

# My Age Of Anxiety Summary

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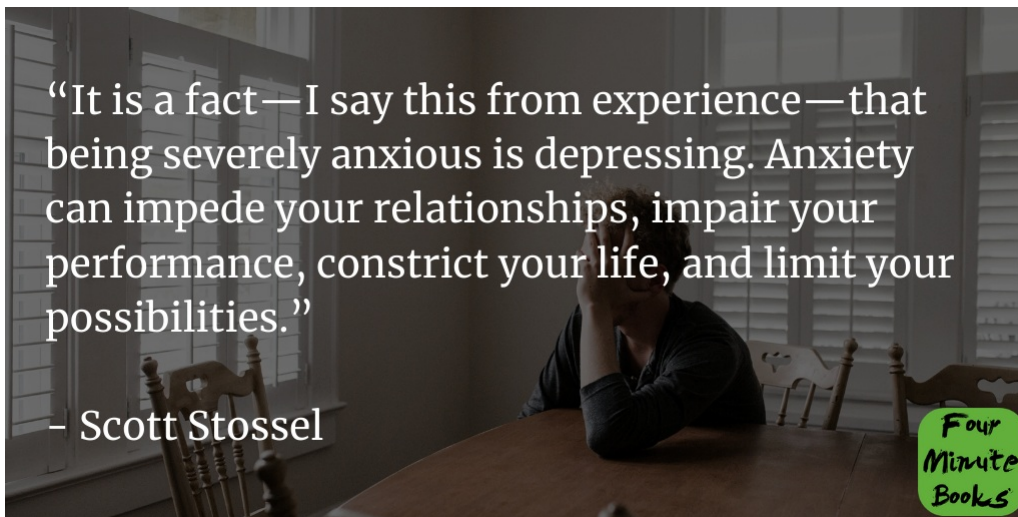


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**1-Sentence-Summary:** *My Age Of Anxiety* is your guide to understanding an aspect of mental illness that most of us don't realize is so severe, showing it's biological and environmental origins and ways to treat it.

**Read in:** 4 minutes

**Favorite quote from the author:**



What are you afraid of or worried about right now? As I write this, it's March of 2020 and many people are scared about the new coronavirus going around. While most people do worry about it, the average person isn't having a panic attack.

We've all got regular fears. Public speaking, important events, and all sorts of things can give us mild to moderate anxiety. Some fears get bad, but nothing is as bad as those with clinical anxiety.

These are people who have some of those same fears as the rest of us. The difference for them is that they are more afraid of things that aren't inherently fatal and experience severe reactions to them, like fainting or throwing up.

The causes and treatments for this type of anxiety are what you'll learn all about in Scott Stossel's *My Age Of Anxiety*. And it isn't just your average advice. This is something the author has dealt with himself and can speak with personal experience about.

Here are the 3 most helpful lessons I've discovered:

1. This disease can make life difficult and embarrassing.

2. Anxiety comes from evolution but is also a result of our experiences in childhood.
3. To treat this form of mental illness, you can use drugs and therapy.

I hope you're not too anxious to dive into this book, because it's going to make your life better! Here we go!

## Lesson 1: Life is hard and embarrassing for those that struggle with this disease.

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Some people with clinical anxiety compare the constant battle to having diabetes. They must constantly deal with difficult afflictions on a daily basis. It takes vigilance to watch out for situations that could make them stressed and need to seek relief with drugs, which is draining.

There are many limitations associated with this illness as well. I have family members that have had a hard time being in public places in the past. Some prefer to just be home where they know they're in control and safe.

One man had it so bad that he couldn't go outside of a five-kilometer radius around his house. If he did, he'd vomit blood.

Even the most simple things in life are hard for these individuals. **The author himself finds it impossible to give a speech or board an airplane without taking a mixture of alcohol and meds.**

He also struggled with overattachment to loved ones, as many others with this ailment do. As a child, he had a hard time being without his parents. If they ever left he would think they were dead.

Some aspects of life are even embarrassing when you have mental illness this bad. On one trip the author missed all the sights because he was visiting all the sanitary facilities due to his anxieties.

## Lesson 2: How we grew up and our biology can both be responsible for anxiety.

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So what causes this disorder, anyway? It's rooted in our evolution, actually. And a little fear and worry isn't actually such a bad thing.

Remember the "survival of the fittest" theory? It states that the best-adapted species will survive and others won't. Our ancient ancestors developed fears for things that wouldn't help them live longer, like cliffs and snakes, for example. This helped them come out on top and thrive.

We all still have some of these fears today, and they make sense. **You're afraid of spiders or snakes still because it helps you live longer.**

But the worries of those with clinical anxiety go much deeper and are far more irrational. The author, for example, has a fear of cheese.

There is even some evidence of this trait being passed down in genes. Stossel, for example, sees a few of his anxieties in his daughter. Some of this may be from upbringing, though.

Research on Rhesus monkeys reveals how important the connection between parent and child is. Young monkeys who were separated showed more anxiety, social abnormality, and aggression later in life.

Another study compared the effects of a mother's traits on her children. It identified that mom's who are more mindful and loving raise children who are less anxious.

### **Lesson 3: Drugs and therapy are two of the best forms of treatment for this mental illness.**

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So now we know what life is like with it, and we've seen some ideas about where it comes from. But how do doctors treat anxiety? The current leaders for this are medication and therapy. And what's most effective just depends on the person.

From fMRI brain scans, we know that this mental illness is connected with events in the brain. Some areas light up differently in people with clinical anxiety than in normal people. Because of this, we know that we can treat it with drugs.

The brain of an anxious person often has a harder time producing serotonin, a neurotransmitter that helps with certain emotions. Medications can help fix this and calm the person down. This option isn't for everyone though as there are side effects and theories that these drugs are no better than placebos.

That's why looking into therapy as a form of treatment is a wonderful thing. Cognitive-behavioral therapy, or CBT, is one remedy that is quite common.

**In the most widely used form of CBT, patients go through what's known as exposure therapy.** The idea is that if a person faces what they're afraid of, they can get over their fears.

This didn't work so well for the author, though. When he tried to confront his fear of throwing up he just ended up choking on the emetic used to induce vomiting.

He's also been through imaginal exposure. This is where the therapist explores his feelings while he visualizes things that scare him. Although he's still going through therapy, Stossel believes that these things are helping reduce his anxiety.

## **My Age Of Anxiety Review**

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At the beginning of *My Age Of Anxiety*, I kept thinking that I didn't like that it was just about the causes and effects of worry. But then I realized that understanding this side of it can help us know how to beat it. I think I still prefer happier books, but this one is a good dive into a big problem and might help us see ways to fix it.

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## **Who would I recommend the My Age Of Anxiety summary to?**

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The 34-year-old mom who worries a lot and wonders if it's clinical anxiety, the 57-year-old who has a friend that struggles with anxiety and wants to know how to help, and anyone with an interest in psychology and improving mental health.