

# OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Dr. Joseph Baker

## Is Fear Taking Over Your Life?

*Tsunamis. Earthquakes. Hurricanes. Fires. Terrorist attacks. Wars. And now the bird flu. It's virtually impossible to pick up a newspaper or turn on the television without some disaster, disease or pestilence gripping you with fear.*

Many of the news reports we read, watch and hear are legitimate and worthy of concern. Some, however, are generated by those who simply want to take advantage of the world's increasingly fearful point of view. Let's face it: Fear sells.

But we can't just blame external forces. A substantial amount of fear is self-generated by our own psyches: We truly can be our own worst enemies.

### The Effects of Fear

A little fear is natural, but too much fear can have serious effects on your physical and emotional well-being.

#### The Spinal Connection

According to Dr. Baker, fear is an emotional cause of **vertebral subluxations**, spinal dysfunctions that are linked with disease.

Doctors of chiropractic correct vertebral subluxations with safe and gentle maneuvers called **chiropractic adjustments**. However, chiropractors also focus on preventing subluxations to begin with. This focus on prevention makes chiropractic unique.

Researchers from the Emory University School of Medicine in Atlanta agree that fear deteriorates wellness. They concluded that "the inability to suppress excessive fear or anxiety is a significant clinical problem." (*Biol Psychiatry* 2005;57:1559-64.)

That's why Dr. Baker urges patients to carefully monitor their internal "fear

meters" and prevent this powerful emotion from taking over their lives.

#### The Emotional Effects of Fear

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression and sleep disorders are all linked to fear. How? Because fear feeds worry.

According to researchers in Australia, compulsive worry sparks generalized anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder and panic attacks (*J Anxiety Disord* 2005;19:877-92).

#### The Physical Effects of Fear

In women — but not men — chronic fear is associated with elevated C-reactive protein levels in the blood, "which suggests the presence of low-grade inflammation and a potential risk of cardiovascular disease." (*Psychosom Med* 2004;66:484.)

Fear-based anxiety may also spark persistent pain in the muscles of the face, fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue disorder and nightly teeth grinding (*CNS Spectr* 2005;10:311-18).

Teeth grinding may lead to a condition known as temporomandibular joint syndrome (TMJ). The over-tightened facial muscles may also strain and misalign spinal bones (vertebrae) in the neck. The reverse is also true: Misaligned spinal bones, known as vertebral subluxations, can throw the jaw out of alignment and result in TMJ.

#### How and Why We Fear

What's the purpose of fear? What happens biologically when we feel fear?



Read on to find out.

#### Fear's Origins

According to new research published in *The Journal of Neuroscience*, fear is processed by the brain — specifically the lateral (side, in anatomical terms) nucleus of the amygdala (*J Neurosci* 2005;25:10,010-14).

The amygdala is located just beneath the surface of the front, medial (middle) part of the brain's temporal lobe: located near the area where the right and left hemispheres of the brain divide. If you imagine the shape of the brain as a boxing glove, this area is immediately above where the wrist opening would be.

Although fear is processed in the brain, it is felt by the entire body, including the circulatory system, respiratory system, nervous system and immune system.

#### The Fear Instinct

You've probably heard of the "fight or flight" response. But researchers have now added "freeze," "fright" and "faint" to the familiar equation.

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“Based on recent literature, freeze, flight, fight, fright and faint provides a more complete description of the human acute-stress response sequence than current descriptions.” (*CNS Spectr* 2004;9:679-85.)

Our basic “fight or flight” internal mechanism is sparked by fear. This is a necessary response, which helps us dodge danger. However, too much of this good thing is harmful. It’s all about establishing balance. The goal shouldn’t be total elimination of fear but, rather, containment and management — so that it doesn’t overtake our lives.

### ***Negative Self-Image and Fear***

“I was lucky this time, fooling everyone, but will my luck hold? When will people discover that I’m not up to the job?” Questions like these frequently unleash a torrent of fear in those you’d least expect: remarkably accomplished and, quite often, extremely successful leaders with staggering lists of achievements.

“The sense of being a fraud is the flip side of giftedness and causes a great many talented, hardworking and capable leaders to believe that they don’t deserve their success. ‘Bluffing’ their way through life (as they see it), they are haunted by the constant fear of exposure.” (*Harv Bus Rev* 2005;83:108-16,159.)

This attitude drains the joy from a job well done. If you are constantly second-guessing your skills, start by addressing some of the key issues. For instance, do you feel your educational background isn’t quite up to par? If so, take action and enroll in classes at your local university or community college.

### **How to Fight Fear**

Now that you know why fear happens, how it happens and how it affects your body and mind, keep reading to find out how to manage it.

### ***Don’t Let Fear Cloud Your Thinking***

The word “fear” is often used as an acronym for “false evidence appearing

real” — a condition that blocks rational thinking. Attempting to make a sensible decision with distorted information is like trying to bake a cake with the ingredients for lasagna.

That’s why it’s important to maintain perspective and not allow fear to hold your thought process hostage. One way to accomplish this is to take an emotional step back. Outline your fears on paper and then analyze each one separately.

### ***Face Fear***

One way to free yourself from fear is to confront the emotion head-on. Identify its source and reconstruct your inner self from there. Talking with a trained therapist, spiritual advisor or trusted friend may help in this process.

Meditation, prayer, visualization, yoga, Tai Chi and similar pursuits also quell fear and keep things in perspective.

### ***Focus on Past Glories***

Instead of focusing on fear, remember past glories. Human nature being what it is, we tend to recall failures first and the successes second. Turn that trend around and, when you do think about a failure, ask yourself what you learned from the experience that will help you succeed in your current endeavor. If you are concerned about an event affecting your country or the world, also ask yourself what positive events have taken place lately.

### ***Practice***

Nothing drives fear of inadequacy away more than practice.

For instance, if you have a fear of public speaking — and your job requires that you make presentations to colleagues and customers — practice in front of friends and family or join a group like Toast Masters.

### ***Breathe***

Fear triggers short, shallow breaths that heighten anxiety. One way to diffuse this emotion is to sit in a comfortable chair with both feet on the floor and palms open on the tops of your thighs. Then take three slow, deep breaths. Imagine your lower abdomen

as a balloon and, as you inhale, inflate that balloon. Feel the breath rise up through your entire body and exhale slowly. Breathing techniques like this short-circuit fear’s clutch on body and mind.

### ***Laugh***

Fear is corrosive, eroding precious minutes and hours of your life. But if you can break its downward spiral for even one hour — by working out at the gym, renting a funny video, sharing jokes with friends or playing hide-and-seek with your children — you can loosen fear’s grip and perhaps gain a new perspective on the problem at hand.

### ***Turn off the Tube***

Psychological research shows that watching fear-inducing images over and over again significantly bolsters the risk of developing anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This is exponentially more true for children. Although it may be important to stay informed for safety reasons, it is not necessary to bombard yourself repeatedly with the same unnerving image.

### ***Exercise***

Fear boosts release of the stress hormone cortisol. Excessive cortisol plays a role in a variety of disorders. The most effective way to combat cortisol fluctuations is aerobic exercise. Although it is tempting to skip workouts during times of stress, these are the most critical times to stick with your exercise program.

### ***Get Adjusted***

At times of emotional stress, the body is more prone to develop vertebral subluxations. When fear hits, pick up the phone and schedule a chiropractic appointment.

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