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## Consequences of Emotion Avoidance

There are at least five types of emotion avoidance that researchers believe are at the root of many emotion problems.

**Situational:** people, places, things, and activities

**Cognitive:** thoughts, images, and memories

**Somatic:** internal sensations such as racing heart, palpitations, breathlessness, overheating, fatigue, or unwanted sexual arousal

**Protective:** avoiding uncertainty through checking, cleaning, perfectionism, procrastination, or reassurance seeking

**Substitution:** avoiding painful emotions with replacement emotions, numbing out, alcohol, drugs, bingeing, or gambling

Why not just keep on avoiding? Because the consequences of emotion avoidance are usually worse than the experience of what we try to avoid.

- Since distress, discomfort, and anxiety are all a guaranteed part of life, emotion avoidance is often only a temporary and superficial “solution.”
- Emotion avoidance reinforces the idea that discomfort/distress/anxiety is “bad” or “dangerous.” It reduces your ability to face and tolerate necessary pain.
- Emotion avoidance often requires effort and energy. It’s exhausting and time-consuming.
- Emotion avoidance limits your ability to fully experience the present.
- Emotion avoidance can keep you from moving toward important, valued aspects of life.
- Emotion avoidance often doesn’t work. When you tell yourself not to think about something, you have to think about not thinking about it. When you try to avoid an emotion, you often end up feeling it anyway.
- Emotion avoidance often leads to suffering: addiction, helplessness, hopelessness, depression, damaged relationships, and lost opportunities.

By allowing yourself to experience fears—and difficult thoughts, feelings, sensations, and urges—you can learn to decrease your suffering.