

Rewire Your Anxious Brain: How to Use the Neuroscience of Fear to End Anxiety, Panic, and Worry

Catherine M. Pittman , Elizabeth M. Karle

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Do you ever wonder what is happening inside your brain when you feel anxious, panicked, and worried? In *Rewire Your Anxious Brain*, psychologist Catherine Pittman and author Elizabeth Karle offer a unique, evidence-based solution to overcoming anxiety based in cutting-edge neuroscience and research.

In the book, you will learn how the amygdala and cortex (both important parts of the brain) are essential players in the neuropsychology of anxiety. The amygdala acts as a primal response, and oftentimes, when this part of the brain processes fear, you may not even understand why you are afraid. By comparison, the cortex is the center of “worry.” That is, obsessing, ruminating, and dwelling on things that may or may not happen. In the book, Pittman and Karle make it simple by offering specific examples of how to manage fear by tapping into both of these pathways in the brain.

As you read, you’ll gain a greater understanding how anxiety is created in the brain, and as a result, you will feel empowered and motivated to overcome it. The brain is a powerful tool, and the more you work to change the way you respond to fear, the more resilient you will become. Using the practical self-assessments and proven-effective techniques in this book, you will learn to literally “rewire” the brain processes that lie at the root of your fears.

Rewire Your Anxious Brain: How to Use the Neuroscience of Fear to End Anxiety, Panic, and Worry Details


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From Reader Review Rewire Your Anxious Brain: How to Use the Neuroscience of Fear to End Anxiety, Panic, and Worry for online ebook

Steve Woods says

This is a useful introduction to the Gordian knot of a life lived in the grip of anxiety. For those who have never experienced anxiety to a debilitating level (be patient our culture is pushing us all there) the difficulties that sometimes just accompany a day's journey are incomprehensible. The approach taken in this book is based on a medical model and therefore in my view suffers from inherent limitations. Namely, the basic assumptions upon which we in the western world live our lives. The default position created by centuries of evolution of the precious, all demanding, all commanding self has left our society crippled and the direction into the chambers of self reflection created by social media will not alleviate the problem. The cultural shift necessary to halt this accompaniment to the demise of western civilization is probably too great to affect much societal change but we as individuals can change it all for ourselves. For me the answers were all laid down by the Buddha a couple of thousand years ago, and all the lessons of this book he covered. Meditation, serious meditation not the ersatz "mindfulness" that has become a recent buzzword, provided the doorway and reading and immersion in the thoughts of the great Buddhist thinkers of the western world, and there are quite a few, guided me through that knot. Suffering all my life from the effects of an abusive childhood and combat in two wars it was quite a knot, accompanied as it was by all the dysfunctional coping mechanisms all combat veterans seem to find, including long term substance abuse there was a lot to work through. In the main I found the efforts of the so called mental health professionals to be next to useless, with a couple of exceptions. Those exceptions had me begin to see the way and their efforts were so aligned with Buddhist thought, it was natural that I would head down that path. In the end, we are all our own physician, and it is truly a case of "physician heal thyself". Others can only guide we must walk our own path with forbearance, courage and above all willingness to do whatever must be done, and to suffer whatever comes forth in that process. The key is without doubt the absolute surrender of the self with all the consequences that surrender carries with it. By all means a good beginning here but I encourage anyone who struggles with anxiety to look further afield and for myself the way of life, (and it is a way of life as opposed to a religion), suggested by the Buddha has held all the answers for me.

Alison says

This book was and will continue to be incredibly useful to me as I attempt to live an anxiety-resistant life. The authors clearly explain the brain chemistry behind anxiety and offer practical ways to address it. I highly recommend it to anyone who suffers from an anxiety disorder (to be used along with a doctor and therapist, of course).

Paula says

This is a very useful and informative book. The book is pitched to well-read, intelligent laypeople and explains the neurobiology and the underlying research in a clear, concise and comprehensible fashion. After reading this book, the reader will understand the mechanisms of anxiety very well.

Dr. Pittman and Ms. Karle cover treatments, which the typical anxious person can do on his own, and more in depth treatments which require professional help. The authors are very clear about when someone suffering from anxiety should seek assistance from professionals.

I would recommend this book to anyone curious about anxiety and how to deal and treat it. This is very well written and accessible and not intimidating at all. A very good read!

Amy says

Much of this review to me. If you've been in treatment for anxiety, done CBT or DBT this will mostly be review. Exercise and sleep reduces anxiety as we know. Also CBT, mindfulness and medication can help. "Exercise produces a protein that promotes the growth of neurons in the brain, particularly in cortex and hippocampus."

Two types of anxiety: amygdala-based and cortex-basedI may have heard this before but can't recall so new information to me. Amygdala is responsible for the flight or fight response. It attaches EMOTIONAL SIGNIFICANCE to situations or objects. The cortex pathway creates worries, obsessions and interpretations that create anxiety. You can have one or the other or both. If focusing on specific thoughts or images you have cortex-based anxiety. If you feel that a specific object, location or situation elicits an anxiety response you have amygdala-based anxiety.

"Anxiety is a human emotion, produced by the human brain, and emotions are caused by the brain's reactions to situations, not the situations themselves."

The brain is neuropathic. It holds the capacity to change its structures and reorganize powers of reacting.

Tara Pradko says

Incredibly helpful and easy to read. Highly recommend

Melanie says

This has the potential to literally change my life. If so, the author is a magician. Let's seeee....

Yuliya Yurchuk says

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Lubinka Dimitrova says

In a clearly written and simple (but not simplistic) way this book presents and thoroughly explains the role of the amygdala in causing anxiety. Nothing superfluous, but on the contrary, the book offers very practical advice and succinct techniques to re-train one's anxious mind and overcome crippling reactions of the mind, which could immensely improve the lives of many who suffer from anxiety. Knowledge is power. When we understand the way our body functions, we are able to take control over many stressful and debilitating situations. Readings like this are just as engrossing as fantasy books, and they remind me of the reason why to me, science is magical.

Rachael says

If you are looking for a book that is just going to provide strategies for how to overcome anxiety, this is probably not the book for you. However, if you are interested in both the neuroscience behind stress and anxiety *and* learning techniques to cope with those responses, then this is an excellent volume to read. Personally, I agree with the authors that it is often easier to overcome stress when you actually know and understand what is happening to your brain, and how it can manifest itself in physical ways. And while this book is very detailed, I think the authors did a good job of keeping everything easy to understand.

Numerous types of stress are discussed in this book, including the reasons that these types of stress occur and what parts of the brain are responsible for your response. If you're anything like me, you are constantly trying to make logical sense out of your worry, but I learned from this book that there may not always be a logical reason behind your anxiety. In fact, you may not ever really know why you certain situations, thoughts, sounds, smells, etc., can trigger an episode of panic. The good news is that you don't have to know. The authors go into great detail to describe techniques that you can use to essentially "rewire" your brain to avoid having stress responses. The book mainly discusses the two different parts of the brain that deal with fear and stress, the amygdala and the cortex. The amygdala is basically your body's natural fear response system. Your amygdala often works without your ever knowing it, such as when you are driving and instinctively swerve out of the way to avoid hitting another car. The cortex, on the other hand, deals with worry and obsessive thoughts. For example, your cortex is to blame when you are constantly worrying about a possible outcome that will likely not occur. You may have one or both of these types of stress, and the authors provide useful "exercises" that can be used to deal with both of these types of stress.

If you're reading this review, I'm guessing that you probably don't care about all of these details though, right? What you really want to know is if the methods in this book really work. I think they could certainly help many individuals who suffer from stress and anxiety. These authors give insightful strategies to help with different types of stress responses, all of which are based on years of research. Your stress isn't going to go away overnight having read this book, but it certainly may help you learn to cope with your anxiety when it does occur.

Disclosure: I received a free copy of this book through Netgalley.

This review also appears on my blog, Reading Rachael.

Greg says

Almost every one of us feels anxiety from time to time. The frequency varies from person to person; and sometimes there are several cases of people who are anxious every day for as long as they can remember. Now the question is: How can we deal with it?

This new book *Rewiring Your Anxious Brain* by Catherine Pittman and Elizabeth Karle offers us scientific insights as to what happens in our brain when we get anxious. The authors presented a very easy to understand case on how our cortex and amygdala play very crucial roles in what makes us anxious.

After reading this book, the following things may happen to you:

1. Understand why despite our repeated attempts to calm down we still remain anxious of different situations
2. Understand why telling people positive thoughts or helping them rationalize their situations would not working all the time
3. Gain insights as to why there are some people just feel anxious or uneasy with no logical reasons
4. Know how the brain works when our anxiousness comes from cortex or amygdala
5. Know that there are different reasons for anxiousness and there is no panacea for it
6. Know what you can do to rewire your brain and handle anxiousness properly.

The principles provided by the authors are very useful not just only to the subject of anxiety but also in other brain related activity as well. You can use the principles here in learning new skills and making yourself more happy.

Justine says

The tips it offers are simple. Often things you've already been told. But the book helps to explain why the anxiety is happening in the first place, which helps you use the methods of handling it more effectively and understand why they work.

Erika Provenzano says

This book was excellent. It really put anxiety into perspective and gave me a whole other side to consider when trying to work through anxiety. It wasn't filled with scientific jargon but rather the authors explained everything really well so non-scientific minds could grasp the concepts. They gave a really great breakdown of how each part of the brain functions during panic attacks and anxious episodes. If you suffer from anxiety, I highly recommend this book.

Nikki says

I didn't read this from cover to cover, as I've read other books like it before. My main interest was in seeing

how solid the scientific basis of this is -- one of the authors has a PhD, but I could have a PhD in literature, which would by no means qualify me to speak on neuroscience -- and how helpful I thought it might be for other people who end up in the same position I've been in. The good news is, from my knowledge of science and my intimate knowledge of anxiety disorders, there's a lot here that's useful. It doesn't just focus on targeting the conscious part of anxiety generated by the cortex -- which people often try to target on its own, with CBT -- but also acknowledges the contribution of the amygdala.

Generally, it seems a sympathetic and credible book that someone with curiosity and determination could work through to help cope with anxiety, whether it's a full blown disorder or just something that crops up more often than you'd like. It's not an exhaustive reference book of information mentioning every single disorder, every single type of medication, but it is somewhere to start. And it quite rightly encourages the reader to get the help of medical professionals, and it doesn't dismiss the uses of medication.

Heena Rathore P. says

Rewire Your Anxious Brain by Catherine M. Pittman is an extremely informative book on the wiring of the human brain and the parts responsible for anxiety in the humans. The writing was really good and it presented complex ideas and functionalities in a very clear and simple way which was very easy to grasp.

The techniques to control anxiety given in this book are pretty effective and I'm really glad I read this book. If you suffer from anxiety, or know someone who does, or generally have an interest in psychology then you must read this book. It'd be worth all the time.

You can also read this review on www.thereadingbud.com

Daniel Aguilar says

I found great relief from reading (actually listening to, since I got the audio version) this book. Very recently I suffered, out of the blue, a few episodes of what I thought was some serious condition (I don't mean to underestimate anxiety disorders, which can actually be very serious and debilitating). I feared something was wrong with my heart or my brain. When I finally visited the doctor (doctors, actually, as I was checked by 3 different ones) I found out something I wasn't expecting at all: I discovered I had experienced what is called "anxiety attacks" or "panic attacks". All the tests I went through (blood, ECGs and neurological) passed without problem. Actually, I happened to be more than fine in all of them. The problem, I was told, was in my mind.

This left me truly astonished. I consider myself a rather calmed, rational person, and in recent times I've been feeling quite relaxed (as opposed to some other times in my life where stress was far more evident), and couldn't understand where something as intense and frightening as what I experienced could come from, specially since I had never had any remotely similar episode at all.

Besides following the doctor indications I felt the urge to learn more about it, and among the many titles covering the topic, this one popped up recommended in many reviews and comments through the internet. I am very happy I grabbed it, as it provided me with great relief from the very first chapters. Not only did my symptoms match perfectly what the book described, but also stated very clearly that:

1. It is manageable and reversible
2. It's pretty normal (prevalent), although in different degrees
3. The sooner you understand it and treat it, the easier it is to fix

So, enough about my personal motivation for reading the book (which, hopefully, can perhaps provide hope and alleviation for others in the same situation of initial shock and fear). Let me now briefly describe the book itself.

This work is very easy to read, even though it covers some of the neuroscience, physiology and biochemistry involved. It describes how the mechanisms of anxiety are deeply rooted in our body, the result of millions of years of evolution, and what are the different pathways through which anxiety can run amok, becoming pathological.

In rough terms, there are basically two main pathways causing or increasing anxiety: the amygdala and the neocortex. They are described separately, as the effective interventions may vary depending on which one is more important for each case, but the author does a great job explaining how they are always interconnected, usually creating feedback loops that make it easy to spiral down to pathology.

The first part of the book is dedicated to a general description. What is the function of anxiety (mostly surviving to threats), the brain areas and hormones involved (mainly amygdala and neocortex, adrenalin, cortisol), the implications in personal life, family, society... when things go wrong and, as stated above, a message of hope thanks to the capacity of the brain to rewire itself (neuroplasticity).

The second part of the book focuses on the amygdala-type cases. These are usually the ones that come up apparently from nowhere, leaving the patient unable to identify the source of such a powerful reaction of her mind/body. I immediately felt identified. It explains how the amygdala system has its own "language", based on associations that are mostly unconscious and very tightly connected to other primary body functions such as the cardiovascular system, digestion and muscles. This is why the experience of an anxiety attack feels so "real and physical", making it very usual for patients to believe something is really wrong (heart attack, stroke, etc...). After the detailed descriptions in each chapter, there are some exercises in the form of assessments to help the reader identify and define his symptoms for further treatment. Finally, another set of exercises are suggested as the more efficient ways of addressing each case: relaxation techniques (deep breathing, progressive relaxation, good lifestyle choices such as having proper sleep, creating new associations and more).

The third part is dedicated to neocortex-based anxiety. This is when the brain gets into obsessively negative thoughts. In these cases the source of anxiety tends to be somewhat more easily identifiable, as the brain parts involved are the ones providing the higher-level functions of consciousness. Again, each chapter provides assessments and coping strategies for those needing them, such as mindfulness techniques, cognitive restructuring, reinterpretation and more.

Both parts two and three make some references to medication but, of course, that is left to the doctor/specialist. Interestingly, and opposed to what perhaps many people think, medication is not always necessary. Actually, it is usually reserved only for the most serious cases as an aid to support the more important and effective cognitive / behavioural interventions.

So, all in all the book provides both a theoretical framework to understand the subject AND a practical guide for patients to help themselves, taking into account that there are two main different basis for the problem but that these two are tightly interconnected (a stress response caused mainly by the amygdala will cause the

neocortex to be alarmed, and viceversa, neocortex pathological processes will cause the amygdala to trigger a lower level stress response).

I strongly encourage anyone suffering from any sort of anxiety disorder (or knowing anyone who does) to read this book. It really helped me a lot. And also, I would recommend it to anyone in general interested in how our brain (and body) works, which is always surprising and amazing.
