



We are fearful of fear. Anxious about feeling anxious. These emotions can be painful and uncomfortable to experience, and often times we do anything we can to get rid of these feelings.

We avoid. We over-prepare. We seek reassurance. We self-harm. We restrict. We purge. We binge. We think. And think. And think.

All to try our very best to get rid of anxiety.



However, we do so much to not feel fear and anxiety, that in the end these very behaviors can actually function to *maintain and/or increase* our fear and anxiety. These behaviors can **fuel** the fear, give **power** to it, **keep** it around. By avoiding the feared thing, for example, we do not allow ourselves the opportunity to challenge the negative/irrational thoughts, develop new, more helpful thoughts, develop new ways of living or coping, or create confidence that you can handle the situation...all of which function to make it even harder to deal with the situation the next time.

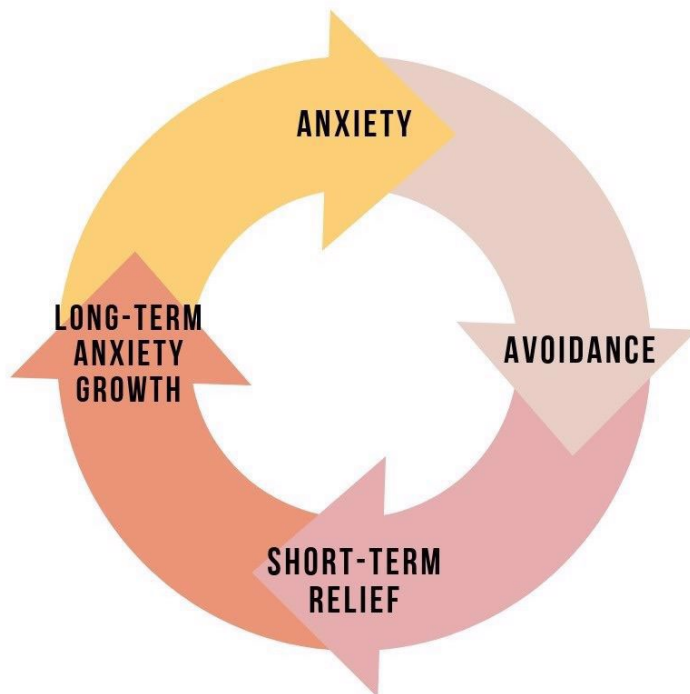
For example:

You have to give a speech-->The thought of this brings on immense fear and anxiety-->You imagine all the worst things that might happen, you tell yourself you can't do it, and you drop out of the class to avoid having to do the speech-->You feel relief from the anxiety and fear which reinforces the avoidant behavior and makes it more likely to reoccur in the future

By not doing the speech, you were able to reduce anxiety and fear, however, you were not able to practice coping with the situation; you didn't allow yourself the opportunity to challenge the fears and anxiety; and most importantly, you didn't allow yourself to see that you are capable of handling the situation. Therefore, next time you have to give a speech,

the fear and anxiety come right back because you have no contradictory experience or evidence to dispute the fears.

The more this cycle repeats itself, the stronger the fear becomes and the more automatic and set the avoidant behavior becomes.



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So what does any of this have to do with eating disorders? Anxiety disorders are one of the most common co-occurring disorders with eating disorders and can be a driving force for the onset and/or maintenance of the disordered eating. It's crucial that you address the anxiety alongside the eating disorder in order to create lasting change. Remembering to **[NOT FEED THE FEARS]** is an important aspect of eating disorder treatment. When we avoid, ruminate, fixate, obsessively research, body check, "latch on" to negative thoughts and engage with them, we are "feeding" the fears.

So how do we start to make these changes?

It starts with identifying the fears and the things that make us anxious. Exploring our thoughts and our beliefs about those things. Figuring out all the ways we inadvertently feed those fears. And then practicing new behaviors in order to no longer provide fuel to

the fears. That could mean journaling to help you sort out and challenge negative thoughts. Distracting yourself with a phone call to a friend or a Netflix show if you find yourself ruminating. Packing up your scale to reduce body checking. Pushing yourself to try something that scares you. Reminding yourself how awesome and capable you are. Talking with your therapist or eating disorder team can help with this process! Together, you can process your fears in a safe and trusting environment, challenge your automatic ways of thinking, and identify new behaviors and skills to help you fight, *not feed*, your fears and achieve lasting change.

Katie Jones, LIMHP, NCC, CPC
Omni Eating Disorder Program Director