

Anxiety

Anxiety is a part of our bodies' natural **alarm** system, the "**fight or flight**" response, which exists to protect us from danger. These natural body responses are not harmful— but they can be really uncomfortable!

The most pure form of the "fight or flight" response is a **panic attack**, which involves a rush of anxiety symptoms, many of which are listed below, usually peaking in about 10 minutes. In these cases, the body is trying to tell us "something dangerous is happening *right now!*" Other forms of anxiety that are less acute but often just as debilitating, such as **chronic worry**, involve symptoms similar to the "fight or flight" symptoms of panic attacks. However, in these cases, it is as if the body is saying "something dangerous is *going to happen* sometime in the future... so watch out!" The differences between the two are the intensity of the response and the context in which it is triggered. The most common anxiety symptoms are listed below. **Try circling the ones that apply to you.**



Physical Symptoms

- Rapid heartbeat
- Sweating
- Trouble breathing
- Tightness in the chest, chestpain
- Dizziness
- Feeling: "Things aren't real"
- Feeling: "I don't feel like myself."
- Tingling and numbness in fingers, toes, and other extremities
- Nausea, vomiting
- Muscle tension
- Low energy, exhaustion
- Changes in body temperature
- Shaking, jitters
- Urgency to urinate or defecate
- Changes in vision and other senses



Cognitive Symptoms

- Worries
- Negative thoughts about one's ability to tolerate emotions or future stress
- Negative predictions about future events
- Other common thoughts: "I am going crazy!"
- "I am going to have a heart attack!"
- "I am going to faint."
- Trouble concentrating or keeping attention
- Magical ideas, phrases or images such
 - as "If I do not wash my hands I will die or someone will be harmed."
- Preoccupation with body sensations or functions



Behavioral Symptoms

- Avoidance of anything that provokes anxiety, including people, places, situations, objects, animals, thoughts, memories, body feelings, etc.
- Protective, "safety" behaviors
- Aggression, verbal abuse, lashing out
- Alcohol and/or drug use
- Compulsive behaviors, such as excessive checking or other unreasonable or harmful rituals or routines

What causes anxiety?

Scientific research suggests that anxiety is caused by a combination of factors related to both "**nature**" (our genetics) and "**nurture**" (our individual experiences).

Can I get rid of anxiety altogether?

Well the answer is...not really. Anxiety is vital to our survival just like hunger and thirst. Without anxiety we would not be as aware of possible threats to our safety. And we probably wouldn't enjoy a scary movie or a roller coaster!

Anxiety is necessary to protect us and can even be fun at times. It isn't in our best interests to get rid of it completely!

Take home point:

The symptoms of anxiety are the "fight or flight" response, and are normal, functional, and necessary for survival. They become a problem when they are too severe or happen too often, given the real amount of danger present, or if it interferes with the activities of life.

Remember: Anxiety is uncomfortable, not dangerous!

For more information visit: <https://medicine.umich.edu/sites/default/files/content/downloads/Anxiety-101.pdf>



sleep hygiene

What is Sleep Hygiene?

'Sleep hygiene' is the term used to describe good sleep habits. Considerable research has gone into developing a set of guidelines and tips which are designed to enhance good sleeping, and there is much evidence to suggest that these strategies can provide long-term solutions to sleep difficulties.

There are many medications which are used to treat insomnia, but these tend to be only effective in the short-term. Ongoing use of sleeping pills may lead to dependence and interfere with developing good sleep habits independent of medication, thereby prolonging sleep difficulties. Talk to your health professional about what is right for you, but we recommend good sleep hygiene as an important part of treating insomnia, either with other strategies such as medication or cognitive therapy or alone.

Sleep Hygiene Tips

- 1) **Get regular.** One of the best ways to train your body to sleep well is to go to bed and get up at more or less the same time every day, even on weekends and days off! This regular rhythm will make you feel better and will give your body something to work from.
- 2) **Sleep when sleepy.** Only try to sleep when you actually feel tired or sleepy, rather than spending too much time awake in bed.
- 3) **Get up & try again.** If you haven't been able to get to sleep after about 20 minutes or more, get up and do something calming or boring until you feel sleepy, then return to bed and try again. Sit quietly on the couch with the lights off (bright light will tell your brain that it is time to wake up), or read something boring like the phone book. Avoid doing anything that is too stimulating or interesting, as this will wake you up even more.
- 4) **Avoid caffeine & nicotine.** It is best to avoid consuming any caffeine (in coffee, tea, cola drinks, chocolate, and some medications) or nicotine (cigarettes) for at least 4-6 hours before going to bed. These substances act as stimulants and interfere with the ability to fall asleep.
- 5) **Avoid alcohol.** It is also best to avoid alcohol for at least 4-6 hours before going to bed. Many people believe that alcohol is relaxing and helps them to get to sleep at first, but it actually interrupts the quality of sleep.
- 6) **Bed is for sleeping.** Try not to use your bed for anything other than sleeping and sex, so that your body comes to associate bed with sleep. If you use bed as a place to watch TV, eat, read, work on your laptop, pay bills, and other things, your body will not learn this connection.



- 7) **No naps.** It is best to avoid taking naps during the day, to make sure that you are tired at bedtime. If you can't make it through the day without a nap, make sure it is for less than an hour and before 3pm.
- 8) **Sleep rituals.** You can develop your own rituals of things to remind your body that it is time to sleep - some people find it useful to do relaxing stretches or breathing exercises for 15 minutes before bed each night, or sit calmly with a cup of caffeine-free tea.
- 9) **Bathtime.** Having a hot bath 1-2 hours before bedtime can be useful, as it will raise your body temperature, causing you to feel sleepy as your body temperature drops again. Research shows that sleepiness is associated with a drop in body temperature.
- 10) **No clock-watching.** Many people who struggle with sleep tend to watch the clock too much. Frequently checking the clock during the night can wake you up (especially if you turn on the light to read the time) and reinforces negative thoughts such as "Oh no, look how late it is, I'll never get to sleep" or "it's so early, I have only slept for 5 hours, this is terrible."
- 11) **Use a sleep diary.** This worksheet can be a useful way of making sure you have the right facts about your sleep, rather than making assumptions. Because a diary involves watching the clock (see point 10) it is a good idea to only use it for two weeks to get an idea of what is going and then perhaps two months down the track to see how you are progressing.
- 12) **Exercise.** Regular exercise is a good idea to help with good sleep, but try not to do strenuous exercise in the 4 hours before bedtime. Morning walks are a great way to start the day feeling refreshed!
- 13) **Eat right.** A healthy, balanced diet will help you to sleep well, but timing is important. Some people find that a very empty stomach at bedtime is distracting, so it can be useful to have a light snack, but a heavy meal soon before bed can also interrupt sleep. Some people recommend a warm glass of milk, which contains tryptophan, which acts as a natural sleep inducer.
- 14) **The right space.** It is very important that your bed and bedroom are quiet and comfortable for sleeping. A cooler room with enough blankets to stay warm is best, and make sure you have curtains or an eyemask to block out early morning light and earplugs if there is noise outside your room.
- 15) **Keep daytime routine the same.** Even if you have a bad night sleep and are tired it is important that you try to keep your daytime activities the same as you had planned. That is, don't avoid activities because you feel tired. This can reinforce the insomnia.



Unhelpful Thinking Styles

All or nothing thinking



Sometimes called 'black and white thinking'

If I'm not perfect I have failed

Either I do it right or not at all

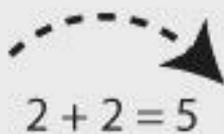
Mental filter



Only paying attention to certain types of evidence

Noticing our failures but not seeing our successes

Jumping to conclusions



There are two key types of jumping to conclusions:

- **Mind reading**
(imagining we know what others are thinking)
- **Fortune telling**
(predicting the future)

Over-generalizing

"everything is always rubbish"
"nothing good ever happens"

Seeing a pattern based upon a single event, or being overly broad in the conclusions we draw

Disqualifying the positive



Discounting the good things that have happened or that you have done for some reason or another

That doesn't count

Magnification (catastrophising) & minimization



Blowing things out of proportion (catastrophizing), or inappropriately shrinking something to make it seem less important

Emotional reasoning



Assuming that because we feel a certain way what we think must be true

I feel embarrassed so I must be an idiot

should

Using critical words like 'should', 'must', or 'ought' can make us feel guilty, or like we have already failed

must

If we apply 'shoulds' to other people the result is often frustration

Labelling



Assigning labels to ourselves or other people

I'm a loser
I'm completely useless
They're such an idiot

Personalization

"this is my fault"

Blaming yourself or taking responsibility for something that wasn't completely your fault

Conversely, blaming other people for something that was your fault

Decatastrophizing



Cognitive distortions are irrational thoughts that have the power to influence how you feel. Everyone has *some* cognitive distortions—they're a normal part of being human. However, when cognitive distortions are too plentiful or extreme, they can be harmful.

One common type of cognitive distortion is called **catastrophizing**. When catastrophizing, the importance of a problem is exaggerated, or the worst possible outcome is assumed to be true. By learning to question your own thoughts, you can correct many of these cognitive distortions.

What are you worried about?

How likely is it that your worry will come true? Give examples of past experiences, or other evidence, to support your answer.

If your worry does come true, what's the worst that could happen?

If your worry does come true, what's most likely to happen?

If your worry comes true, what are the chances you'll be okay...

In one week? _____%

In one month? _____%

In one year? _____%

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness: a state of nonjudgmental awareness of what's happening in the present moment, including the awareness of one's own thoughts, feelings, and senses.

Components of Mindfulness

Awareness. During a state of mindfulness, you will notice your thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations as they happen. The goal isn't to clear your mind or to stop thinking—it's to become aware of your thoughts and feelings, rather than getting lost in them.

Acceptance. The thoughts, feelings, and sensations that you notice should be observed in a nonjudgmental manner. For example, if you notice a feeling of nervousness, simply state to yourself: "I notice that I am feeling nervous". There's no need further judge or change the feeling.

Benefits of Mindfulness

Reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety

Improved memory, focus, and mental processing speed

Improved ability to adapt to stressful situations

Greater satisfaction within relationships

Reduced rumination (repetitively going over a thought or problem)

Improved ability to manage emotions

Mindfulness Practice

Note: Mindfulness is a state of mind, rather than a particular action or exercise. However, without practice, mindfulness is difficult to achieve. These techniques are designed to help you practice.

Mindfulness Meditation

Sit in a comfortable place, and begin paying attention to your breathing. Notice the physical sensation of air filling your lungs, and then slowly leaving. When your mind wanders—which it will—simply notice your thoughts, and turn your attention back to breathing.

Mindfulness Walk

While walking, make a point to practice mindfulness. Start by noticing how your body moves and feels with each step. Then, expand your awareness to your surroundings. What do you see? Hear? Smell? Feel? This technique can also be expanded to other daily activities.

Body Scan

Pay close attention to the physical sensations throughout your body. Start with your feet, and move up through your legs, groin, abdomen, chest, back, shoulders, arms, hands, neck, and face. Spend anywhere from 15 seconds to 1 minute on each body part.

Five Senses

Make a conscious effort to notice the present moment through each of your senses.

- 5 things you see
- 4 things you feel
- 3 things you hear
- 1 thing you taste
- 1 thing you smell

GROUNDING

Create personal calm

Instructions:

Review this handout. Then, answer the reflection question that follows.

What is Grounding?

Grounding is a set of simple strategies that can help you detach from emotional pain (e.g., anxiety, anger, sadness, self-harm). It is basically a way to distract yourself by focusing on something other than the difficult emotions you are experiencing. You may also think of grounding as centering, distracting, creating a safe place, or healthy detachment.

Although grounding does not solve the problem that is contributing to your unpleasant emotions, it does provide a temporary way to gain control over your feelings and prevent things from getting worse. Grounding anchors you, gives you a chance to calm down, and allows you to eventually return and address the problem that is triggering the unpleasant emotions to begin with. And grounding can be done anytime, anywhere, and no one has to know.

Ways of Grounding:

There are three types of grounding. You may find that one of these types works better for you, or that each is helpful.

1. Mental (focusing your mind)
2. Physical (focusing your senses)
3. Soothing (talking to yourself in a very kind way)

Mental Grounding:

1. **Describe your environment in detail**, using all of your senses – for example, “The walls are white, there are five blue chairs, there is a wooden bookshelf against the wall...” Describe objects, sounds, textures, colors, smells, shapes, numbers, and temperature. You can do this anywhere.
2. **Play a “categories” game with yourself**. Try to think of types of dogs, jazz musicians, animals or famous people that begin with each letter of the alphabet, cars, TV shows, writers, sports, songs, cities.
3. **Describe an everyday activity in great detail**. For example, describe a meal that you cook (e.g., “First, I peel the potatoes and cut them into quarters; then I boil the water; then I make an herb marinade of oregano, basil, garlic, and olive oil...”).
4. **Imagine**. Use a pleasant or comforting mental image. Again, use all of your senses to make it as real and vivid as possible.
5. **Read something, saying each word to yourself**. Or read each letter backwards so that you focus on the letters and not the meaning of words.
6. **Use humor**. Think of something funny to jolt yourself out of your mood.
7. **Count to 10 or say the alphabet**, very s . . . l . . . o . . . w . . . l . . . y.

GROUNDING

Create personal calm

Physical Grounding:

1. **Run cool or warm water over your hands.**
2. **Grab tightly onto your chair as hard as you can;** notice the sensations and the experience.
3. **Touch various objects around you:** a pen, your clothing, the table, the walls. Notice textures, colors, weight, temperature. Compare the objects you touch.
4. **Carry a grounding object in your pocket** – a small object (a small rock, ring, piece of cloth) that you can touch whenever you feel unpleasant emotions rising.
5. **Notice your body:** the weight of your body in the chair; wiggling your toes in your socks; the feel of your back against the chair.
6. **Stretch.** Extend your fingers, arms, legs as far as you can; slowly and gently roll your head around.
7. **Clench and release your fists.**
8. **Jump up and down.**
9. **Eat something in a savoring way;** fully experience the food; describe the sights, aromas, textures, flavors, and the experience in detail to yourself.
10. **Focus on your breathing,** noticing each inhale and exhale. Repeat a pleasant word to yourself on each exhale.

Soothing Grounding:

1. **Say kind statements,** as if you were talking to a friend or small child – for example, “You are a good person going through a hard time. You’ll get through this.”
2. **Think of favorites.** Think of your favorite color, animal, season, food, time of day, TV show.
3. **Picture people you care about** and look at photographs of them.
4. **Remember the words to an inspiring song, quotation, or poem** that makes you feel better (e.g., serenity prayer).
5. **Say a coping statement:** “I can handle this,” “This feeling will pass.”
6. **Plan a safe treat for yourself,** such as a piece of candy, a nice dinner, or a warm bath.
7. **Think of things you are looking forward to in the next week** – perhaps time with a friend, going to a movie, or going on a hike.

TIPS:

- **Practice! Practice! Practice!** Like any other skill, grounding takes practice. So practice as often as possible and before you actually need it. Then, when you need to call upon this skill you will have it, know it, and use it well.
- **Try to notice which methods you like best** – physical, mental, or soothing grounding methods, or some combination.
- **Start grounding early on in a negative mood cycle.** Start before the anger, anxiety, or other feeling gets out of control.

Adapted from: *Seeking Safety* by Lisa M. Najavits (2002).

www.winona.edu/resilience

updated 11/21/16



GROUNDING

Create personal calm

- **Create your own method of grounding.** Any method you make up may be worth much more than those you read here, because it is yours.
- **Make up an index card or type in your phone a list of your best grounding methods.** Have the list available so it is there when you need it.
- **Create an mp3 of a grounding message that you can play when needed.** Consider asking your counselor or someone close to you to record it if you want to hear someone else's voice.
- **Have others assist you in grounding.** Teach family and friends about grounding, so that they can help guide you with it if you become overwhelmed.
- **Don't give up!**

Now, list three of the strategies described above that you think will work best for you. Then practice these skills regularly, so in times of need you will know what to do and how to do it successfully.

3 grounding strategies I am committed to learning, practicing, and applying:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

After practicing and/or applying these grounding strategies, what have you noticed? Do you feel more in control? Do your emotions change? Are you able to calm yourself and focus on something other than the unpleasant emotions and situations?

ANXIETY GROUNDING TECHNIQUE

focus on your breathing, then identify

5 things
you can
see



3 things
you can
hear



4 things
you can
touch



2 things
you can
smell



1 thing
you can
taste

