

Worries Rarely If Ever Come True

This time year often brings excitement into the air as the leaves begin to change; we pull out our cozy sweaters and enjoy some pumpkin spice. “It’s no surprise that 40 percent of Americans say that fall is their favorite season, beating out second-place summer by a comfortable margin, according to a poll by international research and data analytics group, YouGov” (Andersen, 2020). Though, a large number of people do not feel this way, the change from summer to fall can often evoke negative feelings such as worry and fear (Andersen, 2020). Researchers believe that autumn anxiety can be linked to the larger number of events that occur between September to December more than any other time of year. With the change of seasons into fall, comes less hours of sunlight leading to lower production of serotonin, norepinephrine, and dopamine, and an increase in cortisol, our stress hormone. With these environmental and physical changes, fear finds a way to creep into our thoughts as we transition into the next season.

Fear can be an intense emotion that hinders our decision making process, creating an emotional, physical, and mental response. When enjoying the thrill of a roller-coaster ride or watching a scary movie the brain’s amygdala messages the nervous system, and the human body responds by creating stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline. In return, the heart and blood pressure intensify, allowing the body to respond with either fight or flight. “Fear is our survival response,” says Northwestern Medicine Clinical Psychologist Zachary Sikora, PsyD.

So, what makes a scary movie enjoyable? Fear really is physical and can even become pleasurable. Fearful experiences arouse and excite the brain. Your body and brain can remain aroused even after a fearful event has occurred allowing the excitation transfer process to occur. During this process, excitement lingers and other emotions may be felt more intensely for a period of time even if they do not directly relate to the fearful encounter. Additionally, your brain produces dopamine, which elicits pleasure, during staged fear experiences (Northwestern Medicine).

So what are we really fearful about? Fear can easily become a common reaction to an event or object. Fear keeps us safe and allows us to take a careful, calculated approach to people, places, and things we experience. Fear is a complex emotion that can be positive and healthy, but when used to often can have negative side effects. It is important that we take the time to assess our fears and bring them into the conscious mind. One of the most helpful approaches is to list your worries and take a look at each thought, questioning the likelihood of that worry coming true. Recent researches suggest that 91.4% of

our worries do not come true (Sarah Fielding August 8, 2019). The human mind has the capabilities to dream up the worst case scenario if we allow it to, after all the acronym for F.E.A.R. is False Evidence Appearing Real. When fear finds its way into your thoughts and feelings, take a moment to acknowledge it, challenge any unrealistic thoughts, calm your body, and release the fear. Letting go of fear and worry can be one of the most freeing and exhilarating experiences.

References

- Andersen, C. H. (2020, December 4). *Autumn anxiety is real: Why the fall season makes you more stressed*. The Healthy. Retrieved October 23, 2021, from <https://www.thehealthy.com/mental-health/anxiety/what-is-autumn-anxiety/>.
- Northwestern Medicine. (n.d.). *5 things you never knew about fear*. Northwestern Medicine. Retrieved October 21, 2021, from <https://www.nm.org/healthbeat/healthy-tips/emotional-health/5-things-you-never-knew-about-fear>.
- Sarah Fielding August 8, 2019. (2019, August 8). *New study shows 91 percent of fears don't come true. Best Life*. Retrieved October 23, 2021, from <https://bestlifeonline.com/anxiety-vs-reality-study/>.