

TECHNIQUES FOR MANAGING ANXIETY



Anxiety is really uncomfortable. Therapy is an important part of changing your relationship with anxiety but you also need tools to use in the moment when struggling. Here are some evidence-based techniques for dealing with anxiety in the moment.

Breathing Exercises

Deep breathing helps calm the body and reduce physical symptoms of anxiety, such as a rapid heart rate or shallow breathing

Technique: Breathe in slowly for 4 seconds, hold for 4 seconds, and exhale for 4 seconds. Repeat this process until you feel more relaxed.

Grounding Techniques

Grounding exercises bring your focus to the present moment, which can help reduce overwhelming anxious thoughts.

5-4-3-2-1 Technique: Name 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. This engages the senses and distracts the mind from anxious thoughts.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)

This technique involves tensing and then relaxing different muscle groups in your body to reduce physical tension caused by anxiety.

How to Practice: Start from your feet and work your way up to your head, tensing each muscle group (e.g., legs, abdomen, shoulders) for 5 seconds, then releasing the tension while focusing on the sensation of relaxation.

Mindfulness Meditation

Mindfulness helps you observe your thoughts and sensations without judgment, allowing you to acknowledge anxious feelings without becoming overwhelmed by them.

How to Practice: Sit quietly and focus on your breath, allowing thoughts to come and go without dwelling on them. When your mind wanders, gently bring your attention back to your breathing.

Cognitive Restructuring (Thought Challenging)

This cognitive-behavioral technique helps identify and challenge irrational or exaggerated thoughts that fuel anxiety.

How to Practice: When you feel anxious, ask yourself, "What evidence do I have that supports this worry?" "What is the worst that could happen?" and "How likely is that outcome?" This process helps reduce the emotional impact of negative thoughts.

Visualization and Guided Imagery

Using calming mental imagery can help shift focus away from anxious sensations.

How to Practice: Close your eyes and imagine a peaceful, safe place (e.g., a beach, forest, or garden). Focus on the details—the sounds, smells, and colors. This can create a calming mental escape during stressful moments.

Journaling

Writing down your anxious thoughts can help process emotions and externalize worries, reducing their intensity.

How to Practice: Spend 5–10 minutes writing about your anxiety, what triggers it, and how it makes you feel. This process can help clarify your thoughts and make them feel more manageable.



Physical Exercise

Physical activity reduces anxiety by releasing endorphins and reducing stress hormones like cortisol.

How to Practice: Engage in any form of exercise that you enjoy, whether it's walking, jogging, yoga, or dancing. Even a short burst of movement can help reduce anxiety.

Distraction Techniques

Redirecting your attention can reduce the intensity of anxious sensations.

How to Practice: Engage in activities that fully absorb your attention, such as puzzles, reading, or a creative hobby. This can break the cycle of anxious rumination.

Set a Worry Time

If constant worrying is a problem, setting aside a specific time to address your worries can help contain them.

How to Practice: Set aside 15–20 minutes each day where you allow yourself to focus on your worries. If anxious thoughts arise outside this time, remind yourself to wait until your "worry time."

These are just some tools to help with anxiety. But it's important to remember that the most powerful tool you have is self-compassion. It's ok to feel anxiety!