



Wintertime Surfing: My Antidote for Coping with Anxiety

Surfing helps me get out of my own head and into “the zone.”

One chilly morning last December I clambered atop a sand dune at my local break to find a roaring winter ocean. The waves were dreamy. One after another, 8-foot peaks folded into perfect emerald cylinders as the offshore wind blew tails of mist out to sea.

Giddy, I dashed back to my car and peeled off my warm clothes all at once. I barely even felt the cold wind whipping against my bare skin as I stepped into my soggy wetsuit, grabbed my surfboard, and ran toward the water.

I feel the freest from my anxiety when the surf is big. Anxiety is the backdrop to my existence, an invisible force that accompanies me through each day. I learned to worry young and have been worrying ever since. And it takes a lot to distract me from my own thoughts.

But there's one thing that grounds me in the present like nothing else can: the fear I feel when the surf is big. It's become the unlikely hero in my mental health journey.

Ironically, the immediate fear of being crushed by powerful surf liberates me from the constant stream of anxiety-borne fears — most of

which are irrational — that take up so much space in my mind.

What's memorable about that day and others like it is how liberating it felt to be so radically present. That day in December, as I paddled out driven by willful determination, all around me waves erupted spectacularly, and the reverberations rattled my body. But as fear welled in my stomach, I instinctually turned my focus to my breathing.

Powered by Rubicon Project Guided by slow, steady breaths, my body moved through the water seamlessly. I felt unencumbered by worries or ruminations and, instead, became hyperaware of my surroundings. The salt in the air, the glare off the water, the explosions of waves breaking — it all took on a crystalline quality.

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