

# Indecision & Anxiety

Last Updated: Aug 16, 2013 | By Ashley Miller

Ashley Miller is a licensed social worker, psychotherapist, certified Reiki practitioner, yoga enthusiast and aromatherapist. She has also worked as an employee assistance program counselor and a substance-abuse professional. Miller holds a Master of Social Work and has extensive training in mental health diagnosis, as well as child and adolescent psychotherapy. She also has a bachelor's degree in music.

Indecision and anxiety may feel like you are sitting in the middle of the tracks.

Indecision and anxiety often go hand in hand. Many people who have anxiety disorders find it difficult to make decisions for fear of making the wrong decision or disappointing others, or they fear that their decision is unchangeable or final. Individuals who suffer from anxiety disorders such as obsessive-compulsive disorder or generalized anxiety disorder may have trouble making decisions to the point that it affects their daily functioning.



## Significance

Individuals who suffer from anxiety may not necessarily fall into the category of having a disorder. Everyone experiences anxiety from time to time, however. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, approximately 40 million Americans are affected by anxiety disorders each year. Those who suffer from anxiety disorders often feel crippled by the decision-making process, which ultimately stems from the characteristic control issues that these individuals face.

## Function

Anxiety serves a hidden function when it comes to indecision. Many people use anxiety as an excuse to avoid making a decision at all. While remaining in a state of indecision can actually cause heightened anxiety for some, it can be a source of comfort for others. The fear and doubt that one experiences when faced with having to make a major (or minor) decision is dysfunctionally preferable to many people with anxiety problems rather than having to face the finality of their decision.

## Types

All types of anxiety disorders can set the stage for indecision. Some of the more common types of disorders are obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and generalized anxiety disorder (GAD). OCD, characterized by the Mayo Clinic as having unreasonable thoughts or fears that lead to uncontrollable repetitive actions, renders people unable to make a decision because sufferers have tried to block out all unpleasant thoughts and consequences of the decision by their repetitive actions. GAD sufferers generally suffer from chronic worry, tension, and stress, which paralyzes the decision-making process.

## Prevention/Solution

An article in Psychology Today describes the decision-making process from the point of view of someone dealing with obsessive-compulsive disorder. The solution recommended by this author is to try to change the decision-making framework from one of fear and doubt to one of purpose and service. In other words, try to use the decision-making process as a means of realizing a positive outcome, and mentally re-frame the decision so that you are presented with as many possible positive outcomes as possible.

## Expert Insight

Although there are many theories as to why individuals suffer from indecision, one useful suggestion is proposed by psychologist Susan Jeffers in her book "Feel the Fear and Do it Anyway". Jeffers describes the difficulties many people have with indecision and anxiety and suggests that most people have one main fear in their lives that cripples them and renders them unable to make--or at least makes them have tremendous difficulty making--any major decisions. Jeffers suggests that indecision and anxiety can stem from a victim mentality, in which individuals struggle with the subconscious fear that any decision they make is the wrong one. Jeffers recommends that these people try to confront their inner fears, whether through self-help or professional counseling, in order to move on and lead lives that are relatively free from anxiety and indecision.