

Why Fear of Discomfort Might Be Ruining Your Life

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Think about the major problems in your life — from anxiety to lack of regular exercise to a bad diet to procrastination and more.

Pretty much every one of these problems is caused by a fear of discomfort.

Discomfort isn't intense pain, but just the feeling you get when you're out of your comfort zone. Eating vegetables for many people, for example, brings discomfort. So does sitting in meditation, or sitting with a hard task in front of you, or saying No to people, or exercising. (Of course, different people are uncomfortable with different things, but you get the idea.)

And most people don't like discomfort. They run from it. It's not fun, so why do it?

The problem is that when you run from discomfort all the time, you are restricted to a small zone of comfort, and so you miss out on most of life. On most of the best things in life, in fact. And you become unhealthy, because if eating healthy food and exercising is uncomfortable, then you go to comfort foods and not moving much. Being unhealthy, unfortunately, is also uncomfortable, so then you seek distractions from this (and the fact that you have debt and too much clutter, etc.) in food and entertainment and shopping (as if spending will solve our problems!) and this in turn makes things worse.

Amazingly, the simple act of being OK with discomfort can solve all these problems.

This is a discovery I made a few years back, when I was trying to change my life.

I started by trying to quit smoking, but I hated the feeling of having an urge to smoke and not actually smoking. It was uncomfortable to resist that strong urge. My mind resisted, tried to make up all kinds of rationalizations for smoking. My mind tried to run from this discomfort, tried to seek distractions.

I learned to sit and watch the discomfort. And when I did, incredibly, it wasn't too bad. My world didn't end, nor did my mind implode. I was just uncomfortable for a bit, and then life moved on.

Then I watched this same process happen with running. I didn't want to run because it was too hard. My mind made up rationalizations, etc. I found ways to avoid the running. Then I gave in to the discomfort, and it wasn't hard. I ran, and learned to love it.

I repeated this process for changing my diet (many times, actually, because my diet gradually got healthier over time), for getting out of debt and not spending so much, for beating procrastination, for meditation, and so on.

Becoming OK with discomfort was one of the single biggest discoveries of my newly changed life.

How to Become Good at Discomfort

If you can learn to become good at discomfort, your life will have almost no limits. There's no better skill to learn.

Here are some tips I've learned:

1. **Try it in small doses.** Sit for 30 seconds in discomfort. If you're averse to vegetables, try one green veggie. Put it in your mouth, leave it there for 30 seconds. You probably won't like it much, but that's OK. You don't have to have a mouthgasm with every bite. I've learned to love veggies.
2. **Immerse yourself in discomfort.** Are you sad, or angry, or stressed, or frustrated? Instead of avoiding those emotions, immerse yourself in them. Dive into them, accept them, be in them. Same with procrastination — sit with the task you're running from, and don't switch to something else. Just be there with that uncomfortable feeling. How does it feel? Are you in deep pain? Are you OK?
3. **Seek discomfort.** Challenge yourself daily. Find uncomfortable things and do them. Introduce yourself to strangers. Hug a friend. Confess your feelings. Confront someone (with a smile). Say No to people. Go for a run. Try a new healthy dish.
4. **Watch yourself run from things.** What have you been avoiding because of discomfort? What feelings have you been rejecting? What problems do you have that stem from discomfort? What have you allowed your mind to rationalize? Become aware of this process, and see if you can stop avoiding things, one by one.
5. **Learn that discomfort is your friend.** It's not an enemy to fear. It's actually a good thing — when you're uncomfortable, you are trying something new, you're learning, you're expanding, you're becoming more than you were before. Discomfort is a sign that you're growing.

Discomfort is the reason I decided to undergo my **Year of Living Without** — I'm facing the things that make me uncomfortable (and so far, finding that it's not hard at all).

While others stay in their comfort zone, I explore the unknown. And I treasure the experience.