

## Calming Your Death Anxiety in 1374 Words

Existential theorists say that the fear of death is a “normal anxiety” rather than a neurotic one. Meaning that it’s unavoidable. For everyone except me, that is. I fear nothing. I hate to break it to you, but human life expectancy isn’t even 80 years. Here in the land of the free, it’s only 77.3. And as a sixteen year old I’m roughly 20% done with my life already. Fear and anxiety towards death is a common thing, but we don’t have to let it rule our lives. So let’s dig deeper, by about 6 feet to figure out the cause and solution to this fear.

The fear of death is all around us at all times. A lot of our primitive instincts are based on survival, or in other words the need to *not die*. You’ve probably heard of the fight or flight response, for one, but according to Harvard Medical School, humans may also go into survival mode when in a traffic jam, having family problems, or experiencing pressure from their work. Another effect of this fear can be death anxiety. You know when you have a cough, look up your symptoms, and panic because the internet says you probably have an incurable disease? Or, when you’re wondering what the point of life is and if you’re going to die and be forgotten, why bother trying? Then you’ve experienced this anxiety.

There are a lot of people who have *severe* death anxiety, those with thanatophobia. These people can experience stress symptoms like nausea and shortness of breath. Obviously, not everyone has thanatophobia, that would be a total mess. But let’s not ignore that 10% of the U.S. population has experienced it. That’s like 33 million people *just* in America. So who are these people? I may not have a list of 33 million names, but I can tell you that there are groups more susceptible to heightened fears of death. For example, non-religious people won’t be able to find solace in their belief system, those who have lost a loved one worry about the pain they’ll put their family through, and people who haven’t accomplished what they want aren’t going to give

up that easily! Well at least you don't have to worry about me, I'm not scared of death, so I hope you all have fun suffering!

And while we're on the topic of me being delusional, the dictionary is my favorite book. Don't take me for a nerd, it's not my favorite to read. I like it because it puts broad concepts into simple terms. In this case, we can dumb down death to determine why it's so scary. The definition of death is, "the end of life." Ah, now I get it! The fear of death is the fear of not living! At least for some. Others may associate death with pain and fear that. Or for others still, the fear of aging and time.

Why don't we circle back to the fear of not living? This idea got me thinking about myself not living. 0/10 do not recommend. I almost couldn't imagine a world without me. Glorious, wondrous me... hold up, is part of this problem's cause ego? Turns out, yes. In his book *A Quiet Ego Quiets Death Anxiety: Humility as an Existential Anxiety Buffer* Pelin Kesebir conducted five studies on this matter. They showed that those with less humility had more fear of death. The studies tell us that self-transcendence is, "a sturdier, healthier anxiety buffer than self-enhancement." So as Kendrick Lamar famously said, "sit down, be humble." I think I've mastered that skill.

As you can see, I've done a lot of work. A lot of research. Now it's time for you to pull your weight. So riddle me this: what happens after death? Whatever you said, you're probably wrong. I guess I'll have to keep spoon-feeding you. I'll tell you what happens after death, you get put in a box and buried. Or are you planning to be cremated? At least you won't be a waste of space then. A good few of you probably said we'll go to heaven, the underworld, Valhalla, the river Yomi, Buddhist paradise, take a segue to one of the elaborate Buddhist hells, or reincarnation will happen. I've been told I'm going to hell plenty of times. But don't worry about

the delusional, I'm not phased by those little hate crimes because I, like Victor Frankenstein, am a man of science. And although according to Mary Shelly, science can create a monster, it doesn't tell us what happens after death... it's unknown. And therefore, the fear of death is partially rooted in the fear of the unknown. This fear is so much different than others. We're scared of spiders because we *know* that some are venomous. We fear heights because we *know* what the impact of falling does. Even the dark is dreaded because we *know* things can take advantage of our impaired vision. A commonly cited quote from Lovecraft (1927) says, "The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown".

Alright, time to circle back around to the beginning. The fear of death inhibits and limits. It's a shame that the very topic, the very notion of death, incites fear because I love talking about it. So allow me to pass on some wisdom to calm this fear, or at least give you something to think about. For starters, the fear of dying has been found to dissolve with age. The elderly are more fearful of the process of death rather than death itself. Actually, the children of the dying are more scared of it. As one grows older, death gets nearer. The older you get, the more time you have to think about it and come to peace, either on purpose or not. Your bucket list gets shorter each year as well. So what I'm trying to say is... you'll get over it.

For my second solution, I have looked to a Greek philosopher named Epicurus for some aid. This man hated the fear of death, as he believed it interfered with happiness, which he said was the meaning of life. One quote by him summarizes my thoughts on the fear of death quite well. So, while I certainly don't agree with everything Epicurus said, he had a point with this one. The quote is: "Why should I fear death? If I am, then death is not. If Death is, then I am not.

Why should I fear that which can only exist when I do not?" In the end, fearing death is pointless.

For my third solution, I tried to get God to send a prophet down to answer my questions but I don't think he likes me. I can't think of a single reason why. No matter, you have me to answer your inquiries, and I'm basically a god. Mortal... or am I? But still, a god amongst men. So, I'll give you the reassurance you've been looking for. I could tell you to crack open the religious teachings of your choice but... if God(s) doesn't like flawless me, then you're screwed. My real advice in overcoming this fear is to just talk about it. Get it out there. Feel things for once! Also, please do something with your life. Think about life more than death and make the most of it so you can get over it faster. Now praise me for my wisdom! ... go on, I'm waiting.

Despite this fear of death being inevitable, let's not give in to it. Instead, let's understand and deconstruct it. This will allow us to live a more exciting, stressless, and greasy food-filled life. I mean, that's what America's about after all! Though, don't get too carried away. Don't die intentionally! I don't want your peasant blood on my hands. Finally, I'd like to thank you for allowing me to present this to you before you die. If you enjoyed this, maybe you'll read my next work of art (still in progress), *'Brought to You by the Most Qualified and Illustrious Person You'll Ever Meet: How to Banish Ego.'*