

## What Impacts Anxiety?

### *Three Days of Naming and Taming Anxiety*

This booklet includes a handout that will help to identify patterns that increase and decrease your anxiety. The handout can also be used to monitor for improvements in anxiety with an intervention.

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## Note on organization of this booklet:

There are bolded statements in the booklet to help you along your path:



**Choose your own path:** indicates that there is a choice-point that we see for you. Feel free to use this booklet in other ways as well.

There are people who want understand everything first and there are others who want to try it and then go back to understand more. Both work! Sometimes you might be working with someone and want to use the handout in different way. Great! The path that we are all moving towards is to have more energy and mental clarity so that we can make better decisions, be more productive and have better health. If you can use any of this booklet or the series of booklets to do that, all the better. This is YOUR path.



**Videos:** indicates that there is an online video available. There will be a description of what the video covers and a link.



**Action:** indicates that there is a worksheet that lets you personalize the material.



**Reflection:** We are so filled with people and devices pulling for our attention that sometimes we forget to stop and reflect on what we've learned and how it applies to us. These questions will help you reflect on what has been covered. Thinking about and answering these questions helps the information wire into your brain more deeply so that the actions do not have to be repeated as many times. We will generally leave space nearby to write your own notes about the reflection.



**Summary:** a wrap-up is provided at the end of each chapter.



**Story:** indicates a short story about a specific point.



**Science:** indicates a section that goes deeper into the science behind a concept.



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### Who this handout is for:

**What Impacts Anxiety (WIA)** helps capture information about anxiety in a format that helps us see the daily pattern of how the symptoms of anxiety show up in our lives. While the [Snapshot of Anxiety Assessment \(SAA\)](#) is a tool that shows what is really happening at the height of the symptoms, WIA allows us to see how the symptoms rise and fall throughout the day. Additionally it is an effective tool to use before and after an intervention to see if and how it influenced the anxiety.

The focus is on learning how meeting the needs of your body, which is the power supply for your brain, impacts energy, anxiety and mental clarity. Since food, sleep, exercise, and our environment impact your body's ability to create a stable platform for your brain and mind to work, they can be significant drivers to improve fatigue and anxiety. Further, WIA can be used with other interventions to track improvement of the symptoms of anxiety, such as the introduction of medications, mindfulness, exposure therapy, and observing anxiety levels in different environments or around different people.

WIA is set up to be used by you, as an individual, and to be shared with the people you connect with.

**As an individual**, it provides you with:

- a tool to be more conscious of your anxiety's patterns. When we are more aware of it, we can often take action on our own behalf to address it before it accelerates like a train.
- a way of identify, assess and talk about the daily pattern of your anxiety,
- a way of describing to your therapist, medical prescriber, primary care



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provider what is happening with your anxiety over three days,

- documentation to share with your providers, to help you get better care in the limited time you have with them,
- a way of comparing how you feel when you make small but achievable changes in what you eat, how long you sleep, and how you move your body, or other treatment modalities, and
- most importantly, it will help you determine whether or not you want to invest the energy to maintaining reduced symptoms of anxiety until your brain re-wires into the habit of lower anxiety.

**As a therapeutic Connector** (therapist, coach, nurse practitioner) it provides you with:

- a tool to dialog with your client about how self-care can lower symptoms of anxiety when practiced over several days,
- a tangible licensee to practice self-care; when it is being done as homework for a provider or mentor, sometimes clients are better able to take action on their own behalf,
- a tool for before and after assessments as you try different therapeutic techniques and management tools for anxiety,
- an observation tool to watch the pattern of symptoms of anxiety and identify what might be influencing the pattern, and
- most importantly, a way to help your client determine if they want invest the energy to maintain reduced symptoms of anxiety until their brain re-wires the habit of lower anxiety.

**Here are some kinds of people who can benefit from using the WIA:**

- Individuals in high states events and/or high stress lives,
- Individuals entering high stress moments employment interviews, public speaking, test taking, crunch time at work, and others,
- Individuals interacting with challenging personalities: relatives,



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bosses, co-workers,

- Caretakers of aging parents and children
- Connectors who support people in crisis
- Individuals with mental health challenges, such as:  
Generalized anxiety disorder                      Bipolar  
PTSD    ADHD  
OCD    Depression  
Traumatic brain injuries                              Addiction



## Structure of What's Influencing Anxiety worksheet

At the top of the handout is a chart to help an individual track the rise and fall of anxiety. One of the challenges with anxiety is its lasting or residual effects. Maybe we were really anxious at noon because we gave a presentation. Even though the symptoms of anxiety have mostly resolved by dinner, we remember the day as panicky because the hormones that made us anxious also increased the coding of the memory of the event in our brain. WIA helps off-set this process because it allows us to see that there are times when our anxiety it is high and times when it is lower.

### These are the components of the handout:

- **What's going on?** Is paired with time of day. There are 7 potential times of day when you can briefly describe what is happening. If you need more space you can use the back of the page. You do not have to use all seven. Some people need to monitor their anxiety at that frequency, others don't. If you find you want to make notes more often, use an extra page. Remember it's *your* handout.
- **Time of day:** Note the time of day that corresponds to what you entered for *What's going on*.
- **Anxiety Level:** Generally, we observe anxiety when it's high and bothering us; otherwise, we don't want to think about it. It takes some training to learn to observe anxiety. Is it low, medium, high? Is it



changing? What changes it? When did it decrease? What increases it? If the 1-10 scale is too difficult to identify with, think of it as low (managing anxiety with little effort), medium (needing to start using tools to manage anxiety), and high (feeling really uncomfortable). This is why Dan Siegel<sup>1</sup> says you have to “Name it to tame it”. Another thought that often arises is wondering how your anxiety compares to others’. This is really not helpful. This worksheet is intended to help you characterize *your* sense of it. If you need a comparative time frame, the last two weeks is good enough.

Along the left side are key questions to review throughout the day when trying to be curious about what causes symptoms of anxiety.

**Accelerators of Anxiety:** These are some of the things that typically increase overall anxiety:

- Caffeine – an individual may have fatigue and need caffeine to function, but caffeine makes it easier for their brain to be anxious or not be able to sleep.
- Alcohol – Some people notice that, in the short-term, a glass of alcohol helps reduce their anxiety; however they can start to experience symptoms of anxiety and adrenalin 5-8 hours later. The use of alcohol to calm anxiety can also cause early morning insomnia, nightmares, higher anxiety levels in the mornings, and may contribute to anxiety throughout the day. Additionally, as we age, use of alcohol may lead to weight gain or a move towards diabetes.
- Sugary foods – 20 to 60 minutes after consuming sugar, our brains begin to think that everything will be ok. However, if the sugar is not paired with protein, good fat and healthy fiber, our anxiety starts to climb again within 2-4 hours.
- Stressful day – we all understand how stress increases anxiety.
- Screens – Spending our non-working hours on a screen for more than two hours will increase anxiety and depression/fatigue. Being on your phone for the majority of the day will negatively change how your brain monitors attention, reward, and stress.



**Resilience Factors:** - These are some key factors that help most people manage or reduce their anxiety:

- Foods with protein - Protein is a major building block for our bodies: it builds muscles and neurotransmitters, transports hormones, is fuel for the liver, and helps stabilize fuel for the brain. We need to have protein distributed throughout the body regularly. The two ways to ensure this is (1) by eating protein and (2) through regular muscle-building and aerobic exercise. If exercise is not part of our routines, we are more dependent on small, frequent meals with protein.
- Exercise – Moving your body brings nutrients and “fertilizer” (Brain Derived Neurotropic Factor) to the brain, improves stress tolerance, improves the efficiency of the power supply to the body, helps us to learn to manage the sensations of anxiety without emotional triggers, and distributes amino acids (the building blocks of protein) around the body.
- Meditation/Mindfulness - Studies show that having a practice of ‘watching’ your brain talk and letting it go is helpful in decreasing the stress hormones that negatively impact your brain.

**# hours of sleep the night before:** Sleep is essential for bodies and brains to repair. During sleep the brain is literally cleaned of the metabolic trash from the day before, neurotransmitters are restocked, memories are filed, creative processes are restored. Studies show that we need a minimum of 7 hours of sleep for our neurotransmitters, physiology, hormones, immune system and cells to reset themselves.

### How to use the handout

This is a tool to help you observe times that you may be more – or less - anxious.

**What is going on?** Each day has seven times for you to track your anxiety. You can take note of what’s going on for you throughout the day, or you use the worksheet only a few times during the day and reflect back at what has happened since you last took note. Write down notes for however many times as make sense for you. Use the back of the page if you need more space. The idea is to increase your awareness of what’s



going on throughout the day – both the highs and the lows – to give you a better idea of your patterns and how these may be influenced by both the accelerators and resilience factors

**Supporting your body:** What and when you eat, movement and exercise, sleep, and supportive relationships can all have a reducing effect on anxiety. Conversely, Not eating or eating foods without protein, not moving or exercising, not getting at least 7 hours of sleep and non-supportive relationships can make managing anxiety more challenging.

**Resilience factors and anxiety accelerators:** Somethings reduce our anxiety and others will accelerate our anxiety. Matching time of day and Anxiety levels with what improves our resilience and what accelerates our anxiety can help us name triggers of anxiety. The lower part of the chart lists factors that can increase or decrease body-symptoms of anxiety that we can often influence. Check what applies to you.



### Reflection:

At the end of the three days, what patterns have you noticed? What can you apply semi-regularly to keep your body from contributing to your anxiety?

**Notes:** Use this space to write your reflections on the questions



## Variations

**WIA can be helpful for many types of Connectors, including:**

- **Nutritionists:** as a nutritionist it is helpful to have people monitor how changes in their diet improve their energy, mental clarity and anxiety levels.
- **Psychotherapists:** as a standalone worksheet, WIA can be used as a therapeutic tool in a mental health professional's office, partnered with such therapies as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT), and Motivational Interviewing
- **Coaches:** as a coach we connect to individuals to help them manage stress. WIA can be effectively combined with the Three-day Protein Experiment or encouraging better self-care in terms of food, sleep, exercise, and supportive relationship
- **Mentors:** part of helping individuals to move to the next level is helping them manage their emotions. Frequently, the ability to move to the next level is connected with their ability to optimize their brains and bodies.
- **Parents:** teaching older children and young adults (10 years old and up) to recognize and manage their stress helps set them up to more successful in their adult lives. Providing them with tools to better understanding their personal anxiety triggers and how to increase their resilience through healthy choices around food, exercise and sleep will lead to habits that optimize their brains and bodies.



**Action: Complete the Snapshot of Anxiety Assessment**

*(Pages 10-11, or [click here for a new worksheet](#))*



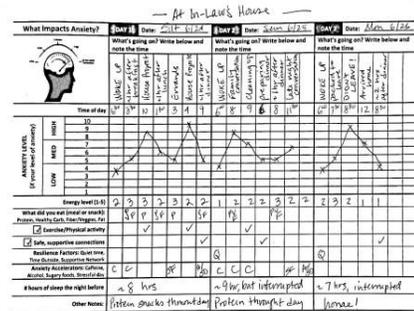
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## Tash's Story: A visit with extended family

A few weeks ago I spent a long weekend with family. Having worked with Kristen for some time now, I loaded up on protein snacks and protein-based ingredients for meals. Anticipating that this would likely be a stressful weekend, I decided to bring along the What Impacts Anxiety handout and give it a try.

I started off think I would check in seven times throughout the day, at regular intervals – but it quickly became clear that that wasn't realistic as I didn't really want to be pulling it out in front of everyone. Still, I found that having started with this intention kept me checking in with myself much more regularly than I would have otherwise. I generally jotted notes on the worksheet at the beginning and end of each day, noting the ups and downs as I remembered them.



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Being more aware helped me know when to pull out my “tools”, like taking a quick timeout or grabbing for beef jerky or a hardboiled egg. I made a point of going to bed at my normal time (10-11ish), even though everyone else was staying up ‘til 2 or 3am. I realized on the first morning that this had an added benefit of some quiet time, as I also woke up a bit earlier than everyone else.

Although there were a few acute stress-points throughout the weekend, overall I think it went really well. Having finished the 3 day worksheet, I returned to my normal routine back at home. It wasn't until I spoke with Kristen a few days after being home that I realized the anxiety from the weekend had subtly carried into my workweek. I was more (over-) reactive to things that wouldn't normally bother me, I was a bit short with people around me, and that inner critic was extra loud! Without the worksheet in mind, awareness of my anxiety level also dropped away. I was forgetting to grab a protein-based snack and wasn't taking that 10-minute walk to clear my head. It was a good reminder that self-care translates into succeeding in all other parts of my life.



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## References:

### Screens affect your brains processing:

- <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/mental-wealth/201402/gray-matters-too-much-screen-time-damages-the-brain>

### Exercise and Brains:

- Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain

### Meditation/Mindfulness:

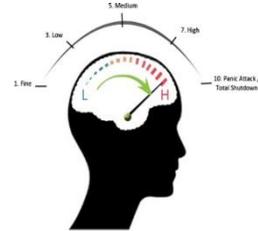
- There are many meditation practices on the internet. I like [this mediation practice](#) offered by Dr. Dan Siegel, because it helps connect the senses, the body, the brain and the mind.



## Instructions for filling out the What Impacts Anxiety Handout

**What Impacts Anxiety (WIA)** helps capture information about anxiety in a format that lets us see the daily pattern of how the symptoms of anxiety show up in our lives. The focus is on learning how food, sleep, exercise, and nutrition improve fatigue and anxiety.

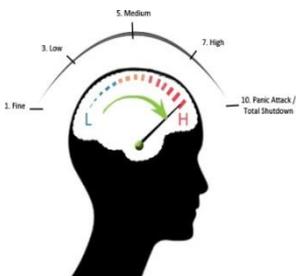
It's a tool that you can use before and after an intervention to see if and how what you did influenced your anxiety level. When filling out the worksheet, it's important to understand that identifying your anxiety level is subjective and I intended the handout to reflect how *you* are experiencing it. As a general guideline:



- **Low Anxiety (levels 1-4)** indicates that you are managing your anxiety with little effort. As you move from levels 1 up to 4, you may be increasingly aware of it, but are still in control of how you are managing yourself.
- **Medium Anxiety (levels 5 -7)** is when the symptoms of anxiety are drawing your attention part of your general awareness and may begin impacting the decisions and actions you take. This is when you need to start pulling out your tools to manage the anxiety. This worksheet is to help you develop and refine your tools to manage anxiety. It is normal to have medium levels of anxiety off and on through life, such as at a new job.
- **High Anxiety (levels 8-10)** is when you start feeling really uncomfortable. The anxiety may no longer feel manageable, or you may feel like you are just holding on. Left unchecked, you may experience a panic attack or total shutdown. This is where decision making and behavior start to be heavily influenced by the anxiety.

In the worksheet, each day has seven times for you to check-in with your anxiety. You can take note of what's going on for you throughout the day, or you use the worksheet only a few times during the day and reflect back at what has happened since you last took note. Write down notes for however many times as make sense for you. The idea is to increase your awareness of what's going on throughout the day – both the highs and the lows – to give you a better idea of your patterns and how these may be influenced by both the accelerators and resilience factors.



What Impacts Anxiety?		DAY 1	Date: _____	DAY 2	Date: _____	DAY 3	Date: _____													
		What's going on? Write below and note the time		What's going on? Write below and note the time		What's going on? Write below and note the time														
Time of day																				
<b>ANXIETY LEVEL</b> (X your level of anxiety)	HIGH	10																		
		9																		
		8																		
	MED	7																		
		6																		
		5																		
	LOW	4																		
		3																		
		2																		
		1																		
Energy level (1-5)																				
<b>What did you eat (meal or snack):</b> Protein, Healthy Carb, Fiber/Veggies, Fat																				
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Exercise/Physical activity																				
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Safe, supportive connections																				
<b>Resilience Factors:</b> Meditation, Quiet time, Time Outside, Supportive Network																				
<b>Anxiety Accelerators:</b> Caffeine, Alcohol, Sugary foods, Screen time. Stressful day																				
# hours of sleep the night before																				
Other Notes:																				

