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# Anxiety & how to manage it

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## **What is anxiety?**

Anxiety is characterized by feelings of stress, fear, or worry. It becomes a mental health disorder when these feelings interfere with daily life. Examples of anxiety disorders include Generalized Anxiety Disorder, Panic Disorder, OCD, and PTSD.

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## **Symptoms:**

Anxiety can be experienced as stress that is out of proportion to the actual impact of the event, inability to set aside worry, ruminating thoughts, and restlessness.

Symptoms:

- Hypervigilance
- Irritability
- Restlessness
- Sweating
- Heart palpitations
- Racing thoughts
- Unwanted thoughts
- Panic attacks
- Lack of concentration
- Fatigue
- Feeling of impending doom
- Insomnia
- Nausea
- Trembling
- Excessive worrying
- Muscle tension
- Irrational fears
- Avoiding social situations

## **Managing Anxiety**

So now that we know what anxiety is, how do we manage it? First off, if anxiety is to the point where it is affecting your ability to function in your daily life (i.e.; affecting your relationships, job, quality of life, etc), seek professional help. Finding a counselor in your area or online (now there are apps like Betterhelp that pair you with a counselor you can text, video chat with, etc) can be a huge benefit in your life. There is no shame in getting help, and in fact it is a sign of strength, not weakness. In general, managing anxiety can look

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like the buzzword #selfcare. Physical activity, a healthy diet, regular sleep, and relaxation exercises may all help reduce anxiety. In the following few pages, there are valuable tips and exercises you can use to help reduce anxiety.

## **Tips and tools:**

### **Going back to the basics**

Self-care isn't something that should be done only when you become overwhelmed. Self-care is a way of life. But we all fall off track, and that is okay. When you find yourself in a place where you are overwhelmed, stressed, and highly anxious, go back to the basics.

- Exercise - get in 10-30 minutes of movement a day. Start your morning with a walk, a stretch, or even a workout regimen if you feel so inclined. Exercise releases endorphins, helps calm the nerves, and increases overall feeling of well-being.
- Drink your water and eat a healthy diet - fill your diet with more veggies, whole grains, high fiber foods, and drink your water. A good Omega-3 should be part of your daily routine as well.
- Proper sleep hygiene - get 8 hours of sleep a night. If you have trouble sleeping, limit phone and electronic usage, and avoid looking at a screen 1 hour before bed. No more scrolling in bed, sorry. Other ways you can help fall asleep and stay asleep: take a hot shower or bath before bed, stretch your body & breathe into your muscles, read a book, and have a consistent bed time.
- Relaxing - anxiety floods your body with stress. Incorporate relaxing into your daily life. Whether that looks like getting up a little earlier to start your day with quiet time and a warm cup of coffee or taking a bath at night. Whatever feels relaxing to you, begin to incorporate this into your daily life.

### **4-7-8 Breathing**

Breathing techniques are a wonderful and easy way to overcome your body's physiology and calm an overactive mind. Deep breaths are your way of sending signals to your brain that says, "hey! It's safe. You can relax." Practice this anytime, anywhere. Not just when

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you're anxious, but when you are feeling calm as well. Practicing breathing preventatively will help you remember to practice in-the-moment as well. Studies show breath work leaves you feeling calmer in general throughout the day.

**What to do:** Sit or lie down. Bring your awareness to your breath. Simply notice it. Is it shallow? Rapid? Are you even breathing at all? Begin to take control of your breath, inhaling for a count of 4, holding for a count of 7, and slowly exhaling for a count of 8. Repeat this 3-5 times.

## **Grounding**

Anxiety can keep you in your head. Let's bring your awareness back to the moment, back to your body and your physical senses. This can be done preventatively or in the moment. There are many techniques for grounding, including many grounding meditations on YouTube. Here are two of my favorites:

### **Grounding technique 1:**

Look around you and find....

5 things you can see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell, and 1 thing you can taste.

### **Grounding technique 2:**

Plant your feet firmly on the floor. Close your eyes and center yourself using the 4-7-8 breathing method. Imagine roots shooting out of your feet and flowing deep into the ground, stretching and wrapping all the way around the earth's bright, pulsing core. Imagine this healing light flowing up through the roots and into your body, flooding you with calming, healing energy. Sit like this as long as you need. Then gently blink your eyes open when you are finished.

## **Guided muscle relaxation**

This is a great way to recenter and recharge. You can do this in the morning when you wake up, anytime throughout the day, before bed, or when experiencing in-the-moment anxiety.

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There are tons of YouTube videos you can find, if you need a voice guiding you into relaxation, or you can do it yourself. Lie flat on your back (if you are at work or in a chair, sitting is fine). You can work your way from the top down or from the bottom up. Starting at your feet or your scalp, begin to tense the muscles in the area and then relax. Work your way over your body until you reach the end and you are feeling relaxed and fully supported by what you are sitting or laying on.

### **Thought stopping:**

Anxiety is often in our head and can take control of our thoughts. Keep in mind, the more you practice something the more it becomes a habit. In other words: you CAN rewire your brain!

Here are the step:

- Recognize when your thoughts begin to become anxious or negative
- And simply say STOP or imagine a stop sign
- Redirect your awareness elsewhere

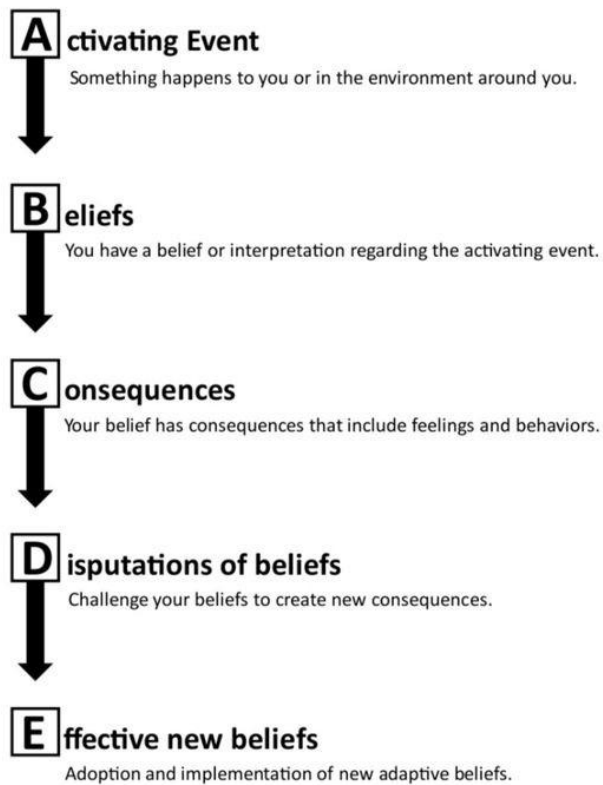
Remember to do this consistently throughout the day. The more you practice this, the easier it will become. If you have a hard time remembering, make a habit out of it. Set an alarm on your phone or have visual reminders the que you to become aware of your thoughts. This will help you to become aware in the moment as well.

### **ABC Thought Log**

If you are serious about rewiring your thoughts and overcoming anxiety, here is a CBT (cognitive behavior therapy) technique. Remember this: thoughts and feelings lead to behaviors (and behaviors can also lead to thoughts and feelings). Use an ABC log to help you recognize how your thoughts and feelings are affecting your behavior.

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## ABC Model



Example:

A - Partner came home and said hi, but didn't kiss and hug you like usual.

B - She must be mad at me, maybe she doesn't want to be with me anymore

C - Feeling anxious, hurt, and chest feels tight.

D - Maybe she had a rough day and is distracted. Maybe she needs to talk or needs to wind down.

E - My partner loves me.

Do you see how in this example, the worst is assumed and how that can lead to panic?

Maybe, even, the anxiety in this examples leads to a fight because you felt ignored and

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scared and she felt attacked after having a rough day (I.e.; feeling of panic and fear lead to the behavior of starting a fight). But, let's say you walked yourself through these steps and as a result, you simply asked your partner if something was bothering her. As it turns out, she had a rough day. Her boss yelled at her and she just needs a little emotional support from you.

Anxiety creates many thought distortions which can lead to assuming the worst and basing your actions on the worst case scenario. Using a thought log, you can begin to see the connection between your thoughts and feelings and behaviors. Life hack: change your behavior and see how your thoughts and emotions change. Example of this: you wake up early and get in 20min of light movement to start your day. As a result, you feel more energized and accomplished. Behavior: exercise. Thought: I feel accomplished, confident, and energized. I'm ready to take on the day!

## **In conclusion...**

These tips and exercises can be used independently or together to help ease an anxious mind and body. Try any or all of them and use what feels best for you. Anxiety and stress can negatively affect your quality of life. Recognizing a change needs to occur is an empowering act and can drastically help you feel better, calmer, and happier. Getting the help you need may look like a few lifestyle changes if the effects are mild, or it may look like talking to a therapist and even getting on some medication. There is no shame in any of this. You deserve to live a life where anxiety doesn't negatively affect you. Reference this guide whenever you need a little reminder or refresher.

Please see the following section for resources that may be helpful to you.

## **Resources:**

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 800-273-8255
- Find a counselor in your area: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists>

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- Free worksheets and downloads for anxiety:  
<https://www.therapistaid.com/therapy-worksheets/anxiety>
  - Betterhelp Counseling - Betterhelp.com
  - Betterhelpcounseling.com/keilyn-goatley