

# Wellness Wednesday



September 20, 2023

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## Therapists Reveal 6 Common Habits That Intensify Anxiety

Anxiety is a universal experience that can significantly impact our well-being. It is a normal response to stress, but when it becomes chronic and overwhelming, it can impede our daily lives. Therapists and mental health experts have identified several common habits that can make anxiety symptoms worse. By understanding these habits, we can take proactive steps to manage our anxiety and improve our mental health.

### 1. Black-and-White Thinking

One common unhelpful thinking pattern that contributes to anxiety is black-and-white thinking, also known as all-or-nothing thinking. This cognitive distortion involves viewing situations as either good or bad, without considering the gray areas in between. For example, if you make a mistake in an email, you may immediately assume that you are incompetent and that the recipient shares the same opinion. However, this kind of thinking is often distorted and fails to consider the complexity of real-life situations.

To counter black-and-white thinking, challenge yourself to consider alternative perspectives and possibilities. Remind yourself that making mistakes is a normal part of being human and does not define your competence. Practice self-compassion and remind yourself that everyone makes errors from time to time.



### 2. Avoidance

Avoidance is another common habit that can worsen anxiety symptoms. Many people believe that avoiding situations or triggers of anxiety will make them feel better. However, this avoidance behavior actually reinforces anxiety in the long run. By avoiding anxiety-provoking situations, you deny yourself the opportunity to confront and overcome your fears, leading to increased anxiety over time.

Instead of avoiding anxiety-provoking situations, therapists recommend gradually exposing yourself to them. This gradual exposure helps desensitize your anxiety response and allows you to build confidence in your ability to cope with uncomfortable situations. For example, if you have social anxiety, start by attending small social gatherings or scheduling one-on-one meetings with friends. By gradually facing your fears, you can reduce anxiety and regain control over your life.

### 3. Seeking Reassurance

Constantly seeking reassurance from others or relying on external validation can contribute to anxiety. While seeking reassurance may provide temporary relief from anxiety, it reinforces the need for external validation and perpetuates the cycle of anxiety in the long term. It creates a dependence on others' opinions and prevents you from developing self-confidence and self-assurance.

To break the cycle of seeking reassurance, therapists recommend practicing self-reassurance and self-validation. Instead of relying on others' opinions, learn to trust your own judgment and validate your own experiences. Cultivate self-compassion and remind yourself that you are capable of handling difficult situations. Over time, you will become more self-assured and less reliant on external validation.

### 4. Catastrophizing

Catastrophizing is a cognitive distortion that involves magnifying the worst-case scenario and believing that it is the most likely outcome. This habit of thinking can intensify anxiety and prevent you from effectively problem-solving or finding realistic solutions. Catastrophizing often leads to excessive worry and unnecessary stress.

To counteract catastrophizing, therapists suggest challenging these worst-case scenarios and exploring alternative possibilities. Consider the likelihood of the worst-case scenario actually occurring and remind yourself that anxiety tends to exaggerate threats. Focus on actionable steps you can take to address potential challenges and remind yourself of your strengths and coping abilities.

### 5. Negative Self-Talk

The way we talk to ourselves can significantly impact our anxiety levels. Negative self-talk, such as constantly criticizing ourselves or expecting failure, can contribute to feelings of anxiety and self-doubt. These negative thoughts create a self-fulfilling prophecy and perpetuate a cycle of anxiety.

To combat negative self-talk, therapists recommend cultivating self-compassion and practicing positive affirmations. Challenge negative thoughts by asking yourself for evidence to support or refute them. Replace negative self-talk with realistic and encouraging statements. Treat yourself with the same kindness and understanding you would extend to a loved one.

### 6. People-Pleasing

Constantly prioritizing others' needs and opinions above your own can fuel anxiety. People-pleasing often leads to neglecting your own well-being and boundaries, resulting in increased stress and anxiety. The fear of disappointing others or being rejected can create a cycle of anxiety and prevent you from expressing your true thoughts and emotions.

To address people-pleasing tendencies, therapists suggest setting healthy boundaries and practicing assertiveness. Learn to prioritize your own needs and consider your own values and desires. Communicate your boundaries and expectations clearly, even if it means saying no to others. Remember that taking care of your own well-being is essential for managing anxiety and fostering healthy relationships.

### Seeking Professional Help

While these strategies can be helpful in managing anxiety, it's important to remember that everyone's experience with anxiety is unique. If anxiety significantly impairs your daily functioning or if you feel overwhelmed and unable to cope, it may be beneficial to seek professional help. Therapists and mental health professionals can provide personalized guidance and support tailored to your specific needs.

By recognizing and addressing these common habits that exacerbate anxiety, we can take proactive steps towards improving our mental health. It's important to be patient and kind to ourselves throughout this process, as changing long-standing habits takes time and effort. Remember that seeking support from therapists and mental health professionals is a valuable resource in managing anxiety and promoting overall well-being.



# STUFFED SHELLS WITH MEAT SAUCE

## INGREDIENTS

- 27 Jumbo Pasta Shells, such as Barilla, or gf pasta, 9 ounces total
- 1 cup onion, finely chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, chopped
- 1 tsp olive oil
- 1 lb 99% or 93% lean ground turkey
- 32 oz crushed tomatoes
- 1 tbsp chopped fresh basil
- salt and pepper, to taste
- 2 cups part-skim ricotta cheese
- 8 oz part-skim mozzarella cheese, shredded
- 1 large egg
- 16 oz package frozen spinach, thawed and squeezed well
- 1/4 cup Parmigiano Reggiano, or parmesan cheese

Stuffed Shells with Meat Sauce made with jumbo pasta shells stuffed with ricotta, mozzarella and spinach in a ground turkey meat sauce is a delicious comfort food meal, especially as the air grows colder. Healthy, high protein and family friendly!

### Variations

Here are some variations and tips to customize your stuffed shells with meat sauce:

- **Vegetarian Version:** Omit the ground turkey (or beef) and make a vegetarian version by using veggie crumbles or other meat substitutes.
- **Ground Meat Substitutions:** If you're not a fan of ground turkey, you can use ground beef or ground chicken instead.
- **Make-Ahead Option:** You can prepare the meat sauce and the cheese filling a day ahead to save time. Simply assemble the dish when you're ready to bake it.

### Nutrition Information

Serving: 3 stuffed shells, Calories: 360.9 kcal, Carbohydrates: 34.3 g, Protein: 28.4 g, Fat: 12.8 g, Saturated Fat: 3.7 g, Cholesterol: 72.5 mg, Sodium: 375 mg, Fiber: 3.3 g, Sugar: 0.5 g



## INSTRUCTIONS



- Cook the jumbo pasta shells according to the package instructions until al dente. Drain and set aside.
- Meanwhile, saute onions and garlic in oil. Add the ground meat and salt and brown until cooked, breaking up in small pieces with a wooden spoon. Stir in the tomatoes, salt, pepper and basil, then simmer on low, covered, about 15 minutes, until the flavors meld.
- In a large bowl, mix together ricotta, egg, spinach, mozzarella, and parmesan.
- Once shells are cooked and cool, fill each shell with (about 2 heaping tbsp) cheese mixture and place on a large baking dish, or two smaller dishes, covering the bottom of the dish with a little sauce.
- Preheat oven to 375F. Top shells with half of the sauce, cover with foil and bake 40 minutes; uncover foil and bake 5 more minutes. Serve with additional sauce on top and garnish with fresh basil, if desired.

## The Origins of Stuffed Shells with Meat Sauce

Stuffed shells, also known as "conchiglioni ripieni" in Italian, have their roots in traditional Italian cuisine. The dish is believed to have originated in the Campania region of Italy, where pasta is a staple. The concept of stuffing pasta shells with various fillings can be traced back to ancient Roman times, where they were filled with a mixture of cheese and herbs.



## FEATURED EXERCISE

<https://www.self.com/gallery/lower-body-bodyweight-workout>Featured Exercise ► **Runner's Lunge to Balance**

- Stand with your feet hip-width apart and your core engaged. Take a big step back with your left foot, and drop into a very low lunge by bending your right knee to 90 degrees and lowering your chest toward the floor to tap your left fingertips to the floor. Your extended left leg may be a little bent, but it shouldn't come to 90 degrees like a reverse lung.
- From this low runner's lunge position, push off your left foot and lift your left leg to come to a standing balance on your right leg with your left knee at hip height.
- Pause for a moment in this balance, then immediately bring your left foot behind you and drop into another low lunge.
- Do all of the reps on the same side, then repeat on the other side. Runner's lunge is a fantastic exercise that not only helps improve your balance but also offers numerous benefits to your overall fitness. This exercise is a favorite among athletes, fitness enthusiasts, and even yoga practitioners, and for good reason! The runner's lunge engages multiple muscle groups, including your legs, core, and glutes, making it a great full-body workout. By incorporating this exercise into your fitness routine, you can strengthen your lower body, improve your stability, and enhance your flexibility all at once.

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Regular exercise can help you control your weight, reduce your risk of heart disease, and strengthen your bones and muscles. But if it's been awhile since you've exercised and you have health issues or concerns, it's a good idea to talk to your doctor before starting a new exercise routine.



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