

## Relaxation and Mindfulness to Help Manage Stress and Anxiety

Go through this list and try each of the exercises. As you try them, mark the ones that help calm your anxiety (even just a little bit!). Learning new skills is hard and takes practice, so just because a skill is hard doesn't mean it won't work. Use these exercises when you are feeling anxious, *and* when you are feeling calm to incorporate them into your regular self-care routine and reduce day-to-day stress levels. Try to pick exercises from each category. We want your toolbox to be full of skills that you can do at home/work/school and activities that are varying amounts of time.

**Remember:** Anxiety isn't bad, and we don't want our anxiety to completely disappear. Anxiety helps us know that something is wrong, different, or new. It says "hey, let's be cautious". Anxiety is a warning light that there *may* be a danger, not an absolute signal that there is danger. After you feel the anxiety, it is your job to assess if there is a real danger, thank your body for the warning, and decide what action to take. Do I need to investigate further? Do I need to reassure myself everything is okay and try one of the below techniques? Do I need to remove myself from the situation because it is dangerous? Anxiety isn't the end, it's just the beginning.

- **Take time to assemble the emotional experience**
  - *Trigger (what bodily experience sparked the anxiety?)*
    - Example: Heart races, shortness of breath, warmth in your face or hands, sweating, the need to move, headache
  - *Primary emotion (what emotion came up as soon as you felt a shift in your body?)*
    - Example: Fear, sadness, hurt, joy, care, concern
  - *Secondary emotion (did another emotion come up because of that?)*
    - Example: Anger, anxiety, shame, numbness
  - *Meaning (what meaning did I make of feeling that emotion?)*
    - Example: Something is seriously wrong, something isn't right, I'm in trouble, I'm safe, this is weird
  - *Action/behavior (what did I do as a result?)*
    - Example: Do I need to leave? Calm myself? Respond to the threat?
- **Relaxation**
  - Guided imagery/Meditation
    - 10 minutes of peaceful beach sounds for meditation and relaxation
      - <https://youtu.be/tIZpNrr0uX8> (10 minutes)
    - 10 minutes of peaceful forest sounds for meditation
      - <https://youtu.be/4S3yJkGWM4E> (10 minutes)
    - 1 hour of gentle mountain river nature sounds, no birds
      - <https://youtu.be/-o1GJHXVMVU> (1 hour)
    - Walking mindful reflection
      - <https://youtu.be/HRuqe26F8SU> (15 minutes)
    - 10-minute meditation to reduce anxiety
      - <https://youtu.be/O-6f5wQXSu8> (10 minutes)
    - 5 minutes of meditation you can do anywhere (5 minutes)
      - <https://youtu.be/inpok4MKVLM>
    - 10-minute meditation for sleep (10 minutes)
      - <https://youtu.be/aEqIQvczMJQ>

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- 10-minute meditation for beginners (10 minutes)
  - <https://youtu.be/U9YKY7fdwyg>
- 5-minute meditation for anxiety
  - <https://youtu.be/p7Rfz3M0hIo> (5 minutes)
- 10-minute mediation for mindfulness
  - <https://youtu.be/tOE17a0GfPM>
- **Negative thoughts and positive affirmations**
  - This is unbearable → I can learn how to cope better with this
  - What if this goes on without letting up? → I'll deal with this one day at a time. I don't have to project into the future
  - I don't know how to cope with this → I can learn to cope better – with this and any difficulty life brings
  - Each day seems like a major challenge → I'm learning to take things slowly. I'm taking time to take care of myself.
- **Affirmations/Mantra**
  - I am learning to let go of worry
  - Each day I'm growing in my capacity to master worry and anxiety
  - I am learning not to feed my worries—to choose peace over fear
  - When anxious feelings come up, I can slow down, breathe, and let them go
  - When anxious feelings come up, I can make time to relax and release them
- **Grounding techniques**
  - *Physical techniques*
    - Putting your hands in water
      - Focus on the water's temperature and how it feels on your fingertips, palms, and the backs of your hands. Does it feel the same in each part of your hand?
      - Use warm water first, then cold. Next, try cold water first, then warm. Does it feel different to switch from cold to warm water versus warm to cold?
    - Pick up and touch items near you
      - Are the things you touch soft or hard? Heavy or light? Warm or cool? Focus on the texture and color of each item. Challenge yourself to think of specific colors, such as crimson, burgundy, indigo, or turquoise, instead of simply red or blue.
    - Box breathing
      - **Step 1:** Breathe in counting to four slowly. Feel the air enter your lungs.
      - **Step 2:** Hold your breath for 4 seconds. Try to avoid inhaling or exhaling for 4 seconds.
      - **Step 3:** Slowly exhale through your mouth for 4 seconds.
      - **Step 4:** Repeat steps 1 to 3 until you feel re-centered.
      - Repeat this exercise as many times as you can. 30 seconds of deep breathing will help you feel more relaxed and in control.

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- Videos to guide box breathing
  - <https://youtu.be/n6RbW2LtdFs> (1 minute)
  - [https://youtu.be/FJJazKtH\\_9I](https://youtu.be/FJJazKtH_9I) (6 minutes)
  - <https://youtu.be/ZfMA0YA1IVA> (3 minutes)
- Hold a piece of ice
  - What does it feel like at first? How long does it take to start melting? How does the sensation change when the ice begins to melt?
- Take a short walk
  - Concentrate on your steps — you can even count them. Notice the rhythm of your footsteps and how it feels to put your foot on the ground and then lift it again.
- Savor a scent
  - Is there a fragrance that appeals to you? This might be a cup of tea, an herb or spice, a favorite soap, or a scented candle. Inhale the fragrance slowly and deeply and try to note its qualities (sweet, spicy, sharp, citrusy, and so on).
- 5 – 4 – 3 – 2 – 1
  - Working backward from 5, use your senses to list things you notice around you. For example, you might start by listing five things you hear, then four things you see, then three things you can touch from where you're sitting, two things you can smell, and one thing you can taste.
- *Mental techniques*
  - Think in categories
    - Choose one or two broad categories, such as “musical instruments,” “ice cream flavors,” “mammals,” or “baseball teams.” Take a minute or two to mentally list as many things from each category as you can.
  - Use anchoring phrase
    - This might be something like, “I’m Full Name. I’m X years old. I live in City, State. Today is Friday, June 3. It’s 10:04 in the morning. I’m sitting at my desk at work.”
  - Describe a common task
    - Think of an activity you do often or can do very well, such as making coffee, locking up your office, or tuning a guitar. Go through the process step-by-step, as if you’re giving someone else instructions on how to do it.
- *Soothing techniques*
  - Picture the voice or face of someone you love
    - Imagine them smiling at you, imagine what they would tell you during this tough moment
  - Practice self-kindness
    - What would you say to a friend that was feeling stressed? Practice compassionate phrases to yourself like “This is hard, and I am trying my best”

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- Sit with your pet
  - Find a comfortable place and cuddle with your pet
- Listen to music
  - Put on your favorite song, focus on the lyrics and melody
  - Create a playlist of your favorite songs
- Touch something comforting
  - Wrap yourself in your favorite blanket
  - Hold your favorite pillow
- Rocking
  - Gently hug yourself a rock back and forth slowly and intentionally
- *Cultural/Community Based Techniques*
  - Cook food that reminds you of your heritage
    - For generations, food has been used to heal, communicate care, and provide comfort. Think of a meal or food that brings you comfort and cook it for yourself or order it from a restaurant
  - Dance
    - Body movement for many cultures is a way to release bad energy and reconnect with ourselves. Dance to music or silence in whatever way feels good for your body.
  - Attend an event at a community center or a place of worship
    - Connecting with people who share the same life experiences, values, and beliefs can be incredibly curative and help you feel more seen and understood. Especially in times of high stress, it is important for us to remember that the opposite of isolation isn't surrounding ourselves with people, but bonding with people.
  - Watch a movie, listen to a podcast, or visit a historical site that helps you feel connected to a community larger than yourself
    - Anxiety can be overwhelming, especially when we feel like we need to manage it on our own. Reminding yourself that you are connected to a larger community can be incredibly grounding. A reminder that there are people that came before you, and there will be people that come after you.
  - Mindfully take care of yourself
    - Brush your teeth, wash/braid your hair, put on an outfit that makes you feel good and comfortable, throw on your comfy bonnet, shave (or not!), put lotion on, do your nails
    - Taking care of our hygiene, skin, and hair isn't for other people—it's for ourselves!
  - Reach out to someone you care about
    - From a young age, we learn to co-regulate with the people around us. When we can't regulate our stress and anxiety alone, we need to reach out to those we trust and care about. Remember, you are not alone.
  - Go outside or open the window
    - Feel the grass or dirt on your feet, the wind on your skin, listen to all the sounds, pay attention to how the temperate feels, take a deep breathe in and out, feel the bark of a tree or the petal of a leaf.