**Understanding Anxiety**

**Anxiety feels rotten**

It is no exaggeration to say that most of my clients have some level of anxiety when they come to see me. Even if they have come to see me about something else, they are often in an anxious state and I can usually do something to help.

If you feel anxious a lot of the time then you will know just how rotten it can make you feel. It also feels as if there is nothing you can do about it because you are never really sure where it comes from.

**Explaining Anxiety**

It can be a considerable comfort if you can understand what is happening, so let’s start with a bit of explanation.

Anxiety happens when our body goes into a state of high alert. This state of high alert is a natural state and it is very useful to us in certain circumstances. If we are in real danger then this state allows us to react quickly, to run away,or to fight off the danger. In this state we feel less pain, our blood supply is diverted from those parts of our body which are not essential to our survival to the systems which we need at this time. So our heart rate will go up and chemicals such as adrenaline course through our bloodstream.

**But I’m not in danger, so why am I anxious?**

All very well, you might be thinking, but I’m not very often in danger. In fact, I can’t really remember the last time I was under any sort of threat. Well, you are not alone. In our modern world we are not very often in danger – indeed quite a few of us go out of our way to find danger: rock climbing, downhill skiing, parachute jumps, driving fast, sky-diving, white water rafting. They are all ways to artificially reproduce that danger which earlier in  the evolution of our species would have been part of day-to-day life.

There’s nothing wrong with this, but there can be a problem. Our bodies can often be deceived into thinking there is a real danger when there is none. What is going on in our heads can cause this response to start, even when there is no danger.

**The mind can cause anxiety**

This wouldn’t matter too much if we believed that there was a danger and then it passed. But often, when the danger is not real we believe it is always there. We are constantly on alert, looking out for trouble. This makes our bodies react in certain ways and causes the feeling we often describe as ‘feeling stressed’. Feeling like this makes us worry even more, if we are feeling like this then surely there is something out there which is causing it, we think. So there we go, back on high alert looking around for danger. We get stuck into a vicious circle. We feel rotten, so we worry about it and then feel even worse.

I hope it helps you to cope a bit better now you understand what your body is doing. On one level you are still behaving as if you are a hunter-gatherer 10,000 years ago, but of course the modern world does not behave like this.

**Breaking the anxiety cycle**

The good news is that you can do more than just understand this cycle. You can break it. I’ll be showing you one technique for doing just that next time.