feel uncomfortable and a bit strange, but I accepted how I felt, which allowed other feelings to come through. Gradually I felt as though I was part of what I was doing and forgot about how I was feeling. As time went by, I became more outgoing and less introverted, while at the same time being able to enjoy and take more notice of what was going on around me. So, don’t put off doing things until you feel like it. Float past all the negative thoughts that say you can’t and tell yourself that you can. If you can’t, then you will find out for yourself, but don’t listen to that voice that constantly holds you back. If going out for the first time in a while makes you feel fearful and anxious, it’s only to be expected, just take those feelings with you. I used to ignore what by body was telling me and did it anyway. I didn’t try to stop these feelings - there was no point because I knew that they would be there. It was only natural to feel like this in my present state, but I was determined not to let them control me any more. You will be amazed by what you can achieve that you just did not think you could. Sometimes it’s just feelings and negative thoughts that hold you back. Float past them and continue to move forward. - 97 - Chapter 12 SOME FINAL POINTS Anxiety genes There have been some studies done into the theory that people with anxiety can have a gene that causes them to feel the way they do. I was not going to mention this, because, firstly, it is only a theory and there is no concrete proof. Secondly, all that this theory does is cause certain people to worry more and, thirdly, people who do suffer from anxiety, gene or no gene, need to know about the subject in order to lead a better life and go on to fully recover. Telling someone that they may have an anxiety gene is like telling them that this is how they are, there is no cure and they can’t do anything about it. So I would never say this to anyone. I have helped many people and not one of them has told me that they think there may be a genetic cause. They have all recalled some flashpoint from where they think their anxieties stemmed. In my opinion, everyone can recover, and I mean everyone. I believe that a lack of knowledge on the subject is what keeps people ill, which is why I try and help people to understand why they feel like they do. Don’t analyse how you feel A lot of people start accepting their feelings and then, when they do not feel better within a short space of time, they start to question the whole way forward. This is exactly what I did, but I now realise I just wanted to feel better straight away. Don’t try and work out any of your symptoms, your day or anything else about your condition. Someone once said to me “I have now realised that I don’t

the mix, this is another symptom that you will be able to overcome in time. Taking a step back and giving up the worrying thoughts, gives your mind the chance to rest, rejuvenate and refresh itself. When it happened to me, I recognised and understood what was causing it. I realised that I was checking in and worrying about how I felt and I did fear this sensation, so I just stopped doing it. I also learnt to get busier and stop brooding on this and other symptoms. Being active gives you another focus. Having too much time on your hands can open the door to too much needless thinking. With less worry and fear of this harmless but upsetting symptom, I was - 109 - eventually able to overcome it. It merely became a nuisance and because I knew the reason for its existence, it no longer held any power over me. When a worry or fear loses its importance, it loses its power and that is why it is essential to realise these symptoms are neither harmful nor serious. Gradually, without all the checking in and worrying, this symptom that so dominated my life began to diminish and eventually disappeared completely. This symptom is like any other. All symptoms are still being fuelled by your fear of them. As long as the fear continues, so will the symptoms. When we start to understand why we feel like we do, we automatically fear them less and they start to lose their edge and importance. We don't pay them as much respect, we worry about them less and we don't feel the need to work each one of them out. This is when symptoms gradually start to fade. One lady emailed me recently after I had been helping her with this symptom and said to me: "Paul, I actually did a lot better today. I simply did not care how weird, not with it, in a dream and disconnected I felt and it actually made the day easier". This is exactly what I wanted her to achieve. Because she stopped concerning herself all day with how she felt, she was able to start looking outwards instead of inwards and invite other things into her day, while giving her mind the rest it needed. A statement that came from another lady, which I believe is relevant to all aspects of anxiety was: "Paul, on a positive note, I'm fine now! I got through a lot of depersonalisation and other aspects of my anxiety by trying to 'engage' with the real world and I stopped focusing on how weird I felt'. This is why I always say 'Live your life'. Don't worry or concern yourself with how you feel. I used to go about my day feeling odd, weird, anxious and not with it, but it was fine. This is the way through. You can do the opposite and walk around questioning it all, fighting it, trying to rid yourself of how you feel, worrying about it and getting frustrated by it, if you wish. But which approach will give your mind and body the break it needs? I took the second option for 9 - 110 - years and just got worse, only when I did the opposite did things begin to improve. To finish this chapter, I am including a post that I did a while back on the subject, entitled 'Recovery from Depersonalisation/ Derealisation', with which people really identified. Well this post was changed from another subject to this as it seems to be a hot topic at the moment and I am going to be very honest about depersonalisation here and try and help people who are still bewildered by it. I will hold nothing back and tell my whole story and the truth behind it. Firstly let's just refresh ourselves about Depersonalisation and why we have it. Let's start by saying that D.P is not just an anxiety symptom. I have read a great deal on the subject and discovered that people who have been to war can suffer, people who have lost a love one can suffer temporarily from it and people who had something happen to them early in their life that really hurt or shocked them, can suffer bouts of D.P. Many people who don't suffer from anxiety have D.P, although I would say anxiety is the main reason. So let's go back to a person who went to war and saw things that shocked him and he would rather forget. D.P is his body's way of shutting down these memories and feelings in order to block them out and protect him. Have you ever seen that blank look on the face of someone who has just lost a loved one? It's as though they are not really listening and are somewhere else. A few people who have lost loved ones may have temporary D.P. It is their body's way of protecting them from all the hurt and worry and they may begin to think very deeply, just like anxiety sufferers. Once the hurt and pain weakens, they tend to become their old selves again and the D.P leaves them as it is no longer needed to protect them. People who have experienced shocking and hurtful events early in their lives, may get bouts of D.P to suppress these memories and to shut out the hurt. - 111 - Now let's move on to anxiety and the reason why people suffer with D.P. Why it is only natural that you will? I had anxiety for about two years before I had any symptoms of D.P. I showed no symptoms at all, until I became more angry and frustrated by how I felt. I was being moved from one doctor to another and nothing was working. This was about the time I decided I would have to figure it out for myself. So I worried daily about how I felt and spend all my waking hours trying to figure a way out of this mess. I spent my whole day feeling sorry for myself and was on the verge of tears at every waking moment. Day after day this went on, until one day I went home and, as I was stroking my dog, I felt as though I was not really there. My vision seemed blurred and I had no idea what was happening. What happened that day is my body said 'enough is enough. I cannot take this worry and deep thinking anymore and to protect me, and you, I have to shut your emotions down' and this is exactly what it did. I could feel no emotions, no happiness, no sensations and no joy. The whole world went grey and lifeless and I seemed to become a walking shell. But what happened next was I began to worry about this new symptom. I tried to figure out not only the anxiety, but this new sensation of feeling lost and empty. What was happening to me? I was more bewildered than ever and I now spent my time getting worse. I really had entered the cycle that would pull me in deeper. If I had known or been taught about D.P before I suffered then I would have known the reason why it was happening and would not have wasted years trying to figure it out or worrying about it daily, sinking deeper and deeper into the condition. That is why people with anxiety develop D.P. It is all the worrying and deep thinking about the initial anxiety that brings it on. No further explanation is needed. You are not unique and it just shows how common this subject is and how many people who suffer with anxiety go on to develop D.P. It is the number one topic discussed on here and I receive more emails about it than any other symptom. - 112 - So how did I come through my own Depersonalisation? Well before I give a list of the things that saw me through, I want to be honest and say to everyone ……. It did take a while and there are no quick fixes. D.P left me when it realised that it was no longer needed. When would this be? When I stopped the deep thinking, trying to figure it all out, and when I stopped the daily worrying and feeling sorry for myself. While I was in this cycle, nothing was going to change. It makes complete sense that while I did worry and obsess, then my body would carry on protecting me. The more I worried, the more I needed to be protected. Only when this was reversed would it ease. I had developed a lot of habits and, yes, worrying and obsessing had become a habit, but I allowed it to be there. I did not add any more worry and I stopped trying to figure it all out daily - what would be would be. My attention was still on me for a while and D.P still held its grip, but I decided, and I mean from the pit of my stomach, to live with this for the time being, question it NO MORE and pay it NO ATTENTION. I was determined not to do this just for a week and then think 'Oh it has not gone, I must try and fix it' or start questioning it all over again - 'Oh, should I do something about it, it's still there, what if it's something else'. I was not going to feel sorry for myself - 'Oh I hate this, why wont it go away?' All this stopped and I TRULY accepted this feeling and understood that it was my body's way of protecting me. I had no control over it, so it was better just to get on with my life. The mistake a lot of people make is they accept it for a week or so and then become frustrated once more. They begin to question it all over again. They have never really accepted this feeling but have just put up with it. I never even thought about recovery. I just gave up and stopped worrying or fighting. I stopped questioning the feeling and recovery came to me. Don't go searching for recovery, your body will bring it to you if you step out of the way and let it. Here is a list of other things that really helped me and I would always recommend to those suffering with D.P - 113 - Exercise This is a great way of clearing the cobwebs, burning off excess adrenalin and giving you another focus to your day. If you go running outdoors, you are having a dose of nature and I found this very beneficial. Keep away from forums and studying the subject daily. I run this blog as I think it is great for giving support and the odd bit of advice. I don't like forums, as people on there tend to wallow in the subject and drown themselves in it, trying to find that miracle cure. Mostly they end up feeling worse and the subject just takes over their day. I took breaks from the subject all the time and stopped doing the daily Google search. I realised that in order to feel like my old self, I had to pack in as much normal living as possible. Doing normal things makes you feel part of the outside world again. I always tried to live as normal a life as possible and never let how I felt stop me. Not always easy, I know, but I am so glad I did as in time normality seemed to override my years of suffering. Stop obsessing and worrying, trust in yourself. Pay this feeling no attention and this means truly just getting on with your day no matter how you feel. You are not going crazy and this feeling will go when your body no longer needs it. No matter how long you have suffered with this feeling, it will pass and does no long term harm at all. Trust in what I say and trust in your own body's natural healing system. I know I keep saying it, but I was worse than most people that come on here. My D.P was so bad that I could not hold a conversation and I came through. I don't have one symptom now. My mind can feel a little tired at times, but I have no symptoms of D.P at all and, trust me, EVERYONE'S body is the same and reacts the same. I can only give advice, I cannot make people follow it and that's the sad thing. People do believe they have something else and go down the worry cycle again. People do believe there must be a quick fix somewhere and begin to go on their merry search again. Someone once emailed me and said "I have read your book but my D.P is still there". Did they read the same book that told - 114 - them it would take time? No, again they wanted the quick answer, the miracle cure that does not exist. I hope the above helps people but please make a special effort to really absorb it and take it on board. Below is a post from Steven who accepted and understood what I said and he was eventually able to come through his own D.P. Over the past few days I have let it be there and not questioned it. I have felt better and done so much the past couple of days. I even played golf today and even though I was thinking about my condition a bit, I didn't care and I actually enjoyed playing the golf. I understand that I will feel strange talking to people for a while and I really don't care. It's amazing how much more I have been able to connect with my family, girlfriend and friends just in the past couple of days since reading your info. I am at Uni now and I'm going to watch the football in my local pub tonight and again I really couldn't care less how I feel! The thing I now know I did wrong was, if the feelings were still there, then somehow I felt I was failing myself and I had to find a way to get rid of them. I now know just how much this held me back and I am just getting on with my life. Never has a truer word been said, Steven. Don't expect miracles, just live alongside the strangeness for as long as it takes and in time the old you will re-surface. Paul And finally, this is from a lady who read the book and posted this on my blog for others to read. Hi everyone, I have been making huge strides with anxiety/D.P and the pieces of the puzzle are truly falling into place. I went from waking up feeling fear all around me, trying to figure these - 115 - feelings out, to the point where I am now which is truly shrugging my shoulders with a whatever attitude and going on with my day. I want to share tips that truly helped me make HUGE strides with this anxiety condition. Tips that helped me: I stay busy, I read, I go outside and look at nature, I keep my focus outward and, as Paul says, I pack in as much normal living as possible. When I feel anxious (tingling, high heart rate) I have learned to shrug my shoulders in a 'whatever' attitude and go on with my tasks, knowing that this condition is normal for the circumstances I have been in. I do not try to justify irrational scary thoughts. I just let them flow in and literally ignore them; pay them no respect and kind of laugh them off :) When my attention reverts back to me (such as when I am out and conversing or doing any task) I allow it to be there and move on with whatever I'm doing. This is very important because trying to figure out this reverting back feeling makes us fight our condition. FAITH - that what you are doing is right – PATIENCE. Most Important: I moved towards my feelings of fear. I would sometimes have a feeling of not being able to breathe or just sudden fear that brought me to a point where I wanted to leave. This is the point where I invited these feelings. I let my body rage inside of me and continued on with my tasks, paying these feelings no respect. This means not questioning them or running away. This is truly the "water to take out the anxiety fire"; the most important behaviour. These behaviours that I have taught myself have led me to a point where I almost feel 100% normal, I do have setbacks, however I now know how to deal with them and they do not scare me., As time passes, things fall into place and the anxiety fire dies out as we face our feelings of fear and allow them to be there:) I hope this helps. Its all about Faith and Patience - 116 - Chapter 14 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS Below are some common questions I have been asked over the years. Some are detailed in my website also, but for anyone who may not have read them or would like to keep them for reference here they are again. Q.1 Why do I feel better in certain situations and not in others? This is a very common one and it all comes down to how you think in other situations. For example, you may feel better in the safety of your own home rather than at a family gathering. There is no difference in either of these situations; the only difference is in the way you think. You are the same person and it is not the situation that makes you feel worse, it is your thought pattern. You may spend the day worrying about going to a particular function, setting your body up to be anxious on arrival and then blame it on the situation you are in, rather than the thought pattern you have created during the day while at home. You may get there and then also worry about making a fool of yourself, spending the whole time tensing against how you feel and creating more anxiety. Do you see how we do this to ourselves? It is not the situation, but our perception of the situation that causes us to feel worse in certain situations. You are merely doing it to yourself with your thoughts. You must just accept how you feel wherever you are and in whatever situation you find yourself. Just allow yourself to feel anything. Sometimes a place may hold certain memories, which may make us feel anxious, but this soon passes when we learn to accept how we feel and let go of that tension. We begin to densitise to different places and situations. How are we ever going to know we are fine and that anxiety can do us no harm unless we go towards it, allow ourselves to feel it and see for ourselves? - 117 - If you truly allow yourself to feel anything and stop all the "what ifs" and other negative thoughts that just increase anxiety, you will find that although you may feel uncomfortable at times, nothing is going to happen to you and in time your reactions lessen until you feel more able to cope, day by day. Anxiety loves avoidance, so take its power away, move forward and embrace these feelings of fear, even if you're in a situation where you feel you have failed in the past. Avoiding symptoms just does not work, as you have no doubt realised by now. Let all feelings be there. Don't avoid them, but go through them. Don't see them as the enemy. This worked for me, I had faced the demons head on and realised that the only way to stop fearing them was to feel them. At one time it did matter to me if I felt anxious or panicky. I would go to places wishing and hoping I would not feel this way, but this was all wrong and I would never move forward like this. I had to let go and welcome any feelings that came. I had to learn not to care if they did, this was the only way through. I ignored my body's instinct to avoid and started to embrace how I felt. I moved forward towards these feelings. Eventually, I started to understand my condition so much more. Q.2 Will these feelings ever go away? Yes, they will. Once you understand why you feel like you do, you can unmask the fears you hold about anxiety. There are so many myths about anxiety that it worries me to know just how many people are misinformed and truly believe they will never get better and will just have to live with it. Like me, too many people spend years searching for that elusive miracle cure that just does not exist. Understanding anxiety takes so much fear out of how we feel. Every stage and symptom has a logical explanation that can be explained. With less fear and more understanding, we also calm the constant worrying. It is the lack of information on the subject that keeps the worry cycle going. Constantly worrying that we will never get better also adds to the belief that we will just have to live with it. Once we start to understand anxiety and use the tools we have been given to cope with how we feel, the change can be dramatic. - 118 - During my recovery, I found that the more knowledge I had and the more I understood my condition, the easier it was to not fear or bother about how I felt. There was a logical explanation for it all and I was not going crazy as I first thought. I started to lose the fear of my symptoms and how I felt. Eventually they began to hold less power over me and I started to pay them less respect. It is your desperation to rid yourself of how you feel that keeps your anxiety alive. The stress you put on yourself daily and the constant worrying and thinking about your condition, puts tremendous pressure on your body. Is it any wonder you stay anxious? So many people first come to me in total desperation for help, never believing they can get better. As time goes by, I receive an email from them saying how much better they are doing, how much easier life is and they can't believe how far they have come. So don't be depressed by how you feel now. I spent 10 years getting worse purely because I did everything I should not have done. I fought, worried, avoided and became more bewildered. My illness just became me and nothing mattered but getting rid of these awful feelings. This just left me more detached from everything around me. The worry was fraying my nerves even further, the deep thinking was tiring my mind even more and, more than that, the feeling of desperation crushed my spirit. I just became a shell. But in time all this was reversed once I had the information you now have. Q.3 Why do I find it so hard in social situations? I find it so hard to communicate with people. Avoiding eye contact and running away became a habit for me and I had to find a way to reverse it. Firstly I decided that how I came across did not matter any more. If I stuttered or felt awful then so be it, I had to go accept this to move forward. We must not run away from conversations, but allow ourselves to feel strange if we have to. We must be prepared to feel half baked and not with it, but just chat away. People don't notice our awkwardness as much as we think they do and remember the aim is to embrace situations we may have run away from in the past. Don't wait for the day when you wake up and all this is behind you and you are able to talk freely and easily with anyone. As you know, that - 119 - day never comes, you have to make that day happen by not caring how you feel or how you come across. So what if people think you seem a bit distant, is it really that important? Remember in time the real you will return. When we find the courage to accept how we feel, even embrace these feelings, we find it easier to follow what the other person is saying. We become less concerned about how we feel which gives us more time to be interested in the situation we are in and become more involved in the present Q.4 Why did anxiety choose me? Anxiety does not choose certain people. It is not something that you just get such as a cold. Anxiety is the result of your body being over worked, be it through long hours, stress at work, a problem or collection of them that you worry about. You over work your body and it breaks down. Your nerves have been battered so much that they go 'bad' if you like. If you work anything you buy beyond its capabilities, whether it be a blender, a vacuum cleaner or a car, it will break down or begin to clunk and run badly. Your body is the same. So anxiety is not an 'it'. It is not something your body wants to go through. It is your body telling you that it can no longer work with the pressure you are putting it under. That is why it is so important to take your symptoms with a pinch of salt and not to get stressed or worry about them; otherwise you are just working your body far too hard, a body that is crying out to be left alone Below are some questions that others asked me in an open session. Q.5 Paul, here is something I have wanted to know about you during recovery: When you say, "whatever" to a thought or feeling, do you feel confident when you say it each time or is it a matter of just saying it even if you feel like you're treading water to stay afloat at that moment? This was one question I welcomed as I got stuck the same way and I did actually do a post on this a while back on this. I think certain - 120 - people get too hung up with accepting how they are. This should be a 'whatever' attitude and NOT a need to keep reminding yourself to accept how you feel. Once you start battling with yourself again, it becomes a 'do'. I think someone once mentioned that they had to keep reminding themselves to accept how they were. There is no need to do this and as some people may know it loses its force in time. Accepting is all about not doing - not fighting, not worrying, and not filling yourself with self pity. Giving your body a break is never a 'do', so please don't feel the need to walk around telling yourself daily that you must accept this. I see it more as a case of putting all your tools down and accepting this is you for the time being. It's more of an 'attitude' that just becomes second nature. It's not about putting pressure on yourself expecting a word to make you feel better and then getting frustrated that it doesn't. You are putting your faith in a word, when what you should be doing is developing an attitude born out of the practice of not caring. There is a world of difference between feeling awful and just carrying on with your day and saying 'whatever' and then getting frustrated that you still feel awful. Can you see the difference? It's like having flu. We know we can do nothing about it, so we just get on with our day even though we feel awful. We don't battle to feel better, worry and obsess about it, because we understand the condition. It's the same with anxiety. Q.6 Paul - I was doing so well these days and out of the blue I got this setback. I feel the terms I use to accept no longer carry any weight. They feel meaningless when I say them to myself. For example, when I say to myself "it's only a bad habit", then automatically my mind will start questioning. "What's a habit? Are you sure it's a bad habit?" I don't know what to do. I have tried using new sayings but the same happens. It's so confusing. Please advise! Again you don't have to have sayings, as you can end up putting too much faith in them to make you feel better and they can lose their effect. When you say 'It's only a bad habit' and then the other questions come, again this is adrenalin building up and needing an outlet. You need to let the extra thoughts come if they wish, but let them burn themselves out. As you say, at the moment you let them - 121 - frustrate you as you become sucked in by them. If you had not, they would not have bothered you. But more than anything, I would drop the sayings, just let come what may. If your mind questions a question, then let it, but don't get involved or let it frustrate you. Also don't search around for a phrase to make you feel better, 'That saying did not work, so what about this saying. That did not work, I'll try this. You see you are back in fight mode. You are not accepting; you are searching for something to make you feel better and having a mental battle with yourself to do so. Q.7 I have been doing great, but I stumble when confronted with the reality that people do suffer from bouts of major depression. With these thoughts come rushes of fear and then I get caught up in a swirl of anxiety and low mood. How would you move toward these feelings appropriately in order to face them head on? This question was asked in a different way before. This is the cycle of anxiety. An initial thought like 'maybe I will suffer with depression' on a sensitised body will set off the anxiety, which is just adrenalin on sensitised nerves. This brings feelings of fear and you may feel down that you feel awful again. Firstly, understanding that this is the cycle can help. Just understanding why you get such an exaggerated response to a thought can be a comfort. If I understand your question, then the initial thought of developing depression is the answer. To desensitise to a thought you need to allow yourself to let the depression come if it wants to. Give in to the initial thought and say "If I become depressed, then so be it". This thought then won't have the same effect, as you have allowed yourself to feel it. There is no recoiling from the thought, which is why you feel the initial reaction to it. Never recoil from any thought. I have been asked the question 'Did you ever worry the anxiety may come back?' Can you imagine the worry, the stress and the watching I would have endured if I had this thought daily? I understood enough about anxiety to not have these fears anyway, but if that initial thought had come, I would have just paid it no - 122 - attention. My attitude would have been that there is nothing I can do about it anyway. Anxiety is a condition, not an illness and your attitude should be 'If it wants to come back, let it' - just give in to the thought /fear. You have allowed it to come back if it wishes, but do you see that with this statement, the fear and worry has now gone and the thought has nothing to feed on. You can ask any ex-sufferer and they will all tell you that they could never suffer again. People who recover understand what got them there in the first place and what got them home and are far less vulnerable than someone who has never suffered before. Q.8 "What does it feel like to be fully recovered" and "How do you know"? I have been asked this question more times than any other. The feeling of full recovery is really special, but something I truly never aimed for. I just wanted to feel better and I think that helped me. I was not desperate to recover; just feeling better was great and it kept opening new doors. But feeling better was up and down. It would go something like this……feeling better, then having bad days - feeling great - feeling awful - feeling really good - feeling awful. It was up and down until the good days were really good and the bad days were not too bad. I may have had a couple of really bad days, but I had been there many times before, so I did not let them bother me. I had so much faith in the fact that I would soon be back to feeling great again. Full recovery was strange as I thought I had just about recovered before. But I do remember the day when I could just chat freely without reverting back to me, without feeling as though I had to place each word in a sentence. I said to my mother "I just know this is it, full recovery". She asked how I knew and I said "well, you know when people say they think they may be in love, but they are not sure, but others say if you're in love you just know' -that is what it is like." I thought I had recovered before as I had so many good days, but now I knew, it went to another level - total freedom. I never thought - 123 - about anxiety any more unless I worked with it and then it was just like any other subject. It no longer bothered me and because I had stopped worrying or caring how I felt, so many other things filled my day, I had my life back. My mind was so clear and my nerves had healed. They were no longer sensitised and did not feel rushes of fear for very little reason. I was not racked with feelings of anxiousness and not constantly irritable. My mind was no longer tired through fear and worry and the deep thinking about my condition. It had regained its flexibility and felt so clear. It was like the whole subject was behind me. One thing though was that it felt odd to feel free again. It was just like being let out of prison and it took a while to readjust to feeling normal. Anxiety had been part of my life for so long it felt natural. Q.9 You mention a lot about not going in search of that magic tablet or secret cure etc and just letting recovery come to you. However, you also recommend a few things such as exercise, avoiding alcohol, massage etc to help with recovery. How do you draw the line between the two and when do these things stop being just aids in our recovery and represent us searching for a quick fix? I've thought a few times about trying meditation or something to help me relax, but then wonder if it might be a step too far and means that I am not accepting the way I feel. This is a very good question and as I have mentioned before, I initially took up running because it helped with my anxiety. But the mistake I made was that my whole run was taken up with 'I will feel great when I get back. This will really help my anxiety. My whole run was built around 'ridding myself of anxiety' which was the wrong attitude. If I came home not feeling great I would question why and try and run further. I needed to feel great, but I had fallen into the trap of doing something to 'rid' myself of anxiety. So although I knew it helped me, I just started to run for me. If it helped with anxiety then so be it. If it did not, then that was fine, it was not going to be the reason I ran. So it does not matter what you do as long as you do it for your sense of well being and don't put yourself under pressure to feel good afterwards. - 124 - Answers to emails I have received Hi Paul. I wondered if you could answer me about a problem I seem to be stuck on. I can be sat in lectures and strange images, past dreams, memories or whatever keep popping up in my mind. I get so distressed wondering why this is happening and thinking that, yes, I am going mad. I can't find this symptom anywhere and I have looked. Is this anxiety because it is making me question my sanity again and it does scare me to the point that I am obsessed with every thought that enters my head. My reply was: Hi, you are doing everything that I have been telling you not to do. You have given in to an off shoot of anxiety and paid it the maximum respect. Rather than just sitting in your lecture with strange images and dreams passing through, you have become distressed and scared of them. You are probably sat there trying to work it all out and scaring yourself with thoughts of going crazy, etc. etc. Is it any wonder you feel worse? You are probably thinking about it all the way home, going over why, what, if. I will tell you that I had the same symptoms many times. When I was drifting off to sleep, I felt like I was lifting off the bed. I had so many thoughts come through, but just shrugged my shoulders. When your mind is tired, which yours will be with all the worry and stress you are putting it under, trying to figure things out, then it plays the odd trick on you. Have you ever tried to stay up all night and not sleep for more than 24 hours? If you have, you will know that you minds starts to play tricks on you. It's the same thing. Your mind is just very tired. Please don't do all the Google searching, looking for this symptom and that symptom, it's a complete waste of time. Just put ALL symptoms under the umbrella of anxiety. Don't feel the need to investigate them all, obsess and worry. You will just go around in circles tiring your mind even more and not giving it the break it so craves. - 125 - As I have said before, I can give advice out but what I can't do is make people follow it and trust in what I say. Only you can do that. Allow yourself to feel anything, it's fine. Hope that helps Paul Her reply was: Hi Paul Thanks so much. I have followed your advice and most, if not all of my anxiety symptoms have gone, just like you say they will. This is my last remaining symptom and thanks for giving me a much needed kick up the bum for giving it so much importance. So what if I get these and feel weird. It's okay. I will now give myself permission to feel like this, something I have not done in the past which just created more problems. My reply was: We do need a kick up the bum sometimes Samantha and I spoke quite direct to try to help you and really get my point across, no other reason. I just don't want you or anyone letting anxiety take control again and bluffing you into thinking it is something else. You're fine, let it play its tricks. It's honestly just a tired mind and means nothing. The above is a classic case of being bluffed by your anxiety. It is your reaction to it and not 'it' that can cause the problem. She had decided to react to how she felt instead of just carrying on with her day whether the feelings were there or not. She was tricked into the whole investigation/worry cycle. She just needed a sharp reminder from me not to go down that road. - 126 - Hi Paul, Thank you so much for your book. It has really helped me to move forward and understand so much more. I am able to face life more easily now, although there are still certain questions I would like to ask. At the moment I drop my 3 year old off at nursery every day. Just before I leave, I start to sweat and by the time I get there it's terrible - horrible in fact. I am trying to let the feelings go through my body and do their worst, but it's hard. Then I start feeling faint and the fear sets in! This is a big achievement for me, as a year ago I never went out of the house. I am trying, I really am, but why do I sweat so much. I feel like I have done a massive workout! Sara Hi Sara, Learning about anxiety, having previously had no information, is like going back to school. The more we learn and understand, the easier things become, but you will not recover overnight. Reading the book has taken away a little bit of fear, which is helping you to do things you could not do before. This is the way forward. Little steps turn into huge strides. Just doing something you could not do in the past is an achievement. What we need to do is take the fear away and put you back in control. The sweating is easy to explain. When anyone gets nervous, before a job interview, wedding day etc, they begin to sweat. Well you have nothing to be nervous about and dropping your child off should not bring these feelings. Well they do, because all you fear is the fear itself. I'll bet you try to rush your way through it and try to get it over with, making a big deal of it before you go. Is it any wonder you sweat? Again, the thing to do is exactly what you have been doing just go with it. If you sweat, you sweat. If you feel nervous, so what? It is just a strange physical feeling. Sara, like it or not, you will feel uncomfortable and sweat for a while because your body now - 127 - associates this run as something to fear. It says "Sara, here we are again" and memory takes over, hence the sweating. This is nothing to worry about because you can now teach your body that there is nothing to worry about, no reason for it to bring these feelings on. You do this by going through it, passing through these feelings and not trying to rush or push them away. The more you go through the situation, letting these feelings come and keeping a calm attitude, the more your body will stop seeing it as something to fear and it desensitises. Avoid running around trying to push these feelings away and going for the quick exit. All this is telling your body is that there is something to fear, so it reacts accordingly by adding more adrenalin. Do you see that unbeknown to you, you are merely doing this to yourself? I went through the same thing and had to go through it many times before I began to find peace. But the very act of letting it come brought some peace in itself. The main thing to remember is that no matter what your body is doing, try not to be influenced. Also it is all about distrusting what your body is saying. Adrenalin comes through habit, which makes you falsely think there is danger, so you rush around trying to get it over with. Now is the time to tell yourself that you will be fine and there is nothing to worry about. So many people approach me and say "Paul, I did it, I really did. I just thought I could not do it" They say they felt uncomfortable, but nothing happened. They had been scared of the fear itself and once they decided to move towards it, they took some of its power away. You will never faint. This is just another symptom of fear. Many people say this. Sara, it is just adrenalin going round your body through habit in a sensitised body that can do you no harm and that always subsides. Don't let these strange physical feelings hold you back. Say "It's just adrenalin, nothing can happen to me; it never does" Don't worry for now about how you feel. It may take a little time and practice, but you can do it and you will be fine. The only thing to fear is fear itself. Let's move towards it and take some of its power away. I put myself in many situations where I felt fear rise and the symptoms of fear came and they always reached a peak -that point that says 'Escape'. But I ignored this instinct and just sat on it. I let it take me where it wanted, but it always died down and nothing happened. I did not lose it or collapse and I thought 'Is that what I - 128 - have been running away from for all this time'. I had let it smack me and then gave it a free reign to do what it wanted. I was fed up with running away. I was almost saying 'come on then, let's see what you are made of. Come and do your worst'. We can only unmask fear when we allow ourselves to feel it and realise it does not have the power we thought it had. Kind Regards Paul Below are a couple of emails to the same person. Max is now just about there with his own recovery and is leading a full life once again. Hi Paul, I'm trying so hard to let these feelings just be, but today I find myself pitying the situation and poor old me. Life used to be so easy. I just don't understand why this has happened to me and what I need to do to finally rid myself of this horrible illness. Accepting it today seems very, very hard. I do understand that this is just a blip and part of the recovery, but it's just so annoying. I never used to be like this and I can't see a reason for me to continue thinking in this way, but as you have said previously, when we get anxious the thinking becomes more negative. Regards Max Hi Max, Referring to your quote below: "After a few good days I am having a real bad time today. I didn't sleep well last night and as soon as that happens, it all goes to crap. - 129 - Then I start worrying about the effects of not sleeping and here we go again" Firstly I can tell you to let the bad days go and not to go down the road of worrying about not sleeping, how you feel etc. and trying to work it all out. Only you can choose whether or not to take this advice, I can only advise you and hope that you trust in my words. Again you have let a bad day throw you into despair. You will have lots of bad days on your road to recovery. It is all part of the process and you really don't need to work out why. Six years ago when I first received help from someone who knew what he was talking about, I was asked the question: "Paul, are you willing to give recovery as much time and space as it needs or are you impatient to be better?" I said "After 10 years of feeling like this I am willing to give this as much time as it needs". He said "Good, then I will help you, but if you expect to recover in a week, then you may as well walk out of that door". This person saved my life because of that statement. Even when I left his help and began to study the subject, I was not cured. I was far better, but not cured. I had good days and bad days, but I always remembered what he said: "Give it as much time as it needs". Now if I had a bad day and worried about it - more stress and more adrenalin. If I tried to figure out why - deep thinking, tiring my mind even further. If I fell into the trap of self-pity and why me - more depression and stress. The list goes on and on and for years I did all of these things until I heard these words. Throughout this time I did not make any progress. How could I when I let one bad day throw me into such despair. I have received several emails like yours from people who are having a bad day or two thinking 'this is not working' and off they go on the roundabout of medication and magic cures only to come back weeks later saying: "Paul can we work together again." This happens time and time again. I have to let these people go and get it out of their system, but they always come back. - 130 - Max, don't become one of these people. It was only a couple of weeks back that you told me that you felt great. You said: "I know there will be some bad days but so what." Why not celebrate all those good days instead of being so bothered about one bad day? You also say that you cannot work out why you feel like this, well my book will tell you. Anxiety is your body's way of telling you to slow down. I devolved panic attacks through drugs misuse. I had no anxiety whatsoever, but the worry and stress of this awful panicky feeling led to me having anxiety 24/7. Many people say I don't understand why I feel like I do. I say "Have you been worrying recently or had a period of stress"? They reply with such things as "my mother passed away last month, my daughter left home, I also lost my job a few months ago. Many don't even realise until you ask them the question. Now it is not important why, the only thing that matters is moving forward slowly but surely. So don't try and figure out why or feel sorry for yourself, let's just work at moving forward. Regards Paul Paul Thanks for the reply. What you say makes so much sense and everything you say echoes what my therapist is saying (unfortunately I only see him for 30 minutes every couple of weeks). What I realise I am doing is giving a bad day so much significance. I had so many good days and things are better than I could have believed or imagined they would have been just a couple of months ago. So as you say, I should be celebrating the great increase in good days compared to bad. The good days are far outnumbering the bad. You're right, I don't need to work out why but just accept it as part of the recovery process. I knew I was going to have more bad days and shouldn't be surprised. How on earth could I expect recovery to be a straightforward cure? It's certainly not the case with any other serious illness. Your continued support is appreciated. - 131 - Regards Max That's a better response Max. The message seems to have come across loud and clear. You know where I am if you need me. Don't hold anything back, even if you go over old ground. I don't care what you ask or how many times you ask, as long as it helps you. Max you really are only asking the same questions everybody else asks, the same concerns I had all those years ago. But just trust in what I say. Not only have I studied the subject for years and written a book on it, but I am living proof that what I say will work for you. Nobody will ever know how bad I was all those years ago. Sometimes I have to pinch myself to realise that I did come through, but everything makes so much sense now and it is up to me to pass my knowledge on. Good luck Paul Max finally understood what I was trying to tell him. I wanted you to read this as I feel it is very important for anyone that feels they are improving. Put no pressure on yourself to feel a particular way, just give yourself as much time as you need. This one came from someone who emailed me on a regular basis, utterly concerned about every symptom he felt and trying to find a quick fix to banish these feelings Hi Paul, I am still concerned and worried about how I feel every day. It worries me that I can no longer feel emotions and have become so detached from the person I used to be. I try so hard to feel like the person I used to be, but this seems impossible at times. Please can you advise? - 132 - Regards Rob Hi Rob, This is exactly the problem - you are trying to be the person you were before. You are not the person who could once feel emotions and have an interest in your day and what was happening, not to mention all the other things connected with anxiety. You are trying to scramble back to who you were and trying to force feeling better. The difference between you and me is that I finally accepted that 'this is me now and this is how I feel, so I might as well get on with my life'. No more questioning it or trying to be the person I was before. I did not accept this was me forever, just for now. This was so important to my recovery, which took a while. It was a bumpy up and down affair, but I did it the right way. You still say you worry. Again you have not accepted that this is you. What is there to worry about? Your mind and body is tired and this is why you feel the symptoms you do. You need to stop hating how you feel and adopt a new attitude. Say "OK this is me for the time being. It feels awful at times, but I am going to try and live alongside it for now instead of fighting against it". Regards Paul The following comes from someone I have been helping for a while and is a conversation we had on msn. He had suffered for many years and needed that extra help, as he was so used to fearing how he felt and was never quite convinced that it was nothing more serious. Hi Paul, I have been looking through other websites trying to find some more information, but have decided enough's enough. I still felt there must be more to how I feel, but now I am beginning to realise it is just anxiety playing its tricks again, making me believe the worst. - 133 - As I have said to you before, if you must look for information, then read it just for information and not to continually put your mind at rest. As you know, as soon as one fear goes, we tend to find another to replace it "Yes, I know. You are so right. Anxiety can be a very clever beast". Ha, ha, correct, it is…..but it's not really the anxiety. It happens because your body is sensitised, so a little worry that would not bother you when you were healthy, seems massive and worthy of investigation. It is all down to being sensitised which is why these thoughts seem to come with such force. When you're healthy, they come and go, receiving little attention. This is very important and that is why you are far better just letting these worries go, something I learnt very early on. Paul This one comes from someone else who came so far but really struggled in the early stages. It is one that I split up and answered for him. I wanted to add it as it shows how someone can move forward with understanding. Hi Paul, Just to make sure that I'm doing everything right, let's assume you're me. In a situation at work, I'm in my boss's office (happened yesterday) and I'm beginning to get panicky. My body is going into panic mode and I'm "fuzzing" out mentally. I kept accepting this as much as I know how. I kept affirming "it's okay that this is how I feel." Then I made sure that I was breathing property, corrected my posture and really allowed the sensations to go on. That ended and similar situations like this come up during the day in my sales career. I will keep accepting this is how I am. Is this right? I did have a breakthrough couple of days after letting this sink into my mind and abandoning myself. - 134 - I really don't like the statement 'just to make sure I am doing things right'. Again, recovery is about NOT DO. You don't have to do anything - that is the whole point. You don't have to worry. You don't have to question. You don't have to fight. You don't have to control how you feel. You don't do anything but accept this is you for now. Don't see anxiety as a big monster, see it as a feeling - just your body's way of saying you have over-done things. You are completely right in what you did when you felt panicky. Panic would have loved you to try and control or push away how you felt. It would have loved you to run away. It would have loved you to start with all the 'Oh no, I am losing control'. You gave it none of this and it passed. Well it will as it had no worry or fear from you to fuel it and you deserve full credit for that. Panic is just adrenalin that will always die down. I could feel like that now and it would not bother me in the slightest as I have a full understanding of what is happening and that it will pass. So I would have no worry, no fear and no fuel. Once you do this several times, then you begin to de-sensitise. Your nervous system calms down, your body begins to relax as it realises there is no need to worry, and things get easier. The people who do the opposite of what you did are the ones that say in the cycle. In my days of suffering, I realised I was sensitised and that it would take very little to make me feel panicky. I accepted this and because of this attitude, I gradually began to de-sensitise. I was looking in your "friends" section of the website. I noticed people on there talking about how they battled this thing and recovered years ago and they are now back stronger than before, etc. Is that something I need to accept also? That this could come back? I suppose if I really didn't fear it, it wouldn't. Matt, one thing I would not do is look at other people's circumstances as each one of us is different. Don't put any pressure on yourself to feel perfect for me, just be happier that you are having good days and take things day by day. In fact, don't even use the word recovery. I never did this and believe that the fact that I did not put any pressure on myself to achieve this was one of the reasons that I did recover. - 135 - I'm really working on this Paul. I feel SO good at times and these feelings extend for a day or more sometimes. I feel horrible at times too. I am just keeping it real and realising that "there's nothing to fight here" and allowing will be better for me. That's great! Remember that at one period you felt bad all the time, so celebrate the fact you are having some good days. This is because you are physically and mentally letting go. You are not trying to 'control' how you feel and just easing some of that anxiety. You are so right, there is nothing to fight here. That should become etched in your memory as it is so, so true and covers everything I teach. Please never be one of those people that has good days and then hates the bad ones even more because they felt good the day before. The bad are just as important as the good for your recovery. They also give you the chance to practice the 'so what' attitude. What do you think? I realise that I can