

The sky isn't falling, but it sure can seem like it!

Living and Thriving in Anxious Times

Mix this sluggish economy, stubbornly high unemployment, uncertain politics, and foreign upheaval together and you've got a big bowl of stress stew.

Add to it a heaping dose of the “do-more-with-less” workplace, along with a fast-paced, ever-changing, technology-driven world, and what you end up with is a perfect recipe for freak-out time!

Can you still thrive in this environment? The answer is yes.

So what now? Is this truly the end of the world we once knew? Are our best days behind us? And if so, how do we cope with what's to come?

There are no easy answers, but two things remain true: 1) it is not as bad as it seems, and 2) you have more control over your future than you think.

Power of Perspective

If crime, dishonesty, rudeness, and all-around bad behavior seem at an all-time high to you, consider that what has changed is not society, but your ability to see it up close—the worst part of it—through modern media technology. You know only what you *hear, see, and read*.

There's an old saying in the news business—“If it bleeds, it leads.” Media outlets love doom and gloom because it's generally cheap to cover and it draws eyeballs. And they are pushing the edge of the envelope.

But it's not just traditional media. Today anyone with access to the web can broadcast to the world through mediums like Facebook and YouTube where exhibitionism and outrageous behavior tend to crowd out restraint.

The next time you find yourself wondering if the whole world has gone mad, remember

that the stories and images on your TV, computer, and smartphone are distorted, “funhouse” representations of reality. If they are having a negative impact on your outlook, switch your consumption to something positive or simply unplug. You don't have to participate in the circus.

Coping with Anxiety

The world's problems seem too big for you to handle for one simple reason—they are!

Think about it—you have little to no control over weighty things like crime, poverty, oppression, terrorism, and world hunger. What you can control, however, are your thoughts, actions, associations, and lifestyle. This is key to a happier life.

With that in mind, here are some tips to help you manage stress and anxiety:

- Learn your triggers. Carefully note what sets off your anxiety, and limit your exposure to it.
- Spot quickly and interrupt negative feedback loops with positive reinforcement. Anxiety often comes from playing out “what if” and doomsday scripts in your head. Keep motivational, spiritual, and affirming literature at hand, or even your own private “positivity hot link” on your computer—music, video, narrative, or images that instantly help you “reset” your mind.
- Cut yourself a break when you're overwhelmed. Agree to do what you

can, when you can. Let that be enough for the day.

- Let go of worst-case scenarios. Most of what we fear never comes to pass. When or if a crisis ever hits, options will appear at that time to help you deal with it.
- Realize that fretting is not productive. The world doesn't change because you are concerned and unhappy. It's OK to be cheerful even in the face of misfortune.
- Get moving. Worry is undirected energy. Put that energy to use on something positive and productive.
- Seek out positive, uplifting people. Your happiness is directly related to your influences.
- Learn relaxation techniques like yoga and deep breathing exercises.
- Exercise regularly. Seriously, for dozens of reasons that you have already been beaten over the head with, this is one of your most powerful “feel better” strategies.
- Accept that it takes time to change. Hint: Focus on lowering the intensity and length of worrying, rather than eradicating it completely.

Finally, don't beat yourself up for feeling anxious. A certain amount of stress is unavoidable.

The key to managing it is changing your habitual reactions to it. Your Employee Assistance Program has the knowledge, tools, and resources to help. Don't hesitate to contact your HR department for assistance and information the next time you're feeling stressed out, depressed, or overwhelmed. ■

