Almost all people know fear in their professional life: Some others are afraid to speak in a large group, sometimes bosses are afraid of staff members, others are afraid to speak in a small group. and sometimes the fear of not being up to a task keeps us up at night. In the long run, anxiety threatens health and well-being. What fear is all about
and how we can deal with it properly, explains Dirk W. Eilert, expert in limbic emotion and performance coaching.

Fear can be unlearned

What is fear and what is its function?

To put it simply, brain research distinguishes between the "thinking brain" and the "feeling brain": our thinking processes take place in the cerebrum. Feelings, on the other hand, are located in the so-called limbic system. Thus, the limbic system also plays a key role in the development of fear.

Fear is learned in most cases. Through an experience we learn that a certain situation is is threatening.

In principle, fear is a healthy reaction: it should protect us from taking unnecessary risks. And when a If danger threatens, it ensures that we concentrate completely on this situation in order to avert the impending danger. What happens From our Brain is interpreted as danger is very subjective and differs from person to person. One person "dies of fear" when he has to give a speech; another takes it with calm assurance. The paralysing fear here is not to be confused with the performance-enhancing stage fright that even seasoned professionals experience before a performance. A certain amount of "fear" in a situation makes us efficient, ensures that we call on our resources to the letter. However, if the fear becomes too great, it blocks our performance.

How does fear arise?

In most cases, fear is learned. Through experience we learn that a certain situation is threatening. It can also be enough for someone to describe a situation to us as threatening. Because de- The decisive factors for whether we assess a situation as a danger or not are the inner images we form of the situation.

Here, processing mechanisms in the brain play an important role. In addition to its function as an important emotional trigger centre, the limbic system also processes all our daily impressions and experiences. These processing mechanisms function excellently 99 percent of the time. In some situations, however, these mechanisms can be overloaded; then an experience gets "stuck" in the limbic system. This unprocessed memory can cause us to develop fear in relation to the situation. For example, according to one study, the fear of dental treatment in 86 percent of anxiety patients is based on a traumatic experience at the dentist.

How does our limbic system process experiences and stress?

The so-called REM phases in sleep (Rapid Eye Movement) play a central role; they are the oldest and most natural stress management system.

I like to compare their way of working with shopping: while shopping, we buy things and put them in bags. When we come home from shopping, the shopping is not yet done: the contents of the bags still have to be sorted into the cupboards.

This is very similar to what our limbic system does. During the day, it collects our impressions; in the REM phases during sleep, it then processes and sorts them. And sometimes one bag or another gets left behind. Either because it is perhaps there were simply too many bags (too much stress) or the bag is too big.

How can positive processing in the limbic system be promoted?

Through a conscious stimulation of the natural processing mechanisms during wakefulness.

This is made possible, for example, by the wingwave®-
wingwave® is a short-term coaching concept that works, among other things, with the targeted stimulation of "awake" REM states. These are created by rapid movements in front of the client's eyes. The client follows these movements with his gaze.

More and more experts assume that the positive effect of this technique comes from the stimulation of optimal cooperation between the two hemispheres of the brain and thus all areas of the brain. This is why the coach in wingwave® stimulates the brain not only through eye movements, but also uses auditory and tactile left-right stimulation of the two hemispheres of the brain.

Through this alternating left-right activation of the hemispheres of the brain, one experiences, so to speak, a "Emotion update": Restrictive negative emotions such as fear are reduced and positive empowering emotions are strengthened.

Two studies in particular prove the effectiveness of the wingwave® method in the treatment of anxiety. One study dealt with the successful reduction of test anxiety, the other with the topic of performance anxiety.

What else can we do against fear?

One possibility is also to consciously confront oneself with the situation. Probably the most famous "anxiety patient" who cured himself in this way was Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. To cure himself of his fear of heights, Goethe climbed the highest church tower in the world at the time (the Strasbourg Cathedral). He repeated this several times at shorter intervals and cured himself in this way. Through this constant confrontation with the fearful situation, the situation is recoded in the brain and the fear is unlearned.

How can the development of anxiety be prevented? Can negative emotions be "managed" in everyday life?

The best prevention against the development of anxiety is healthy and intelligent emotion management. By promoting stress processing in the brain, one prevents the processing mechanisms from being overloaded. In our high-performance society, where stress is as much a part of everyday life as brushing one's teeth, this is an absolute necessity in order to remain productive in the long term. For the mental self-regulation, two special wingwave® CDs have been developed which promote stress processing through bilateral hemispheric stimulation.

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Today, stress research knows that the many small stressors in the course of the day affect us much more than the one-time big ones. For example, if you have a difficult customer on the phone and still have to remain friendly and calm, you are acting contrary to the natural reaction "fight or flight" - attack or flight. Such stress accumulates during the course of the day. After the respective stress situation, regulating the body's stress reaction down again counteracts this. In addition to the wingwave® CDs, the Butterfly Technique can also help here.

The Butterfly Technique is a self-coaching technique that causes bilateral hemispheric stimulation. This means that the brain is de-stressed - negative feelings are reduced and positive feelings are built up.

To perform the butterfly technique:

1. Sit or lie down comfortably (standing also works). Important: Do not cross your legs!
2. Cross your arms over your chest so that your hands rest on your shoulders.
3. Now you can touch the shoulders with the palms of both hands by lightly alternating the tapping (approx. once per side within one second) and thus bring about the desired neuronal regulation effect.

The more we are able to manage the stresses of everyday life while remaining centred, the more efficiently and confidently we can face and overcome life's challenges. ■