

ALEXANDRA MASSEY



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MARJORIE WALLACE, CHIEF EXECUTIVE SANE

THE ANXIETY TOOL KIT

37 PROVEN WAYS TO REDUCE ANXIETY

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37 PROVEN WAYS TO REDUCE ANXIETY SYMPTOMS

By Alexandra Massey



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PUBLISHER'S WARNING: If you are currently undergoing a course of prescribed medication for anxiety, we strongly advise that you do not stop taking it without first consulting your GP.

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INTRODUCTION

We are in the middle of an anxiety epidemic. The statistics have the evidence: “Our World In Data” estimates that 284 million people suffered from anxiety in 2017. I’m not a drama queen. Rather, I would like you to know you are not alone. Millions are anxious and confused, and the spread of anxiety is accelerating.

It’s like having an ever-present uninvited guest within your family, friendship, or other community. It’s rampaging through society like a cerebral plague, forming a low-level white noise, hiding in the shadows of our collective minds, and now it seems to be moving into the driving seat.

Sarah, 42, explains:

“My anxiety is a bit like a humming noise in the background —like the quiet buzz of an electrical substation. I get on with life, but it always feels like there's something I'm missing, something I need to attend to, or that I’ve done something horribly wrong.”

The medical profession is treating anxiety differently as extreme levels of anxiety being ‘normalized.’ If you compare someone who sees the doctor today with a ‘normal’ anxiety disorder to someone who went to the doctor 50 years ago with the same levels of anxiety; 50 years ago they would have been diagnosed with having a ‘nervous breakdown,’ been prescribed ‘tranquilizers’ or hospitalized. The same levels of anxiety in today’s world are seen as ‘typical.’

Did you know anyone who had a ‘nervous breakdown’ when you were growing up? Perhaps they were kept out of the public, who knows. Today, however, we all know many, many people are suffering from extreme levels of anxiety.

So why the meteoric rise in modern-day anxiety? Well, no one really knows. What we do know is that modern-day treatments are not really working.

Current Treatments

The problem is that the medical industry promotes anxiety as a 'disease,' which can only be 'cured' with medication. But anxiety isn't a disease, and medication will only cover some symptoms in the short term.

Benzodiazepines (benzos) are the most commonly prescribed anxiety drugs that act as a sedative and reduce physical symptoms of anxiety such as tense muscles.

Although they are great at their job, people need higher and higher doses to get the same effect. However, tapering or withdrawing from benzos can be a nightmare.

The other treatment that doctors offer is cognitive-behavioral therapy or CBT. There are hundreds of studies that testify to its effectiveness for a broad number of mental health conditions. However, it does not cure every symptom for every person, and it won't work for many people.

The problem is when CBT is touted as the panacea for all anxiety conditions, and if it doesn't work, we might end up blaming ourselves or the therapist. It's easy to turn that into "Jeez, even CBT can't help me. I must be a real lost cause." But it's not so!

Modern medicine (psychiatry in particular) has totally lost touch with any kind of soulful or holistic healing. Or, how about just having a doctor who will take the time to hear your whole story without staring at a computer screen?

I Know What Anxiety Feels Like

As someone who sought help for anxiety, I never really found the help I was looking for. That made me extra anxious. I began to feel paranoid about going to the doctor. Without real support, I began to feel anxious about getting help! Then anxious about being more anxious!

When it got terrible, it felt like an electric current building up inside of me, like it was going to start shooting out of me, except it didn't, which made it worse. When you are left with anxiety about being anxious, it feels like you've hit the back wall of a one-way street.

The reality is that the roots of anxiety will stay firm unless they are challenged. The things caused by anxiety cannot be fixed by a drug: a racing mind, unresolved conflict, or projecting into a catastrophic future.

To fully recover from anxiety, we have to take another approach. Anxiety is often an extension of fear, worry, and a negative outlook.

How This Book Will Help

Through this book, I'd like to take you on a journey to help you start over, take a breath, and find relief in a safe place.

Anxiety is not a disease, and you can recover without medication. Medication is an ineffective long term solution. It will cover some of the symptoms in the short term, but the crux of the condition will stay the same.

This book identifies 37 different tools that have been proven to reduce anxiety symptoms. These tools are wide and varied. Everybody who suffers from anxiety has had different influences. These 37 tools are as varied as possible to cover all types of recovery techniques.

You may find that adding magnesium into your diet is all you needed to feel more in control. Or, a weighted blanket. Or learning how to schedule worry time.

Then again, you may work towards the end of the book, where you'll find some real therapeutic techniques for digging deep into your psyche and reaching inside to the part of you who's hurting like in the tool 'Divide Into 3' or Tackling Your Shame And Anger.'

You can work through the book tool-by-tool. Then again, you may want to flick through the book, stop at a page pick up some tips on how you might make a little progress today.

These tools are scientifically PROVEN to work for anxiety. There are references to studies and scientifically researched papers which have been peer-assessed and published in professional journals and websites. The full list of references are cataloged at the end of each page.

You've Done Nothing Wrong

While your anxiety is rampant, you may criticize yourself for feeling incapable and powerless to manage your symptoms. But please remember: You Have Done Nothing Wrong!

Anxiety is created around a swirl of fear and retribution that you have done something terribly bad. Culturally and religiously, you might believe that stuff is happening in your life as a punishment because you think you've done something wrong to upset other people or God or, God forgive us, our parents.

So many of us have been raised to believe that karma is a force that expects payback for things we've got wrong when we strayed from the path of 'righteousness.' And that it's our 'job' to do whatever it takes to get back 'in line.' That's an unwarranted goal, which is too picture-perfect to achieve.

Because, seriously, have you done anything wrong? No. Nada. Nothing. What you have done is tried your very best to make things right. The anxiety is a part of that. The anxiety comes from the part of you that's trying to make everything perfect.

Of course, you can't be perfect, but the part of you that's anxious doesn't understand that. That part of you that's frightened is terrified and tries many ways to avoid the anxiety. But as you try to avoid the anxiety itself, you know it only makes it worse. You simply can't battle anxiety; it's like trying to punch fog, it just doesn't work.

Let's think about that anxiety for a moment. Let's think about the fear. What is it, and where is it? The anxiety is a part of you and a part of your daily life. It's rooted in your heart and body. It has taken control.

Here's the thing, instead of fighting it, you can come to understand it. It's rooted in the small, childlike part of you that's simply afraid. It's the part of you that feels a bit defenceless and helpless without any adults in charge. It's the side of you that's reaching out to be loved and held, taken care of and nurtured. Yet the other parts of you can't see this is because you're wound up like a coiled spring, waiting for the next awful situation that needs to be conquered.

It's vital to acknowledge you've done nothing wrong, you aren't wrong and that you can, with help, turn your feelings of anger, shame, helplessness, and powerlessness over your anxiety into something good.

This book is the starting point for that.

WHAT IS ANXIETY?

It's super important to understand how anxiety starts. And unsurprisingly, it all starts with fear, fear of something you've seen heard or thought. Something stressful or scary. The fear kick-starts a reaction and that fear is always fear of the unknown - whether it's real or imagined.

The brain listens to our fear, and when we indicate, we feel stressed or frightened; it knows we need help. This is a normal response by a normal healthy brain. It is the brain's job to keep us alive. By jolting us into action, it's fulfilling its role. Consequently, it kick-starts the adrenals, which shoot out a hormone called adrenaline.

This adrenaline acts as a supercharge, giving us extra strength for either fighting or fleeing. It can make us see better, respond faster, hear better, and become more aware of everything around us so we don't miss anything that could be a threat.

This is called the "fight or flight" response, which you may have already heard of. The brain is acting as it should – protecting us in everyday life.

However, when someone experiences a stressful event and the fear sends a distress signal to the brain, the changes happen so quickly that we aren't aware of them, and we don't have control over it. In fact, the wiring is so efficient that the brain starts all this off even before the brain's visuals have had a chance to process what is happening fully. Imagine a car has just mounted the pavement, you jump out of the way even before you've thought about it.

As the initial surge of hormones subside and the threat passes, the hormones fall, and the nervous system puts on the brakes and dampens the stress response.

However, for many of us, these brakes often don't get jammed on because we're in a constant loop of the fight or flight response.

This is then fuelled by our anticipation that it might happen again. You might think: what happens if another car mounts the pavement and hits me this time? How will I cope? How will I get out the way? You assess the risks, and each time you do this, you are spiking the fight or flight response. The hormones get released, the breathing gets faster, the heart starts beating, you might sweat or have a panic attack.

The body doesn't differentiate between a real threat and a potential threat, and potential threats come in surprising packages. Take social media, for example, it's possible to post something on Instagram and when no one likes it, fear kicks in because you think no one likes you, you are socially isolated, and that makes you feel bad about your own life and reinforces feelings of not being good enough. So the brain steps in and anticipates a threat and floods your body with adrenaline. It doesn't recognize the difference between a real emergency and something that just doesn't feel nice because fear is fear.

Of course, the potential threat was simply a thought that no one liked you, but each time you had that thought, you were firing up the fight or flight response. But this is the important thing:

- Your brain doesn't know WHAT it is that is making you feel fear; it doesn't work that way
- It doesn't have eyes or ears
- It is not going to stop and analyze the situation you are in to decide if you are over-reacting or not; that is YOUR job to figure that out
- Your brain is trusting that you know what is going on out in your world
- It assumes you can determine what is a threat and what isn't a threat
- It trusts that if you are feeling fear, there is a reason for it
- It responds accordingly

- It works exactly as a computer would, except that instead of responding to typed commands, it responds to your fear.

If you don't stop the brain reacting to fear, it just keeps acting in the way it only knows how. It only takes a short time before you are so anxious you've lost the ability to be rational. Suddenly anxiety is dominating your life, and you've forgotten what it's like to live without it.

So, these 37 proven techniques are the perfect way to start dealing with those unwanted negative reactions and gain more control to calm down the fight or flight response. Just choose one and follow through.

How Anxiety Is Controlling You

When you're very anxious, it's impossible to be rational because the brain is in survival mode. It isn't able to receive or process rational explanations. But it's important to understand how anxiety is controlling you because it will help you stop beating yourself up for not being able to easily overcome it.

You're reading this book because you want to overcome anxiety, but the anxiety is stopping you from grasping how this all works. So, I'm going to be your rational brain and give you just enough information to help you see why you need to do what I ask you to do.

So, imagine you are driving the car down the road, and a cat runs out in the road in front of you. Instantaneously you feel fear, and then the brain follows up by assessing the immediate risks. In a second, your brain says: can I slam the brakes on in time? Can I drive around the cat? Is it safe to brake hard?

And then your brain decides to take evasive action by braking really hard. It may also decide to swerve. And then swerve again to avoid oncoming traffic. It all happens instinctively.

We make risk assessments all the time, and we respond to what's going on even down to things that make us happy. So, for instance, we see a cute puppy, and our

brain signals it's a lovely thing and triggers a happy feeling and a smile. It's just the way we work.

Except if we're very anxious. And then this is ramped up because our risk assessment has got out of control, and everywhere we look, we see the poorest possible outcome. So, we are making inappropriate assessments that always takes us to the worst-case scenario. And it runs on overdrive X 1000.

So, if you have to go to a meeting and you're anxious, your risk assessment may be more like: oh my god, they're going to hate me... what if I have a panic attack when I get there... what if I mess the presentation up... how can I make myself sound ok... what if I stumble...what shall I do if they ask me questions... what if I faint... what would I do if I go red or sweat... I think I'm going to make a fool of myself... this is just too much. I can't face it.... I have to find some way of canceling it.

Your brain's firing off, doing 'risk assessments' of your future surroundings, fine-tuning your senses, and your perception of everything around you. You're on 'red-alert.'

These are risk assessment thoughts when you're focusing on worst-case outcomes because all risk assessments are worst-case outcomes. And so, what you think is you're taking evasive action to avoid the chance of catastrophe. It's called catastrophizing.

When you've got an anxiety condition, your brain risk assesses a situation and always goes to the worst-case scenario. So when it risk assesses you as a person, and you're gay, for example, it asks 'What if I'm straight?'. If you're in a good relationship, it asks, 'What if it goes wrong?' If you are doing well at work, it asks, 'What if they find out I'm a fraud?' If you're straight, it asks, 'What if you're really gay?'

All of these risk assessments trigger the fight or flight loop. And you know what happens, right? It triggers a surge of hormones which starts:

- Heart Racing
- Sweating
- Nervousness, Restlessness, Or Being Tense
- Rapid Heart Rate
- Rapid Breathing, Or Hyperventilation
- Increased Or Heavy Sweating
- Trembling Or Muscle Twitching
- Weakness And Lethargy
- Difficulty Focusing Or Thinking Clearly About Anything Other Than The Thing You're Worried About
- Insomnia
- Digestive Or Gastrointestinal Problems, Such As Gas, Constipation, Or Diarrhoea
- A Strong Desire To Avoid The Things That Trigger Your Anxiety
- Obsessions About Certain Ideas, A Sign Of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder
- Performing Certain Behaviors Over And Over Again
- Anxiety Surrounding A Particular Life Event Or Experience That Has Occurred In The Past, Especially Indicative Of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (Ptd)
- Feelings Of Panic In The Chest
- Unable To Catch The Breath

Now you really do think there's a danger. You think that there's really something to be scared of. The catastrophizing gets stronger, and that initiates more hormones flooding the body.

Once the anxiety symptoms begin, you react to them on top of the original thing that triggered the anxiety - because just having anxiety symptoms can make you think there's something wrong when there isn't.

Your levels of drama and excitement rise, and it becomes hard not to buy into it because it FEELS so real. You know how it is, you post something on social media and then watch to see who is going like it. If very few people do, the risk assessment starts:

- Nobody likes me
- What have I done wrong?
- How can I get other people to engage with me?
- I have got no friends
- I'm going to be alone forever
- No one can help me

Even the most normal stable people who engage in social media have higher levels of anxiety. It's unavoidable.

Once you start the dance with the risk assessments and project the worst-case scenario, you've planted a seed of fear, and your brain then switches on the flight or fight system. Your brain didn't understand the difference between a full-on emergency brake to avoid the cat, and the thought 'nobody likes me' – one was a real emergency, and one wasn't. It assumes that both need to trigger the stress hormones and either run away or tackle the immediate threat.

Once you understand that's what's happening, you will see that you are unintentionally doing it to yourself. You didn't mean to set up like this. You somehow just fell into it. You didn't do anything wrong. And there's nothing wrong with you.

Why All Anxiety Is The Same

One thing that's really important to understand about all anxiety disorders, no matter what you suffer whether it's OCD, agoraphobia, Post-traumatic stress disorder, eco-anxiety, health anxiety, social anxiety, phobias, general anxiety disorder, Pure O, etc. they all start with fear.

Fear is a very physical reaction to something that you have seen, heard, or thought. You may have seen a car driving up on the pavement next to you. That would cause anybody to be frightened.

“Oh my god, is it going to hit me? I better run as fast as I can in the opposite direction.”

You may hear a scream from someone close by. That would trigger a frightening reaction.

“What the hell was that? What’s going on?”

How about the thought of doing a presentation and completely drying up? The fear makes the brain flood the body with stress hormones that will make you react.

If that car is mounting the pavement, you just react you don’t think about it. In fact, you have no control over how you react. Just like when you’ve got a tummy ache, you don’t have the control to fix it. Yes, you can take medication and hope that fixes the problem that you are not fixing the reason why you got tummy ache in the first place. You don’t have control over your reactions. Usually, people will see that car mount the pavement and then jump out the way. Once the adrenaline has come down, it won’t affect them again. The emergency is over.

Much like when you see two cats fighting, they are screaming and clawing each other, but when the fight is over, they slink off, take themselves to a safe place, lick themselves all over and carry on with their day. What they don’t do is re-live the fight in their mind, start assessing the risk that the cat might attack them again, and play out in their head all the ways they must avoid that cat.

But that’s what you do if you have anxiety... you play out over and over again what could happen next time and how bad it could be. This creates a ‘catastrophizing’ mindset, and we end up scanning everything for potential threats. Our fear level increases and triggers the fight or flight reaction over and over and over and over again until we are in a state of such high anxiety, we’ve lost the ability to think rationally. Once we are in this state, it’s difficult to find the mental clarity to step out of it.

'Catastrophising' is when you have irrational thoughts, believing that something is far worse than it actually is. Catastrophising can generally take two different forms: making a catastrophe out of a current situation and imagining making a catastrophe out of a future situation.

Fear turns into an anxiety disorder if it repeatedly occurs in situations that are not at all dangerous and if the fear is disproportional to the real situation. There is no obvious reason why we suffer from a particular anxiety disorder, but the root of all anxiety disorders is equal.

I suffered from severe health anxiety and actually planned my funeral. Why health anxiety and not agoraphobia? I have no idea, but there it was! Although we have many anxiety disorders between us, the roots of all anxiety are the same.

Because anxiety is a result of a response to a frightening thing, it's very difficult to change that response by talking about it or trying to change your thoughts or taking medication. In fact, what needs to happen is you need to stop talking about it, stop trying to change your thoughts, and, in an ideal world, stop taking medication.

Please remember, I am not a doctor. I never purport to have any medical knowledge. I talk from experience and 30 years of research. I always advise you to seek professional medical help if you need to. If you want to stop taking medication, please consult your doctor.

37 PROVEN WAYS TO REDUCE ANXIETY SYMPTOMS

1. BREATHE DEEP

You've probably heard that breathing is a good call if you're stressed out. What's fascinating is the reason why it works so well: breathing deeply lets your nervous system know that it can chill out according to many studies¹.

Deep diaphragmatic breathing is a powerful anxiety-reducing technique because it activates the body's relaxation response. The first thing you do when you get anxious is to shallow breathe or even pant.

During an emergency, your breathing rate and pattern change. Instead of breathing slowly from your lower lungs, you breathe rapidly from your upper lungs. If during this time, you are not physically exerting yourself, it can produce 'hyperventilation.'

'Hyperventilation' when you start to breathe very fast. Good breathing occurs with a healthy balance between breathing in oxygen and breathing out carbon dioxide. You upset this balance when you hyperventilate by exhaling more than you inhale.

This, in turn, can explain many of the uncomfortable symptoms during panic:

- dizziness
- shortness of breath
- a lump in the throat
- tingling or numbness in the hands or feet
- nausea
- confusion

¹ <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fnhum.2018.00353/full>

The good news is that by changing your breathing, you can reverse these symptoms with deep diaphragmatic breathing.

Deep diaphragmatic breathing is a powerful anxiety-reducing technique because it activates the body's relaxation response. It helps the body go from the fight-or-flight response of the sympathetic nervous system to the relaxed response of the parasympathetic nervous system.

I'm going to show you three ways to change your breathing. It's really useful to practice these when you're not feeling anxious so that you will easily remember them when you need them most.

Three breathing techniques:

I. **Abdominal Breath** This is a good way to breathe all day long unless you are involved in physical exercise. In other words, you should practice breathing this way all the time, since it provides for sufficient oxygen intake and controls the exhalation of carbon dioxide. It goes like this:

- Gently and slowly in
- Inhale a normal amount of air through your nose, filling your lower lungs
- Then exhale easily
- Put one hand on your stomach and one on your chest
- As you inhale gently, your lower hand should rise while your upper hand stays still
- Continue this gentle breathing pattern with a relaxed attitude, concentrating on filling only the lower lung

This breathing pattern is the opposite of the one which comes automatically during anxious moments. Instead of breathing rapidly and shallowly into the upper lungs, which expands the chest, you breathe gently into the lower lungs, expanding the abdomen.

II. **Calm Breath** This is deep diaphragmatic breathing and can be used during times when you are feeling anxious or panicky. It is a powerful way

to control hyperventilation, slow a rapid heartbeat, and feel more in control.

Practice this breathing at least ten times a day for several weeks. Use it during times of transition, when you are concentrating or whenever you want to let go of anxiety and begin to experience a sense of calmness. It goes like this:

- Take a long, slow breath in through your nose, first filling your lower lungs, then your upper lungs
- Hold your breath to the count of 3
- Exhale slowly through pursed lips, while you relax the muscles in your face, jaw, shoulders, and stomach

This will help you become familiar and comfortable with the process. Use it any time you begin to feel anxiety or panic building. It's good to practice this so you can use it as a tool to help you calm down during panic. It will help you be more familiar and comfortable with the process.

III. **Hot Chocolate** Pretend you have a mug of hot chocolate in your hands. Smell the warm chocolatey smell for three, hold it for one, blow it cool for three, hold it for one. Repeat three or four times.

Because you spend time concentrating on a specific task, you tend to pay less attention to your anxious thoughts. When you do this for 90 seconds, you will get a bit of traction on calming your mind, and this will reduce your anxiety.

Practice these three techniques regularly and notice the difference!.

2. EXPOSURE THERAPY

If you're trying to get comfortable with negotiating, speaking in public, or other scary activities, professionals often recommend exposure therapy. This is when you slowly expose yourself to the things you're afraid of, so they're no longer unfamiliar to you.

One study² at the Rehab Institute of Chicago found that it can dramatically improve the way people relate to their fears. It's done in a series of ordered steps, starting with a relatively low level of engagement with the fearful situation, and increasing levels with each step.

For example, if someone had a cat phobia, you might start by just looking at a very small kitten from a distance of a few meters. You would eventually work your way up to stroking a full-sized cat. The steps of exposure therapy are worked out for each individual, depending on where they can start.

There's a fundamental difference between a fear and a phobia. Fear is a natural response that can be advantageous in some situations but flawed if it is excessive. Phobia is a fear that is excessive and interferes with your life. It is a type of fear disorder. For instance, being afraid of cats and avoiding them is an example of excessive fear. However, being so afraid of any type of cat that you may avoid going outside, in general, is an example of a phobia. Exposure therapy treats both.

It works by exposing you to the anxiety source or its context without the intention to cause any danger. Research³ has shown that doing so helps you overcome the distress that the thing you're scared of gives you. It teaches you to predict and, when possible, control the anxious situation so that it is no longer unpredictable and uncontrollable, which makes it far less threatening.

There are three types of exposure techniques:

² <https://news.northwestern.edu/stories/2012/05/spider-phobia>

³ <https://psycnet.apa.org/fulltext/2014-55092-006.html>

- I. **Real-life** where the exposure exposes you to actual fear-inducing situations, e.g., if you fear public speaking, you may be asked to give a speech to a small group of people
- II. **Imaginal exposure** is when you're asked to imagine a situation you're afraid of. This is helpful if you need to confront feared thoughts and memories
- III. **Interoceptive exposure** is when you confront feared bodily symptoms such as increased heart rate and shortness of breath

All three types of exposure may be used together or separately.⁴

It's recommended that you use a therapist to help you through exposure therapy. However, that's not always possible as they will be private and can be expensive.

Here are some ways I teach others to reduce their anxiety through exposure therapy on a self-help basis.

Self-Help Exposure Therapy

You may have found yourself in the habit of avoiding situations that cause difficulty. This coping strategy can often make anxiety worse because you have to spend time and energy avoiding certain situations. Of course, the longer this continues, the more intimidating the situation you are avoiding becomes. And that makes the anxiety worse.

Say, for instance, you avoid going out socially, being in large groups, or avoid 'performance situations' like presentations. This avoidance strategy means you never have a chance to prove to yourself that you could cope and cope well. It's easy to see how avoiding a situation can have a negative impact on your life as you start to avoid more and more situations.

Here are some steps to follow using exposure therapy is a way of managing your anxiety:

⁴ <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/da.20907>

- I. List the things that you avoid** or often try to escape from or avoid. These could be things like speaking to a group of friends, giving a presentation to a small group, making eye contact with a stranger, ordering a pizza, having a one to one conversation with a colleague, asking a stranger for directions, etc.
- II. Rank these situations** in order of difficulty. From the least anxiety-provoking to the most anxiety-provoking on a scale of 0-100: 0 = no anxiety and 100 = extreme anxiety.
- III. Challenge the lowest-ranked** item on your list, the one that causes you the least anxiety. You may find that although your anxiety might initially rise, it will drop if you remain in the situation for long enough. Try to stay with the situation until your anxiety has reduced by at least half.
- IV. Repeat, repeat, repeat...** every day, if possible, or as often as possible. Don't leave too long between times when you challenge this item. This is because the more you challenge something, the more your fear will reduce. You will notice your anxiety getting less and less each time you do so. You may eventually find that it will cause you little or no anxiety at all.
- V. Move on to the next situation** quickly. Working through your list will help you feel less anxious in fewer and fewer situations. You will find that your confidence grows as you move through your list. You will find that your highest-ranked tasks will seem more manageable as you progress.

Quick Note

Remember, symptoms of anxiety can't harm you. Try not to escape situations you fear half-way through. Your anxiety will reduce each time you confront a feared situation. It's also helpful to challenge any unhelpful thoughts. You may challenge an item on your list, which doesn't go as well as you had hoped. Try not to give up. Keep going, and it will eventually get easier.

3. RECOGNIZE WHEN YOU'RE SUCCUMBING TO ANXIETY

As Wharton research scholar Jeremy Yips⁵ has found, fear about one thing in your life has a way of spilling over into other parts of your life. Anxiety offers a familiar response to uncertainty, and as a result, you try to reduce your risks.

But some anxiety triggers are totally unrelated to your responses or decisions. Yip calls this 'incidental anxiety' where there's a spillover effect when one event causes you to be anxious, which then, in turn, causes you to be wary about taking any risks over lots of totally unrelated situations.

For example, imagine a very frustrating journey into work where the traffic is awful, or the trains were canceled. Maybe you had a row with your partner before you left for work. Or, an encounter with someone you were trying to avoid.

So, you might get into work, and suddenly everything feels stressful, and you make decisions based on the anxiety you brought into the office. You don't like to take any risks because your anxiety is so high, so your decisions are made to keep you feeling safe.

It's very difficult to go to work, or a party or another social commitment and switch the anxiety dial right down if you've had an anxious situation before you got there. Even though you're trying your best if your anxiety trigger is negatively influencing situations or relationships with others (that's nothing to do with what's made you anxious,) it may be doubling your anxiety.

How do we stop incidental anxiety affecting other parts of our life? You can reduce incidental anxiety affecting other parts of your life through emotional intelligence.

⁵ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0956797612450031>

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is being able to recognize your emotions, understand what they're telling you, and realize how your emotions are affecting the people around you. It also involves your perception of others because when you understand how they feel, it allows you to manage relationships more effectively.

People with good emotional intelligence are often successful in most things they do because they're the ones that others want on their team. When people with good emotional intelligence send an email, it gets answered. When they need help, they get it. Because they make others feel good, they go through life much more easily than people who are easily angered or upset.

In his 1995 book titled "Emotional Intelligence - Why It Can Matter More Than IQ," the American psychologist Daniel Goleman developed a framework of elements that define emotional intelligence:

- i. **Self-Awareness** – People with high emotional intelligence are usually very self-aware. They understand their emotions, and because of this, they don't let their feelings rule them. They're confident – because they trust their intuition and don't let their emotions get out of control.
- ii. **They're also willing to take an honest** look at themselves. They know their strengths and weaknesses, and they work in these areas so they can perform better. Many people believe that this self-awareness is the most important part of emotional intelligence.
- iii. **Self-Regulation** – the ability to control emotions and impulses. People who self-regulate typically don't allow themselves to become too angry or jealous, and they don't make impulsive careless decisions. They think before they act. Characteristics of self-regulation are thoughtfulness, comfort with change, integrity, and the ability to say 'no.'
- iv. **Motivation** – People with a high degree of emotional intelligence are usually motivated. They're willing to defer immediate results for long-term success. They're highly productive, love a challenge, and are very effective in whatever they do.

- v. **Empathy** – This is perhaps the second-most important element of emotional intelligence. Empathy is the ability to identify with and understand the wants, needs, and viewpoints of those around you. People with empathy are good at recognizing the feelings of others, even when those feelings may not be obvious. As a result, empathetic people are usually excellent at managing relationships, listening, and relating to others. They avoid stereotyping and judging too quickly, and they live their lives in a very open, honest way.
- vi. **Social Skills** – It's usually easy to talk to and like people with good social skills, another sign of high emotional intelligence. Those with strong social skills are typically team players. Rather than focus on their success first, they help others develop and shine. They can manage disputes, are excellent communicators, and are masters at building and maintaining relationships.

How Does This Relate If You Have High Levels Of Anxiety?

When you make a decision, you might ask yourself: how do I feel about this? If you're anxious because of another event in your life and you're trying to make decisions about who to hire or which car to buy, you end up using your emotional state as information.

There are several ways you can go, but the two that dominate are the safe option and the riskier option. Incidental anxiety tends to make you choose the safer option regardless if it's the best option or not. So when you're anxious, you may choose the car or new member of staff that ticks the safe option boxes for you.

However, studies⁶ have shown that the people who can block the effects of this incidental anxiety when they make decisions have higher levels of emotional intelligence because they can block the influence of incidental anxiety on their risk-taking.

Whereas those with lower emotional intelligence are more confused about the source of their anxiety, and they misattribute their decisions, making them reduce their ability to take a risk.

⁶ <https://www.fastcompany.com/3025239/how-misplaced-anxiety-affects-your-decision-making>

How To Get Better At Making Decisions When You're Anxious

Using your emotional intelligence, you can get better at making decisions when you're anxious by asking yourself these three questions:

- How do you feel?
- What is causing you to feel this way?
- Is it relevant or irrelevant to the decision you're trying to make?

Trying to recognize where your fear is coming from will help you to make good decisions even if you are anxious. If you're worried because you had a row with your partner this morning, recognize that those worries have nothing to do with your pitch at work this afternoon.

4. SPEND TIME WITH YOUR FRIENDS: SOCIAL SUPPORT REDUCES ANXIETY.

People with close friends are better able to survive anxiety, divorces, job losses, and other traumatic events, according to research.

These studies indicate⁷ that in today's society, social support is associated with greater resilience to stress and lower levels of anxiety, higher self-esteem, and an enhanced ability to cope with stressors like bereavement, job loss, trauma, and illness. It has also been shown to buffer the effects of depression. So, the evidence suggests that social support is an important part of boosting our overall mental health.

Can you think back to a time when you were feeling anxious and turned to friends for support? You may have asked for a hug or some advice. It's natural!

We, humans, are social creatures who find connecting with others in times of high anxiety is beneficial enough to lower our stress levels. And there are many times when a hug is just what you need.

⁷ Thoits PA. Mechanisms linking social ties and support to physical and mental health. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*. 2011;52:145.

We are inherently social beings and enjoy other people's company and maintaining a sense of connectedness to others. This is because it decreases the sense of loneliness while promoting feelings of safety, security, belonging, and enjoyment.

It seems to affect our balance of hormones as social support is associated with increases in levels of a hormone called oxytocin, which decreases anxiety levels. It also stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system calming down responses. More oxytocin stimulates our desire to seek out social contact and increases our sense of attachment to people who are important to us. Anxious people who have adequate levels of social support receive an oxytocin boost, and this helps them feel less anxious and more confident in their ability to cope.

Plus, spending time with other people directs our energy outward rather than inward. If you are focused on reaching out to other people, you are temporarily distracted from your anxiety, and so you worry less.

Reaching out to others for support can help stabilize anxiety because you know you can rely on those individuals for help and emotional assistance in the future. Also, you feel wanted, included, and cared for. Talking through problems and sharing feelings with others has a direct impact on stress feelings. You also strengthen your sense that life has meaning and purpose, and this will protect you against the negative effects of anxiety.

It's quality, rather than quantity, that counts when it comes to social relationships. In other words, surrounding yourself with a large number of people that you don't know very well is less effective than having 2 or 3 close friends. It's very important, however, once you have established relationships, to devote some time to nurture them. It's give and take; you need to strike a balance between listening and being listened to, supporting another while being supported, and so on.

Being very giving to others or doing good things for them without focusing on the reward for yourself goes a long way. The act of giving can activate neurotransmitters (chemical messengers in the brain and nervous system) associated with positive feelings, making you feel stronger and more energetic and decreasing anxiety.

Also, having a giving heart decreases anxiety by virtue of an outward focus. By focusing on and helping others who are less fortunate than you can provide you with a sense of perspective on how fortunate you are. You can spend more time being thankful for the things you have like good health, enough food, having a safe place to sleep, etc.. It also makes you pine less for things that you feel you lack like a fancy car etc. Helping others can also help you gain a more positive perspective on the things in life that are truly causing you anxiety.

Big hearted people often have a better life adjustment overall and tend to see life as more meaningful. Also, they can have better love relationships, less hopelessness, depression and better self-esteem. Being big hearted can counter negative emotions that affect the immune system and even cardiovascular function.

It's important to do things that fit with your personality, financial situation, and time allowances otherwise this generosity can start to take on the tone of stressful obligations and start to increase, rather than decrease, your anxiety. Sometimes just offering your time to help someone with babysitting, walking a dog or provide respite to a carer who needs a short break can be enough to increase your oxytocin levels which will, in turn, decrease your stress levels.

5. EXERCISE

Exercise, whether at the gym, at home or on the sports field, can be a brilliant way to help manage your anxiety.

Apparently, when we exercise, science⁸ has proved that it releases feel-good endorphins, the natural cannabis-like brain chemicals that we all need to enhance our sense of well-being. It also takes your mind off your worries so you get away from the ruminating (cycle of negative thoughts) that winds up your anxiety.

Cardio

Cardio is great because it pushes your heart rate up and is the best known anxiety-buster in the game. Cardio exercise includes everything from swimming, running, weightlifting, team sports and High Intensity Training (HIT). It's anything that makes you break into a sweat, feel your heart race and make you breathe hard.

Cardio reduces levels of the body's stress hormones, such as adrenaline and cortisol, according to Harvard Medical School⁹. In turn it stimulates the production of endorphins, chemicals in the brain that are the body's natural painkillers and mood elevators. It's the endorphins that are responsible for the "runner's high" and for the relaxing feelings and optimism after you've the hot shower when your exercise is over.

Another study¹⁰ of different exercises found that, among people with anxiety, symptoms dipped the most 90 minutes after a 20-minute high-intensity workout at '80% of maximal oxygen intake.' It's about breathing hard. Even if you can't work at that efficiency, aerobic effort seems to be a good plan overall for getting the best possible mix of lowered stress hormones and high endorphins.

Interestingly, it seems that intense workouts over 30 minutes long are better at reducing anxiety than workouts that were less than a half hour. It's thought that sustained exercise that raises the heart rate and causes rapid breathing for over 30 minutes helped people feel comfortable with those feelings.

⁸ <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/depression/in-depth/depression-and-exercise/art-20046495>

⁹ <https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/exercising-to-relax>

¹⁰ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.2190/PM.41.1.c>

That, in turn helps anxiety, because a racing heart and fast breathing are both characteristic anxiety symptoms and exercise teaches anxious people not to fear them. Also, the lower anxiety levels of symptoms, after 30 minutes, seemed to be sustained for a significant period of time after the exercise had finished.

The Best Non-Medical Solution For Anxiety?

Having anxiety can increase your risk for other disorders like depression and it can also contribute to diabetes and cardiovascular problems. People¹¹ with anxiety tend to be more inactive and do less intense forms of physical activity. The irony is that lacing up your trainers, getting out and moving may be the single best non-medical solution we have for preventing and treating anxiety.

Although aerobic exercise is especially helpful, you don't have to burn the glutes to get the benefit. A simple bike ride, dance class, or even a brisk walk can be a powerful tool for those suffering from chronic anxiety. It can also help if you're feeling overly nervous and anxious about life and all that it throws at you.

Another study¹² examined how exercise helps to divert you from the very thing you're anxious about. The art of distraction is a brilliant tool for calming down those anxious thoughts.

How Does Distraction Help?

For anyone anxious, their intellect isn't being challenged, and because it's boring, it's going mad in an empty space, and it's creating anxiety. It's like when you leave a puppy alone in a house, and it trashes the place because it's fed up, and it's trying to keep itself occupied. No one's keeping an eye on it, and it lacks positive stimulation. It's being allowed to roam free and scratch up the furniture and chew up shoes. And it's not having fun while it's doing it! It's actually having a bad time, and it's lonely because it's on its own, and puppies need their pack to feel safe. So, tearing up the place burns a lot of energy and distracts it from its loneliness. Exercise gets that creative brain busy, and anxiety doesn't like a busy brain!

¹¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4293141/>

¹² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/30032703>

Exactly How Does Exercise Help Anxiety?

- Moves your body lowers muscle tension, and muscle tension can contribute to feeling anxious
- Gets your heart rate up changes your brain chemistry by increasing the flow of important anti-anxiety neurochemicals like including serotonin and gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA).
- Activates¹³ frontal regions of the brain responsible for decision-making, and this helps control the amygdala, the reacting system to real or imagined threats to our survival.
- Regular exercise¹⁴ builds up resources that bolster resilience against tricky emotions.

How Much Do You Need To Do?

There are no studies which definitively map out how much you should do. However, people with anxiety who exercise are better protected against developing more anxiety than those with low physical activity. The bottom line is when it comes to anxiety, the more you exercise, the better.

If you're just beginning, then you're doing the exact right thing. Some studies¹⁵ show that just one single bout of exercise can help ease your anxiety when it strikes.

It might not matter what type of exercise you choose to do. Everything¹⁶ is effective from high-intensity training (HIT) down to gentle Tai Chi. It seems that and the improvement was noticed regardless of the activity. The important thing is to get moving.

4 Tips To Maximize The Best Outcome:

¹³ <https://www.jneurosci.org/content/33/18/7770>

¹⁴ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2095254619300298>

¹⁵ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=18723899>

¹⁶ <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/interval-training-more-workout-in-less-time-and-you-can-do-it-2018042013569>

- i. choose something that you enjoy so you will do it repeatedly, building resilience.
- ii. Do something to get your heart rate up.
- iii. Work out in a group to reap the added benefit of social support.
- iv. If possible, immerse yourself in nature or green space, which will further reduce your anxiety¹⁷

Other benefits include:

- You gain confidence because achieving exercise goals boosts self-confidence
- Getting in shape makes you feel better about your appearance
- Socially, you get a chance to meet with others; a friendly smile goes a long way
- Doing something positive to manage anxiety is a healthy coping strategy and a whole lot better than downing a few drinks or, as I used to do, eat a box of chocolates in one sitting!

6. REFRAME ANXIETY AS EXCITEMENT

If you're trying to "Keep Calm And Carry On," it's a bad idea!! Professor Brooks from Harvard Business School has found¹⁸ that the best way to work with anxiety isn't to keep calm but to reframe it as excitement.

Emotions happen at two levels, one, a physical sensation called arousal and two, the way you mentally interpret it, called valence.

When you're anxious, your heart rate goes up, and that's called high arousal. The thing is, you probably would read that as bad news, which gives you a 'negative

¹⁷ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/30544682>

¹⁸ <https://www.fastcompany.com/3022177/feeling-anxious-why-trying-to-keep-calm-is-a-terrible-idea>

valence.' But if you reframe it as 'excitement,' you stay in that high arousal state and read it as good news or 'positive valence.'

If you're anxious and try to 'calm down,' it can work against you. It's actually very difficult to do successfully. It's especially tricky when leading up to something that makes you anxious like public speaking, a job interview, or singing in front of people. When you tell yourself to 'calm down,' you have to make two hidden steps, moving both arousal and valence. Moving from anxiety to excitement is easier because your body can stay in a heightened physiological state. Then you re-appraise your anxiety as excitement, which is more positive.

Some studies¹⁹ have determined that this approach makes people able to function much better, particularly in public speaking. It also makes people into better performers.

This two-step process is not an intuitive one. However, understanding that you're trying to do two different things makes you more emotionally literate.

How To Reframe Your Anxiety As Excitement.

It's very simple. Whenever you are doing something that makes you anxious - a speech, a meeting, etc. - take a moment beforehand and give yourself the command: Get Excited!

Oscar Wilde once quipped that "worry is misspent imagination." It's true. When we're worried, we make poor investments with our attention. Instead of thinking of the ways that big presentation will go right, we spend our limited attention on the things that could go wrong or what's wrong with us and what everyone else has done to us. Consequently, anxiety precludes us from exploring real thought patterns that will find the solution.

When you're in a positive valence, it sets up an opportunity mindset so that you think of all of the good things that can happen, and you're more likely to make decisions and take actions that will focus on those good things.

¹⁹ <https://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/xge-a0035325.pdf>

Paying Attention To Our Investments

When we're actually investing our attention, it's important to recognize that we're constantly spending but not getting back.

Attention is measured by psychologists in bits. Studies²⁰ show that you can attend to 5-7 bits of information at a time. The total amount of bits you get in a lifetime is 150 billion. That means you're spending your 'bits' budget regardless of what you're doing, whether it's by watching TV, scrolling through your endless inbox, or having a meaningful conversation.

Every thought, conversation, emotion, and sensation you'll ever have is included in that number. Just like you only get so many sweets in a bag, you only get so many bits.

Looking at this from an existential perspective, here are three important questions:

- I. How can you get that 600-bit task to fit into the 150 billion bits that you get to spend in your life?
- II. Is it worth your attention?
- III. Is anxiety worth spending bits on? Probably not but reframed into excitement, it could be offering a much better return on your investment by making sure you're allocating your precious resource (attention) in ways that most closely align with who you are and what impact you want to have on the world.

If, for instance, you're about to give a presentation, and someone asks, "how do you feel?" and you tell them that you're excited (rather than anxious), it could really improve your performance.

Or, if you just do something and constantly work on it, when you revise and hone it into a product or a performance, it turns into something wonderful. Just reappraising anxiety as excitement can help inspire simple actions—just to get excited and do something.

²⁰ <https://www.britannica.com/science/information-theory/Physiology>

7. GET A PERSPECTIVE

Has anyone ever said to you, “just change your perspective, and your anxiety will seem negligible.” Easy? No, that advice is not helpful.

On the other hand, when you're really anxious, you'll try anything, right?

Perspective is when you understand not only someone else's viewpoint but also understanding where they're coming from.

It's like you've leaned in and seen their world through their eyes without fully stepping into their shoes. Perspective is only effective if you stay in your shoes because you don't need to have any empathetic stress as well.

One study²¹ at the State University of New York at Buffalo showed that seeing things from an 'imagine others perspective' came with less anxiety than seeing things with an 'imagine yourself' perspective. This is because when we think about other peoples' feelings without taking on their associated emotions, we can appreciate another person's visual and perceptual perspective.

Our brain likes to be the centre of attention by 'ruminating,' i.e. going over and over and over the same thoughts, These thoughts are usually sad or dark! In other words, it's always “Me! Me! Me!”

It isn't a good thing. It stops you from living carefreely and makes you anxious by pulling your attention towards everything negative, and then you get trapped in an unhelpful feedback loop²². This loop causes you to focus more on potentially negative situations, become emotional (empathetically emotional) about them, and see them as particularly relevant to your life.

So, changing perspective means stepping back and looking at a situation and thinking about differently.

Here are three ways to do this.

²¹ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0022103116303961?via%3Dihub>

²² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/10327898>

The Time Machine

With this first tool it's common to see your problems as spinning 'out of control' or being way more important than they actually are. What is bothering you right now might feel overwhelming and that your anxiety will last indefinitely—maybe, forever. But will it? Let's say you argued with your partner. You are really upset right now. But, how might you feel in a day, a week, a month, a year?

The Time Machine helps you to get a perspective on your problems to help bring down your anxiety and calm down symptoms. Apply this to a problem at least once a day for 21 days.

How To Use The Time Machine

When you're facing a big problem, answer these questions:

Describe the event that's bothering you right now.....

How will you feel about it in one week?.....

How will you feel about it in one month?.....

How will you feel about it in 6 months?.....

How will you feel about it in one year?.....

Whenever you feel a problem is overwhelming you, come back to this tool and figure out how important that problem really is.

The brain allows you to be constantly aware of the past and the future. This is like a type of mental time travel or "chronesthesia," the fancy name for it. When you remember (past events) or imagine (future events), you can do so through varying degrees of 'psychological distance.'

For example, you can remember the dinner you had with your family that happened yesterday (near) versus the dinner that happened six months ago (far). And though they may have been virtually identical, you experience them differently. The same goes for projecting yourself into the future. Imagine yourself in a job interview

tomorrow (near) versus a job interview in 6 months (far). It generates a different mental experience altogether.

These differences can be used to change your perspective, which can help pull your sense of self away from anxiety.

Letter to the future

The second tool is to write a letter to your future self explaining the situation as you're experiencing it right now. Give the anxiety a score from 0-10. Describe the things that are causing you anxiety and how you think things could change in the future. Once you're finished with the letter, put it away for a bit of time (a day, a week, a year), then come back and read it as if you're your future self. This will pull you away from the anxious situation.

Think Back method

With this third tool you look back to a situation in the past within the last year where you were dealing with a similar anxious situation. Write out the answer to the following questions:

- At its peak back then, how bad was the anxiety? How would you have then rated it on a 0-10 scale?
- How long did the anxiety continue?
- When did it subside?

The Think Back method works best when you are as specific as possible. According to research,²³ this is because being specific and using concrete details triggers episodic memory. These detailed episodic memories give you an exact sense of what was done or what could be done.

For example, you may be falling behind your work schedule and to help with this, you might think about the following specific episodic details from a previous time this happened:

- What action you took

²³ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1053810011002327>

- Who you spoke to
- What meetings you had
- What emails you sent
- Who you confided in
- What did you learn, etc.?

You should be so specific that it pulls you out of the present moment. It's an effective strategy because it makes your brain re-wire itself to lead you to a different perspective. You become more objective and less subjective, resulting in better clarity of judgment and a change in perspective.

It also better manages your anxiety because it helps to minimize the 'Me-Me-Me' part of the brain and induce a more separate, objective, and third-party view. Changing perspective doesn't have a simple switch on solution. But with the right tools, and applied over time, anxiety can be reduced as you habitually separate the 'you part of the brain' from the source of anxiety. Without the 'you' attached to the anxiety, there's no longer anything to get anxious about.

8. GET SOME MAGNESIUM

We all need magnesium, and it's one of the most abundant minerals in the body. It plays an important role in several areas, and especially in levels of anxiety.

According to research²⁴, it would be safe to say that just taking magnesium could be a treatment for anxiety. This review explained that one of the reasons why magnesium might help reduce anxiety is that it plays an important role in regulating neurotransmitters, the chemicals which send messages throughout the brain and body. It's thought magnesium affects a part of the brain called the hypothalamus, which helps regulate the pituitary and adrenal glands. These are responsible for your 'anxiety response.'

Interestingly, It's been reported that magnesium levels are low in part due to a major shift from whole grains to refined flours. Refined flours have a much lower mineral,

²⁴ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2959081/>

generally only containing 16 percent of the magnesium that's found in their unrefined, and arguably healthier, counterparts.

Which Magnesium Is Best For Anxiety?

Magnesium is often bonded with other substances to make it easier for the body to absorb it. There are categorizations of magnesium according to these bonding substances. The different kinds include:

- Magnesium glycinate. Often used to reduce muscle pain.
- Magnesium oxide. They are commonly used to treat migraines and constipation.
- Magnesium citrate. Easily absorbed by the body and also used to treat constipation.
- Magnesium chloride. It is easily absorbed by the body.
- Magnesium sulfate (Epsom salt). Generally, less easily absorbed by the body but may be absorbed through the skin.
- Magnesium lactate. Often used as a food additive.

It appears that most of the relevant studies²⁵ on magnesium and anxiety use magnesium lactate or magnesium oxide. Although more studies are needed to compare the anti-anxiety effects of different types of magnesium, it might be worth trying these two and seeing if either help.

How Much Should You Take For Anxiety?

Many people have low magnesium levels as that many people aren't getting enough magnesium from their diets. The Recommended Daily Allowance (RDA) for adults is between 310 and 420 mg²⁶.

If you take magnesium as a supplement, for them to have an anti-anxiety effect, you could look at the upper end of the RDA. It might be worth consulting a

²⁵ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5452159/>

²⁶ <https://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/Magnesium-HealthProfessional/>

healthcare practitioner before taking any supplement so that you know the correct dose for you.

What Foods To Eat?

To ensure you have enough magnesium in your diet, you can eat foods that are high in magnesium. The top foods are:

- Pumpkin seeds: 46% of the RDI (Reference Daily Intake) in 16g
- Spinach, boiled: 39% of the RDI in 180g
- Swiss chard, boiled: 38% of the RDI in 175g
- Dark chocolate (70–85% cocoa): 33% of the RDI in 100g
- Black beans: 30% of the RDI in 172g
- Quinoa, cooked: 33% of the RDI the in 185g
- Halibut: 27% of the RDI in 100g
- Almonds: 25% of the RDI in 24g
- Cashews: 25% of the RDI in 30g
- Mackerel: 19% of the RDI in 100g
- Avocado: 15% of the RDI in one medium avocado (200g)
- Salmon: 9% of the RDI in 100g

What Are The Side Effects Of Magnesium?

While there are few side effects from taking magnesium supplements, it's always important not to take more of any supplement than you actually need.

High amounts of magnesium in food sources don't pose a risk as the kidneys usually flush extra magnesium out. However, it is possible to overdose on magnesium supplements.

What Are The Other Benefits Of Taking Magnesium?

Magnesium can pack a punch for other benefits too. From improved mood to bowel health, magnesium works throughout the body. Studies like this²⁷. have found many other ways magnesium may help your health.

Other benefits are:

- constipation treatment
- better sleep
- reduced pain
- migraine treatment
- reduced risk for type 2 diabetes
- lowered blood pressure
- improved mood

While more evidence is needed to understand and explain how it works fully, magnesium seems to be specifically an effective treatment for anxiety as well. Speak to a healthcare professional before taking any supplements.

Emily, 39, tells how taking magnesium citrate helped her anxiety.

'My career started to take off in my mid-20s, and alongside that, my anxiety kicked off. I'd gone from worrying about what I was going to wear on Friday night too suddenly found I had so much more To worry about.

I moved to Singapore in 2007 to edit a magazine, and from that moment onwards, my anxiety skyrocketed along with my insomnia. I didn't notice to start with because I was socializing at booze-soaked parties night after night, and it would fall into bed in the early hours. The one side settled in a long-term relationship and found myself in my early 30s, and I stopped partying every night, yet getting to sleep what becoming a real problem.

My career was going from strength to strength, but my anxiety was really setting me back, and I started to dread going to bed. Sometimes I would lie

²⁷ <https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/10-proven-magnesium-benefits>

awake all night just worrying about getting through the next day. During the day, I could barely function. Both of these scenarios made my anxiety rocket. My job involved interviewing lots of doctors, and I started questioning them about my personal problems – not the most professional approach! But it was an Austrian doctor who suggested I take magnesium citrate. Fair enough, I thought I was ready to try anything. I read up on it, and Studies told me it was great for anxiety, so I started taking it. I had nothing to lose.

I knew I was anxious because I was under pressure in my career, and this had a knock-on effect on my sleep patterns, and I would have tried anything. Since I started taking the magnesium citrate, and despite having two young kids, I have slept through the night like a baby who has knocked my anxiety on its head!

9. MEDITATION

Anxiety can occur at any time of day and, when it does, it can be the worst. But for some people, it has a particular habit of rearing its ugly head in the morning. Does this happen to you?

It turns out that there's a good scientific reason why. The stress hormone cortisol is highest in the first hour of waking up. It's helping us to stay alert and focused in the morning.

However, if you go to bed feeling anxious, it can cause cortisol levels to spike too early and lead you to wake up with racing thoughts. Some people are also prone to lower blood sugar levels first thing in the morning, which can also trigger anxiety.

Suffering from a prolonged period of anxiety when you struggle to take control of your racing thoughts can go some way to scar you in that you think, "I never want to feel that way ever again." Because, when you feel the slightest onset of those same, uneasy feelings, you can jump straight into panic mode that it's all returning.

This is the anxiety loop, getting anxious about feeling anxious. Or, the possible arrival of anxiety. Although this may sound ridiculous, it isn't when it happens to

you, and it's actually quite a normal pattern of behavior for us humans. It's really easy to think that you are the only person that's having it, but, actually, it's common to all of us and always has been.

If you do a meditation first thing in the morning, it ensures that you start the day fresh. You lay down a foundation of calmness that means that you are more likely to make more composed decisions throughout the day. You will experience a better quality of life throughout the day. Even a short mindfulness exercise can provide you with a calmer sense of emotional balance so you can create a better, more sensitive day.

Mediation has unequivocally proved²⁸ to help with anxiety. lead study author John J. Durocher, Ph.D., an assistant professor of physiology in the department of biological sciences at Michigan Technological University, said:

"Our results show a clear reduction in anxiety in the first hour after the meditation session, and our preliminary results suggest that anxiety was significantly lower one week after the meditation session. Participants also had reduced mechanical stress on their arteries an hour after the session. This could help to reduce stress on organs like the brain and kidneys and help prevent conditions such as high blood pressure.

Here, Amber, 33, talks about her anxiety and the part that meditation helps her ongoing recovery.

"Before I was diagnosed with a generalized anxiety disorder a decade ago, I genuinely thought everyone woke up with a sinking feeling in the pit of their stomach every day. I'd heard people speak of anxiety, so I thought it was normal, but now I know that being anxious and having an anxiety disorder that requires medical attention isn't the same thing. Anxiety is a normal feeling in the body, like happiness, sadness, or jealousy. There's a big distinction between anxiety and anxiety disorders.

My anxiety was especially bad in the morning because I struggled to deal with the day ahead. Waking up meant I had to organize my day to ensure I

²⁸ <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/04/180423135048.htm>

didn't miss anything or say anything that would make me feel anxious all night. I went through the tasks in my head over and over. If I were doing something new or unusual that day, I'd wake up too early with anxiety. Everything new spelled fear, especially when it centered around certain people or expectations I had to achieve. Socializing was a huge task, and talking on the phone felt awful.

At the time, I was working as a fashion influencer in London, which meant socializing with other fellow bloggers and going to events. This was a nightmare, and I'd sometimes prepare for events three weeks in advance. I would inadvertently have one too many drinks (not because I was having so much fun, but because I was trying to drown out the anxiety) which created its own problems.

Then when I was going through a tough time with family problems, for two months, I woke up every day having panic attacks. I could barely catch my breath through the day, and I ended up on a psychiatrist's couch. She explained I was living in a state of panic 24 hours a day, like a 24/7 panic attack. I lost 20lbs in a month and started taking medication. At first, the medication made me a bit better, but I had to find other ways to help me feel even better than that.

I put in place a lot of routines to give me a feeling of control as my anxiety is all about anticipating the unexpected, eliminating the unexpected help. In the mornings, I wake up, make coffee, feed my dog, and then meditate. I do a mindful meditation every day - consistently. It's helped to stabilize me and pull me more into the present moment and away from catastrophizing into the future.

It lowers my anxiety because I always know that I'm OK right at each moment. I didn't realize how different life could be for me with just such a simple thing as meditation.

Mindful Meditation

Here is a 10 minute mindful meditation script that you can record into your phone and listen to every morning. It's intended to help you enter a very deep state of relaxation.

It is best if you can manage to stay awake throughout the entire exercise. It's important to remember not to try to relax.

What you'll be doing instead is becoming aware of each passing moment and just accepting what is happening within you, seeing it as it is. Let go of the tendency of wanting things to be different from how they are now and allow things to be exactly as you find them. Just watch the activity of your mind, letting go of judgmental and critical thoughts when they arise, and just doing what the exercise guides you to do as best, you can.

The Script:

Lie down or be seated in a warm and private place, dressed in loose and comfortable clothing at a time when you will not be interrupted. Closing your eyes and letting your arms lie alongside your body, your feet falling away from each other/or flat on the floor and slowly bring your attention to the fact that you are breathing.....Not trying to control your breath in any way... but simply experiencing it as the air moves in and out of your body.... and noticing your abdomen and feeling the sensations there as your breath comes into your body... and your abdomen gently expands.... Then noticing your belly deflate as the breath comes out of your body..... And following the rhythmic movement of each breath, ...the rising of your belly on the in-breath... and on each out-breath... just letting go.... letting your body become heavy..... as it sinks a little bit deeper into relaxation..... Just bringing full attention to each breath in each moment.

Now bring your attention to your feet.... becoming aware of whatever sensations are there... If you are registering a blank as you tune in... then just experiencing nothing.... And as you breathe in, imagine your breath moving down to your feet... and then when you reach your feet... begin

your out-breath and let it move up your body.... and out your nose..... So that you're breathing in from your nose... and breathing out from your feet And when you are ready.... letting your feet dissolve in your mind's eye..... Become aware of the shins and calf musclesand the sensations in the lower legs....not just on the surface but right down into the bones.... experiencing and accepting what you feel here.... and breathing into it.... then breathing out from it..... Then letting go of your lower legs as you relax into your seat or bed or mat..... And moving now into the thighs.... and if there's any tension just noticing that..... Breathing into and out from the thighs..... Then letting your thighs dissolve and relax.

Shift your attention to your pelvis now.... From one hip to the other..... Noticing your buttocks in contact with the bed or the mat.... And the sensations of contact and weight..... And whatever sensations or lack of sensations you are experiencing..... And directing your breath down into your pelvis.... breathing with the entirety of your pelvis.... And as you breathe out.... moving the breath back up through your body and out your nose.... letting your pelvis softenand release all tension as you sink even deeper... into a state of relaxed awareness and stillness..... Totally present in each moment..... Content to just be, and to just be right here as you are right now..... Direct your attention now to your lower back.... And just experiencing your back as it is..... Letting your breath penetrate and move into every part of your lower back on the in-breath..... And on the out-breath.... just letting any tension... any tightness... any holding on... just flow out as much as it will..... And then letting go of your lower back..... And moving up into your upper back now.... Just feeling the sensations in your upper back..... You may even feel your ribcage, in back as well as in front.... expand on the in-breath..... And any tightness.... fatigue or discomfort in this part of your body... just letting them dissolve and move out with the out-breath... as you let go and sink even deeper into stillness and relaxation.

And now shifting your attention to your belly again... and experiencing the rising and falling of your belly as you breathe..... Feeling the movements of your diaphragm.... that umbrella-like muscle that separates your belly from your chest..... And experiencing the chest as it expands on the in-breath and

deflates on the out-breath.... And if you can, tune into the rhythmic beating of your heart within your chest..... Feeling it if you can..... As well as the lungs expanding on either side of your heart..... Just experiencing your chest.... your belly.... as you lie here...the muscles on the chest wall.... the entirety of the front of your body..... And now just letting this region dissolve into relaxation as well.

Moving your attention now to your fingertips.... and both hands together..... just becoming aware of the sensations now in the tips of your fingers and thumbs.... where you may feel some pulsations from the blood flow... dampness or a warmth or whatever you feel..... Just feeling your fingers..... And expand your awareness to include the palms of your hands.... and the backs of your hands.... and your wrists..... And here again, perhaps picking up the pulsations of the arteries in your wrists.... as the blood flows to ...and from your hands..... And becoming aware as well of the forearms..... And the elbows..... Any and all sensations regardless of what they are..... Allowing the field of your awareness to include now the upper arms..... Right up to your shoulders..... Just experiencing your shoulders... and if there are any tensions.... breathing into your shoulders and arms..... And letting that tension dissolve as you breathe out.... Letting go of the tension and letting go of your arms.... All the way from your fingertips..... right through to your shoulders..... As you sink even deeper into a state of relaxed awareness..... Just being present in each moment..... Letting go of whatever thoughts come up or whatever impulses to move and just experiencing yourself in this moment....

And now focus your attention on your neck and throat..... and feel this part of your body... experiencing what it feels like perhaps when you swallow ...and when you breathe..... And then letting it go.... Letting it relax ...and dissolve in your mind's eye..... Becoming aware of your face now..... Focusing on the jaw and the chin.... just experiencing them as they are....

Becoming aware of your lips and your mouth.... And becoming aware of your cheeks now...and your nose.... feeling the breath as it moves in ...and out at the nostrils..... And be aware of your eyes.... And the entire region around

your eyes and eyelids..... And if there's any tension.... letting it leave as the breath leaves..... And now the forehead..... letting it soften to let go of stored emotions..... And the temples..... And if you sense any emotion associated with the tension or feelings in your face... just being aware of that... Breathing in and letting the face dissolve into relaxation and stillness..... And now become aware of your ears.... and back and top of your head..... Now letting your whole face and head relax..... For now, just letting it be as it is..... Letting it be still and neutral..... Relaxed and at peace. Now letting your breath move through your entire body in whatever way feels natural for you..... Through the entire length of your body..... All of your muscles in a deep state of relaxation..... And your mind simply aware of this energy..... of this flow of breath. Experiencing your entire body breathing..... Sinking deeper and deeper into a state of stillness.... and deep relaxation..... Allow yourself to feel whole..... In touch with your essential self in a realm of silence..... of stillness.... of peace..... And seeing that this stillness is in itself healing..... And allowing the world to be as it is beyond your personal fears and concerns..... Beyond the tendencies of your mind.... to want everything to be a certain way..... Seeing yourself as complete right now as you are..... As totally awake right now.....

As the exercise ends,.... bring your awareness back to your body again.....feeling the whole of it.... You may want to wiggle your toes and fingers.... Allow this calmness and this centeredness to remain with you when you move.... Congratulate yourself on having taken the time to nourish yourself in this way..... And remember that this state of relaxation and clarity is accessible to you by simply paying attention to your breath at any moment..... no matter what's happening in your day. Let your breath be a source of constant strength and energy for you.

10. EMBRACE THE POTENTIAL ADVANTAGES OF ANXIETY

We rarely hear people say, "I'm really feeling anxious. Isn't that great?" But if we didn't have some anxiety in our lives — the "good anxiety" variety — we'd feel rudderless and unhappy. If we define anxiety as anything that alters our hormones, good anxiety, in its many forms, is vital for a healthy life. Bad anxiety can even turn into good anxiety and vice versa.

Good Stress vs. Bad Anxiety

"Good stress," or what the medics refer to as eustress. It's the type of stress you feel when you get excited. Your pulse quickens, and the hormones surge, but there is no threat or fear. You might feel this type of stress when you go for a new job, ride a roller coaster, or go on a first date. It keeps you feeling alive and excited about your life.

Bad stress comes from quick surprises that need a response. It triggers the body's fight-or-flight as well, but it's not always happy and exciting. Bad stress in itself doesn't take a heavy toll if you find ways to relax quickly. Once the stressor has been dealt with, you can return your body to its pre-stress state, to be healthy and happy. Unfortunately, for people with anxiety, this doesn't always happen, and when you repeatedly face stressors that take a heavy toll, it can feel inescapable. Because our bodies aren't designed for ongoing stress, we can face negative health effects (both physical and emotional) if we deal with chronic stress for an extended period.

Sources of Good Stress

So how do you add good stress to your life? Ideally, you find activities that make you feel good, happy, and excited. Studies²⁹ show us that having good stressors can turn our anxiety to our advantage by placing the same energy into projects that stimulate and excite us.

The key to turning this around is to change your mindset from 'stress is debilitating' to 'stress can enhance my life.' For many years, the spotlight has been on stress's

²⁹ http://goodthinkinc.com/wp-content/uploads/CrumSaloveyAnchor_RethinkingStress_JPSP2013.pdf

negative aspects, including detrimental health effects, loss of productivity, and depression. This interpretation may be well-intended, but the result of such a perspective may be counter-effective.

The findings recent studies indicate that people can be primed to adopt a 'stress can enhance my life' mindset, which actually has positive consequences and helps improve both health and work performance. This doesn't mean that you should seek out more stress. But, it does mean is you may not need to focus single-mindedly on reducing your stress but change your mindset towards stress – and anxiety.

How To Do This

The best way to do this is to find ways to nourish your mind. These are things you can turn to that positively engage your creativity.

If you're anxious, it means your mind has got time on its hands. That time is now spent on thinking about all the things that can go wrong. It's catastrophizing and then winding up your adrenal glands, flooding your body with stress hormones, preparing you to either fight or run – all the while, there's no actual danger. To mitigate your brain's wandering into places, it's got no right to be in, you ensure it's too busy to get stressed.

To do this, you have to find something that completely distracts the mind so it can't get away with thinking about all the things that may go wrong in the future. This has to be all-encompassing and something you're passionate about. It needs to be something that gets you involved enough that it intellectually challenges you and takes over your anxious thoughts.

Take Mike, who had severe business problems and was full of anxiety. Eventually, his business problems were resolved. But, he was left with the anxiety, and he just couldn't get out of the loop. His mindset was leaning towards it being a disaster. The anxiety made him think there was something wrong when there wasn't.

He then found something he wanted to learn – Italian! It was something he'd wanted to do all his life. Whenever he had some downtime, he got on his phone and learned the language. This was the missing piece of the puzzle that stopped the anxiety triggers. He was focused on something he felt passionate about. He turned

his mindset from feeling stress and anxiety to investing his brain into something worthwhile. His mindset then became much more positive.

It has to be something that distracts your intellect, and this can take some time to discover. But everybody has one or two things that take them to another place.

Jack, 20, was very anxious all the time. He knew he loved singing, and when he was singing, he completely forgot he was anxious. He got into it so much that he bought a microphone and a sound booth and started recording himself. Then he started auditioning, and he was picked up by X-Factor and was invited to attend a private audition with a handful of other people to form a new band. He became so involved with singing as a serious hobby that it completely switched off his anxiety.

You have to find your passion. It can take time, but everybody has something that they get lost in, which stimulates the brain to distract it from creating more anxiety. It might be playing guitar or writing novels. Other people have found painting, photography or film making (so easy now with smartphones), poetry, learning a language, reading, cooking, learning an instrument, and so on.

If your intellectual mind isn't being challenged, it will become bored and create mischief, and mischief creates anxiety. It's boring because you have a creative intelligence that's not being stimulated, and there's a big empty space that's allowing the anxiety to breed. Remember, it needs something to get the brain busy, so exercise doesn't count because that's physical.

Get Started, Get Busy

This is your immediate task:

Write down what you used to love before you became anxious. Write a list of things you'd like to try. Try out what you used to love first then move on to trying other stuff. Don't stop until you've found what works for you. It might take a while, but – just how long have you been anxious???

To gauge whether or not an activity is worth your time, pay attention to how the thought of it makes you feel. Do you feel excited? Is it a 'want to' or a 'have to'? Be sure you focus on your 'want to' activities. Tune in on your anxiety, but direct it towards the good stuff.

In one study³⁰, researchers showed a group of videos on the benefits of stress. Not only did they see stress more positively, but they also reported improved psychological symptoms and better work performance.

Chew Gum

The recommended treatment for people with generalized anxiety disorder includes psychological or drug therapy or a combination of the two. One thing you won't find among the treatment recommendations is the idea of chewing gum. But weirdly, now there's research³¹ that suggests gum chewing may lower levels of anxiety and stress in healthy adults.

Researchers at Swinburn University³² had a look into whether chucking a bit of gum into your mouth helped them in stressful situations and lo and behold; it was a pretty good result.

The researchers concluded:

"During both levels of stress the chewing gum condition was associated with significantly better alertness and reduced state anxiety, stress, and salivary cortisol. Overall performance on the framework was also significantly better in the chewing condition. The mechanisms underlying these effects are unknown but may involve improved cerebral blood flow and/or effects secondary to performance improvement during gum chewing."

It didn't matter if they had normal gum or sugar-free gum to chew because, in each group, they found their stress levels to be 16 percent lower after having a good chew.

³⁰ http://goodthinkinc.com/wp-content/uploads/CrumSaloveyAnchor_RethinkingStress_JPSP2013.pdf

³¹ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0031938409000687?via%3Dihub>

³² <http://www.swinburne.edu.au/news/latest-news/2015/08/chew-more-stress-less.php>

It's thought that chewing gum increased alertness while reducing anxiety. It's a distraction. Plus, it decreased people's cortisol levels, which is the hormone your body produces when it feels under threat. It's also subconsciously be associated with social occasions like mealtimes, which may be relaxing in themselves—chewing increased blood flow to the brain, which may also help to reduce anxiety.

So next time you're feeling anxious, pop in some gum and pick up that guitar!

11. SCHEDULE WORRY TIME

We all worry from time to time. The problem is, some of us have a tendency to worry about things that turns an unhelpful habit into a serious anxiety issue.

Excessive worry is often accompanied by specific physical symptoms like tension, fatigue, or insomnia. Then there are the psychological ones like dread, anxiety, and sometimes depression. This excessive worry is called 'catastrophizing' which is believing that something is far worse than it actually is. It's when you either make a catastrophe out of a current situation or imagine a catastrophe being made out of a future situation.

What doesn't help is when someone says, 'don't worry about it!' It can make you feel dejected or frustrated. It's not usually, but the chances are that person's never experienced anxiety because they'd know how all-consuming it can be. Have you ever told yourself the same thing? And you know what? It didn't work! Trying to force yourself to stop doing the thing you know you shouldn't do is the best way to do that exact thing even more.

If you worry a lot about what might have been or what might be, you miss out on life by not being present in what's happening now.

Here's an unusual and controversial way of tackling anxiety and worry: schedule time for it. It really works.

Schedule Worry Time

Yes, you heard, right! Studies have shown³³ that if you schedule worry time, it can significantly reduce the level of worry thoughts. Its medical name is: 'stimulus control training for worry', and it's a CBT technique that can help you to worry more effectively if there is such a thing!

'Scheduled worry time' is a technique whereby you're encouraged to set aside time specifically to work through the things that may be worrying you. The time is scheduled for the sole purpose of worrying, and during this time, you might consider what is causing you to feel anxious, nervous, or concerned.

At first, this technique may seem counterintuitive because you worry but always try not to worry at the same time because it makes you feel anxious. Please be assured, with persistent practice, this tool can help you to significantly reduce the level of worrisome thoughts and the time you spend doing it.

Scheduling Your Worry Time In 3 Steps:

- I. Worry awareness– recognize when you experience worrying thoughts through mindfulness.
- II. Worry delay– acknowledging those worrying thoughts and setting them aside for now.
- III. Worry time– re-engaging with those worrying thoughts at the scheduled worry time.

Worry Awareness

The first step is to recognize and label your worrying thoughts. You can do this with mindfulness. Mindfulness is being aware of what is happening in the present moment by noticing your worrying thoughts. The more you intentionally try to notice your thoughts, the easier the process will become.

There's a mindful meditation that you can record in your phone and listen to it whenever worries overtake you at the end of this tool. It will help you to recognize and label your worrying thoughts.

³³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22977265>

Don't be on yourself if, at first, you don't notice that you're caught in a worrying cycle because it does take practice. Once you become aware that you're worrying, try to accept that you are, in fact, worrying. Try to accept what you're currently experiencing. Try not to judge yourself for worrying. Rather, acknowledge the fact that you noticed and that you were mindful of the experience of worry.

Worry Delay

The second part is to become aware of your worrying thoughts and to try to actively disengage from your worry until a later, scheduled time. At this point, it can be helpful to note down your worry to remind you what the thought was. But it's OK to just simply remember the nature of the worrying thought.

This is the hardest step. You can often feel that by worrying, you will either solve or prevent from occurring, what it is that is worrying you. It's as if the worrying has some esoteric power. Unfortunately, this isn't the case. What usually tends to happen is that you just go over and over the same worry. Again, this is where mindfulness is helpful. If you try to notice and acknowledge that you are worrying, just try to accept it.

As mentioned above, this is the hardest part. Sometimes you can feel the urge to worry. Sometimes by not worrying, you may even begin to feel anxious. Try to remember that this takes practice. Try to notice the feelings that come up when you delay your worrying. How do they make you feel? Are you able to sit with them? Then make a firm decision to delay the worrying until your scheduled worry time.

Worry Time

The third part is to use the scheduled worry time. This is the assigned time, and I recommend around 20 minutes or so. During this time, allow yourself to go over all the worrisome thoughts that you've put on hold throughout the day.

Once you're into this worrying time, try not to do anything else other than work through the worrisome thoughts that you noted throughout the day. It is best not to engage in any other activities that may distract you from the aim of focussing on your worries.

Once you've re-engaged with the worries you've noted throughout the day:

- Consider each of the worries one by one

- Examine the nuances of each worry
- Understand why they arose
- Notice how the worries feel after you've revisited them

Scheduled worry time will help you in six ways:

- I. Become more mindful of the way you worry
- II. Show you that you're can sit with any anxiety that delaying your worries may bring up
- III. Allow you to notice that perhaps what you thought were insurmountable worries, relative to your other worries, aren't really that big of a deal
- IV. Allows you to view your concerns from a better perspective
- V. Helps you better prioritize them
- VI. Allows you to see what you thought was insurmountable was actually fairly insignificant

Sometimes, your worries are as troublesome as you originally thought. In this case, make plans to take action, such as actively preparing for a future situation or talking with a trusted friend or colleague.

You need to practice patience. Just as you can't expect yourself to be a classical guitarist the first time you pick up a guitar, you need time to retrain how you worry. It takes lots of practice.

The change will not happen overnight, but with practice, you can learn to worry more effectively because worrying about the future severely hinders your ability to live fully in the present —all you truly have is this present moment... right now.

Mindful Meditation For Worry Scheduling

Take a few moments to settle into feeling the body as a whole, sitting and breathing, or lying down and breathing, being aware of the waves of the breath moment by moment, resting in this awareness. Life is unfolding here and now in the body, in your awareness.

And when you're ready, if you care to, letting go of the breath and the body as a whole—allowing them to recede into the background while we invite all the worries and the feelings to be center stage in the field of awareness.

For a time attending to the worries rather than being carried away by them or their emotional charge, simply rest comfortably on the bank of the thoughts, allowing individual worries if and when they arise to be seen, felt, recognized, and known, as worries in the field of awareness.

Recognize them as one-off events, occurrences, part of the thoughts – regardless of what they say and what emotions they trigger. Just minor events that are center stage.

Now see all of these worries and fleeting thoughts as bubbles rather than as facts or as the truth of things, whatever they are, whatever the emotional trigger, whatever their urgency, whether they are pleasant or seductive, unpleasant, or horrid.

Expanding your awareness, seeing any and all of these worries and thoughts bubbles coming out of a bubble machine. Or like clouds passing by and lingering for the briefest of instances, before dissolving back into the formlessness of the sky. Relating to their content as if it were of equal importance and relevance to say what you had for lunch last week, even if a thought is particularly compelling and insightful. But especially if it is particularly compelling and insightful.

For now, just letting all worries come and go. Just let sounds come and go. Or sensations come and go. Not preferring some to others, nor pursuing some over others, not pursuing anything, just resting in awareness of thinking itself and the spaces between thoughts. Moment by moment, breath by breath, as we sit here or as we lie here.

Become aware of the steady stream of commentary and advice you may be giving yourself as you sit here and recognizing it as such. As a framework. As running commentary, taking a position in relation to it that resembles turning down the sound on a TV set, so that you're just watching the game and aren't being sucked into the endless stream of commentary and interpretation and opinion that is so characteristic of televised sports events.

Rather, you now detect the individual secretions of commentary on your moment to moment experience merely is more thinking as thoughts, as judgment. Rest in the recognizing of them like stewards attending to each event as it arises in the stream without being pulled into the past or the future or opinions or fears or desires, simply seeing them and knowing them as thoughts and as emotions or as mental events, not as the truth and not as you're watching them proliferate endlessly as they do. Watch the mind secrete them and throw them off.

Allowing all of this to be held to bear attention in your awareness, moment on moment, breath by breath as you sit here resting in the awareness itself without taking up residence. Be aware of the awareness itself, knowing the worries as worries and feelings as feelings and accepting the worries and feelings whatever their content, whatever their emotional charge.

Learn to observe carefully and rather than identifying with the content of thoughts and feelings. See them more impersonally as clouds in the sky or ripples on the surface of the vast lake of the mind. As you inhabit the whole of the mind's boundless energy, you know you are bigger than any worry, however powerful, and are capable of making use of thought and emotion without being caught and imprisoned by unwise and unexamined habit patterns. Just allow them to arise on their own in the field of awareness to whatever degree they do. Moment by moment by moment, and breath by breath, as you sit here or as you live your life.

12. GET A MASSAGE

Where the mind goes, the body follows. Or, so the saying goes. When your mind is fearful, your body follows fear. Consequently, you experience the physical effects of anxiety, i.e., the production of cortisol, the hormone that causes stress, that, if left unchecked, can be very unhelpful for your body.

Happily, the Mayo Clinic reports³⁴ that a vigorous kneading may help. While this is difficult to pin down medically, this report claimed that a 60-minute massage could lower cortisol by up to 30% after just one session. It also tells us that a massage will simultaneously increase the production of serotonin, the hormone that improves our mood, in equal measures.

This study also found that participants who received regular massage therapy for 12 weeks had a 50% reduction in anxiety symptoms lasting up to six months. Regular massage seems to improve both the immune system and the quality of sleep that comes from frequent physical contact with others.

It certainly makes sense when you think about it. Imagine something awful happening to you. What do you do? Tense up and tighten your muscles. If you're suffering from a generalized anxiety disorder, you will be doing this all the time.

How Massage Helps Anxiety:

- By having pressure applied on a specific point in your body, it brings your thoughts to that area, making you become more into the present moment, which calms the frantic mind.
- You become more conscious of the fact that you're not just a mind, you have a body as well. This gets you out of repetitive thought cycles and brings you into the moment.
- This almost silent communication between you and the therapist can be meditative.
- You may feel the therapist's empathy towards your issues without ever having to use words, which makes you feel safe but acknowledged.
- Your breathing will regulate because by being calm and relaxed with their breathing, the therapist sets a tone that you subconsciously pick up on, and this direction of this calmness is like a form of meditation.
- Massage triggers the parasympathetic system, which will lower your blood pressure, which calms your heart rate and breathing right down bring. In turn, this calms the fight or flight response.

³⁴ <https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health/speaking-of-health/can-massage-relieve-symptoms-of-depression-anxiety-and-stress>

- A massage helps you to create that feedback loop between your brain and your muscles, activating a mind-body connection where your brain tells your body that it needs to chill everything out.

Studies³⁵ show that a Swedish massage may be the most effective type of massage for anxiety. It involves long, gliding strokes, in combination with kneading, to release surface tension. The strokes it uses are deeply relaxing, allowing the massage therapist to feel the general muscle tone and identify any problem areas that need work.

This promotes circulation in the area and eases anxiety. If the therapist performs it correctly, it can feel very relaxing for the entire body. A Swedish massage is a lighter form of massage. It may be best for people who simply require help with anxiety relief and works really well for anyone receiving a massage over six weeks.

It's well known that when you experience high levels of anxiety, you're more vulnerable to illness and injury. When anxiety is combined with poor sleep and nutrition, the body's immune system is more vulnerable. Its ability to naturally protect itself against infections, pathogens, and bacteria is reduced.

Studies³⁶ have indicated that regular massage sessions not only help reduce stress but can also boost the immune system's natural ability to fight off pathogens and enhances the body's ability to deliver nourishment. Receiving a 45-minute massage increases the number of lymphocytes, which are white blood cells that play a large role in defending the body from disease.

Tom , 47, suffered insomnia for nearly a decade. With an unbroken night's sleep, a luxury. He explains how massage helped him.

"As a doctor, my sleep patterns are regularly disrupted by my working schedule. I'm an A&E doctor, and that can mean working very odd hours – sometimes starting at 11 pm, and finishing at 11 am. Then I have to switch over to a normal pattern during the next shift pattern.

I've tried every alternative remedy under the sun, but nothing worked.

³⁵ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27464321>

³⁶ <https://www.cedars-sinai.org/newsroom/adults-demonstrate-modified-immune-response-after-receiving-massage-cedars-sinai-researchers-show/>

Then read reports of a study concluding that a lifetime of disturbed sleep can increase the risk of heart problems and I panicked, and I knew I had to try I'd heard that massage could help, so I took myself off to a spa, and I was mostly interested in their specialist sleep-inducing massage, which came highly recommended.

It's called the five-element aroma, which was an hour-long massage designed to calm you down and focus on the smell. I hoped it would relax all the right signals in the brain to knock me out.

To begin with, I had to smell each oil in turn, then choose the combination I liked most. The one I particularly liked was a soothing blend of cedarwood, mandarin, lime, bergamot, frankincense, and geranium.

Apparently, in Chinese medicine, ultimate relaxation comes from scents that contain the five fundamental elements in the universe – water, fire, air, earth, and metal. Sure enough, as soon as I breathed in the mixture, my low-level anxiety eased off. Then, hot stones were placed on my spine, with the purpose being to loosen up the muscles and boost circulation. The heat supposedly increases the flow of blood to the muscles, reducing pain, soreness, and tension.

All this hopefully will get me to the deep sleep, which makes you feel refreshed when you wake up. Then the massage began, and with the heat of the stones, the gentle pressure of her hands, and the calming aromas filling my nostrils, it was so soothing, I started to drift off. And that night, I had no trouble dozing off, my sleep clock was reset for several days, and I always go back if I need a little help in getting my sleep back on track.”

It's clear from this research that massage doesn't only feel good; it also may be good for reducing anxiety, pumping up the feel-good hormones plus boosting your immunity.

13. ACUPUNCTURE

Acupuncture for anxiety has shown promising results in several studies according to one review³⁷ published in 2016. It suggests acupuncture helps the body regulate its fight or flight response, which, as we all know, is at the heart of any anxiety disorder.

What's key to this is that the studies show that:

'the effects of acupuncture for treating anxiety are significant compared to conventional treatments.'

The largest study³⁸ in this review found that acupuncture had a significant effect on reducing anxiety compared to prescription medication and psychotherapy treatment with double the reduction in symptoms.

The way acupuncture works is it treats anxiety by activating the parasympathetic nervous system, otherwise known as the rest and digest system. This helps to achieve a biochemical and emotional equilibrium in the body.

Anxiety naturally activates the sympathetic nervous system by increasing the production of certain neurotransmitters, which exhibit symptoms such as increased heart rate, wide eyes, higher breathing rate, digestive problems, sleeping issues, restlessness, etc.

Acupuncture has such a positive effect on the nervous system that it stimulates the body to release neurochemicals such as endorphins, which are the body's natural feel-good chemicals. This calms the sympathetic nervous system response and regulates the symptoms of anxiety.

Justin, 32, explains how acupuncture worked for him.

"I have never been a fan of needles, which is why acupuncture was never something I could see myself having. But, after a few particularly awful panic attacks, I was overly stressed and anxious. I couldn't switch off. As a result, I

³⁷ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3689180/>

³⁸ <https://bmccomplementmedtherapies.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1472-6882-13-308>

had been struggling with chronic anxiety and panic attacks. My neck, shoulders, and back were a mess.

Meditation and running had helped slightly, but the low-level anxiety was still there, and I was in pain sitting at my desk all day. A friend of mine had told me how Peter and the acupuncture had helped her, so I booked myself in.

After asking me some questions about my life and how I felt physically and mentally, Peter took my pulses and then asked me to stick out my tongue. He explained that my pulse was weak because of high levels of anxiety and poor circulation. Stranger still, my tongue showed that I was apparently holding onto some hidden rage. (Seriously?)

Now onto the treatment. And does it hurt? Not really. A tiny prick at best is how I could describe it. It's like your body sucks the needles in which is a strange feeling. At certain points, it felt quite sharp but not painful.

Once all of the needles are in, you just lie there and stare at the ceiling. Your acupuncturist may adjust the needles, which is a strange feeling, but you say stop if it becomes too intense. I left feeling relaxed and mentally clearer but very tired.

That night I slept like a baby and woke to feel quite a lot better than I did before.

After three days, the pain in my back started to return, but I felt less anxious. Four sessions later, I have made it through a month without feeling anxious. It feels quite literally that an entire weight has been removed from my back. Where's that feeling of impending dread gone? Not one panic attack!

It's been one of the best decisions I have ever made to get acupuncture treatment. Stressed? Of course, I had some anxiety when I stopped going weekly, but I feel better prepared against it when it comes."

The principles of acupuncture are to restore the body and mind to a state of balance. As the energy flows through our body, it sometimes becomes blocked or disrupted, and this it manifests as illness, anxiety, and pain. Inserting needles into specific

points unblocks these channels, which increases the blood flow. And that, in turn, stimulates our bodies' natural healing response.

14. LAUGH! LAUGH? YES, LAUGH!

When it comes to relieving anxiety, more giggles and jokes are just what the doctor ordered. Whether you're messing around with friends, cracking up at a TV sitcom, or quietly giggling into a book, laughing is a great form of stress relief—not joking!

It has great short-term effects because it actually induces physical changes in your body as well as lightening your load mentally. It isn't just a quick pick-me-up though, it's also good for you over the long term.

Of course, it's not going to cure all ailments, but the science³⁹ is showing us the positive things laughter can do.

Laughter:

- I. Stimulates your organs.
- II. Enhances your intake of the oxygen-rich air.
- III. Stimulates your heart, lungs, and muscles, and it also increases the endorphins released by your brain.
- IV. Activates and relieves your stress response because a rollicking laugh fires up, then cools down your stress response, increasing and decreasing your heart rate and blood pressure resulting in a good, relaxed feeling.
- V. Soothes tension because it stimulates circulation and aids muscle relaxation, both of which can help reduce some of the physical symptoms of anxiety.
- VI. Improves your immune system. Because negative thoughts manifest into chemical reactions that can affect your body by bringing more anxiety into your system and decreasing your immunity, positive thoughts can

³⁹ Woodbury-Farina MA, et al. Humor. *Psychiatric Clinics of North America*. 2014;37:561

actually release neuropeptides (small protein-like molecules used by neurons to communicate with each other) to help fight anxiety and potentially more-serious illnesses.

- VII. Relieves pain because it causes the body to produce its natural painkillers.
- VIII. Increase personal satisfaction by making it easier to cope with difficult situations and connect with other people
- IX. Improve your mood by lessening your anxiety and may make you feel happier.
- X. Helps you trust your instincts and your spontaneous reactions to life's curveballs.
- XI. See the humor in life. You might notice yourself regularly swept away by a barrage of incessant questions. When you can see the humor in life's adventures, you'll be able to move through them with greater calmness, ease, and efficacy.
- XII. Laughing at yourself can improve your self-esteem. A pinch of playfulness in how you see yourself will help you to celebrate your uniqueness, rather than compare yourself to others. You'll actually feel better in your skin when you feel laughter relieves some of your self-imposed pressure. There's nothing better than cracking up when you recognize how silly or nutty you're being. And, if someone laughs with you, affectionately, it's a sweet moment.

However, it is tough to be light and funny when you have anxiety. It's not easy to see the lighter side of life. You may be afraid you have an underdeveloped or non-existent sense of humor. It's explained like this:

- You feel like the stakes are on red alert all the time.
- You feel the need to be right in your personal and professional conversations.
- You resist letting yourself be in positions of vulnerability or taking risks.
- You are very defensive when someone teases you.
- When things go wrong, your first response is pretty much negative.

- You're trying to be cool to fit in.

These things sap your natural sense of humor, but turning that around may be easier than you think. Here are some tools to help:

I. Just Smile

Just make yourself. It's amazing how many people just smile at you because you're smiling. It will take you by surprise. Share one with people you pass on the street, in a shop, or neighboring cars. It helps you and others to feel like you aren't alone, and you will get a natural high off the happiness chemicals being released in your brain.

II. Listen to Music

Dance in your kitchen like your life depends on it. Sing in your car. Make a workout playlist that makes you strut your stuff. Music is excellent medicine, and not just for singing the blues!

III. Get Silly

Take a cue from children. Be willing to be silly. Look for the absurdities in life. Crack jokes or do funny faces; people love it and will respond to you.

IV. Get Some Perspective

When you notice yourself getting bogged down, take a moment to breathe in and gain some perspective. Laugh at yourself rather than going down a shame spiral. Just remember, there's a billion people out there who live without enough water or food, or feeling safe or healthcare or shelter or education who would swap their life for ours in a flash. If you're reading this book, then you're in a safe place. As I'm writing this book, I'm in a safe place. When I consider this perspective, it helps me to see how much I have, and that makes me feel grateful.

V. Watch Your Favorite Sitcom

Sometimes we need someone else to give us permission to do what we want to do but feel guilty for doing it. For the sake of your mental health, I give

you permission to watch your best ever film or tv series. Switch on and kickback. Enjoy the moment. Laugh your way through it.

Go ahead and give some of these a try. Turn the corners of your mouth up into a smile and then laugh, even if it feels forced. Once you've had your giggle you'll notice how your muscles are a little less tense; you feel a little more relaxed. That's the natural wonder of laughter at work.

While there is plenty in life to be serious about, taking life too seriously can deplete your happiness, impair your sense of connection to others, and leave you feeling depressed and lonely. That's why it's important to take your regular dose of humor like a daily vitamin. Life without a sense of humor is no life at all!

15. GET A WEIGHTED BLANKET

Weighted blankets are a newish idea and are heavier than the kinds of blankets people usually buy. They typically weigh anywhere from 2 kg to 15 kg, depending on your size. This weight makes heavier than the average comforter or duvet.

For many people who have disorders such as anxiety, insomnia, or autism, weighted blankets may provide a safe alternative to medication or other types of treatment. They can also be used to complement existing therapies. Research has shown that weighted blankets can help reduce symptoms and manage these conditions.

The Benefits Of A Weighted Blanket For Anxiety:

- I. They feel like someone's got their arms wrapped around you, and this helps you achieve a relaxed state, allowing you to sleep more deeply.
- II. They help "ground" your body during sleep by pushing it downwards. Research has shown⁴⁰ this process, known as "earthing" or "grounding," may have a deeply calming effect.

⁴⁰ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15650465>

- III. They also simulate 'deep pressure touch,' which is a type of therapy that uses firm, hands-on pressure to reduce high levels of anxiety. The study showed that grounding might help reduce night-time levels of cortisol, the stress hormone. High cortisol levels, especially those that don't drop back down to normal levels naturally, are now known to cause multiple complications, including depression, weight gain, insomnia, and anxiety.
- IV. The deep pressure touch provided by weighted blankets can promote relaxation and help break this cycle. This triggers the release of the neurotransmitters dopamine and serotonin, which are feel-good hormones that help combat stress, anxiety, and also depression.

The study mentioned previously indicated that grounding the human body while sleeping is an effective way to synchronize cortisol secretion with its natural, 24-hour circadian rhythms. This grounding helps reduce cortisol production while you sleep, and this improves your sleep and alleviates pain, anxiety, and of course, insomnia.

Another study⁴¹ found that 15kg weighted blankets are a safe and effective way to reduce anxiety in adults with 63% of the study's participating

How Heavy Should A Weighted Blanket Be?

You work it out according to your own weight. Some blanket manufacturers recommend that adults buy a blanket that's 10% of their body weight. For children, they recommend blankets that are 10 percent of their body weight plus 0.5-1kg. A doctor or occupational therapist should be able to help you decide which weight blanket will be the most comfortable and efficient for you.

It's also a good idea to choose a blanket that's made from a natural fiber such as breathable 100 percent cotton. Polyester and other synthetic fabrics are typically much hotter, which is one of the problems of a weighted blanket – being too hot!

⁴¹ https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1300/J004v24n01_05?needAccess=true

Weighted blankets aren't for everyone, as they may add too much heat as well as weight.

If you're handy with a needle, you can even make your own weighted blanket at home. You'll find videos on how to do this on YouTube.

16. KISSING

Kissing is possibly the most primal way we express affection to others. We kiss friends on the cheeks, babies on their adorable chubby faces, and lovers on the lips to demonstrate our feelings and desire for closeness. It could be the earliest evolutionary mechanism for social bonding.

Incredibly, there are also some remarkable health benefits backed by science, and these include reducing anxiety:

- I. Boosts your happy hormones. Kissing someone triggers the brain to release a cocktail of chemicals, including oxytocin, dopamine, and serotonin, which are the BIG THREE love hormones. Hacking into your happy hormones can make you feel euphoric and make you feel all gooey and affectionate. It also lowers your cortisol⁴², your stress hormone. That will help you to feel less anxious. It can even make you feel closer.
- II. Increased oxytocin improves relationships and helps you bond with other people. Oxytocin is specifically linked to pair-bonding because when it's released, it makes you feel loved and as you belong. This improves satisfaction in relationships⁴³, which is especially important in long-term relationships.
- III. It has a tangible impact on your self-esteem because in reducing your cortisol levels, you improve your feelings of self-worth.

⁴² <https://scholarcommons.scu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1008&context=comm>

⁴³ <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10508-013-0190-1>

Researchers in one 2016 study⁴⁴ found that participants who were unhappy with their physical appearance had higher cortisol levels. It stands to reason if you feel unhappy about the way you look, you will get anxious.

Mark, 36, opened up about his self-esteem regarding his body because despite being a successful bodybuilder, Mark struggled with his image after years of being bullied by bigger guys throughout his youth. He explained he was picked on because he was much smaller in stature, which has since prompted him to devote to growing as much as he could.

His dedication to the gym eventually led to him competing in high-profile competitive physique competitions and forging a lucrative career as an elite personal trainer. But, his journey came with a great deal of pain along the way.

“It was intimidating playing rugby at school and not being nearly as strong as my teammates; I was an underdeveloped fly-half. That’s what made me build as much size as I could, never to feel small again. Looking back, I’m now stronger than everyone who was on my team, and I never want to be that intimidated again.”

Mark says he had ‘small man syndrome,’ which he says really took hold when he left school.

“Men with small man syndrome are either full of themselves, or have a bad attitude, or try to bully people, etc. They’re compensating for what they lack – it’s actually a way of dealing with their insecurities. That’s when my obsession for bodybuilding took off.”

Strangely, Mark is actually 6-foot-tall, and the real problem turned out to be body dysmorphia. Body dysmorphic (BDD) is a mental health condition where a person spends a lot of time worrying about flaws in their appearance. These flaws are often unnoticeable to others.

People of any age can have BDD, but it's most common in teenagers and young adults, both men, and women. Having BDD does not mean you are vain or self-obsessed. It can make you very anxious and have a big impact on your life. Mark

⁴⁴ <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10865-015-9695-5>

shares that he would wear two undershirts or find clothes that would fit him in a certain way to showcase how big he was. One of his biggest obstacles was comparing himself to others and always wanting more.

Things changed when he met Claire. As the relationship grew, Mark told Claire about his sensitive feelings about the way he looked. Claire always responded with positive thoughts about how she loved him for who he was, not the size of his chest.

Of course, it's not just kissing that has a tangible effect on self-esteem; it's also feeling safe with someone you can open up to. Trusting, they won't be shaming and accept you for the way you are. All of these things add to our positive sense of worth and can help to heal old scars. Kissing is central to that; kissing and caresses and hugs.

Hugging and saying, "I love you," makes you happy. Studies⁴⁵ show these impact the positive physiological processes which help regulate anxiety levels:

- i. Kissing dilates your blood vessels, which helps reduce your blood pressure. When your blood vessels dilate, your blood flow increases. When your blood flow increases, this causes an immediate decrease in your blood pressure. Kissing is good for the heart, literally and metaphorically!
- ii. And this soothes headaches because that dilation of blood vessels and lowered blood pressure can also relieve headaches⁴⁶. Kissing can help you prevent headaches by lowering anxiety, and as we all know, anxiety is a headache trigger⁴⁷.
- iii. Kissing can boost your immune system. Swapping spit strengthens your immunity by exposing you to new germs that boost your immunity. One study found⁴⁸ that couples who kiss frequently share the same microbes in their saliva and on their tongues.
- iv. It also reduces the allergic response from hives⁴⁹ and other reactions to pollen and dust mites. Because anxiety worsens these reactions, kissing's effect on the anxiety may also reduce the allergic response.

⁴⁵ <http://sk.sagepub.com/reference/encyclopedia-of-health-communication/n17.xml>

⁴⁶ <https://www.healthline.com/health/headache-hacks>

⁴⁷ <https://headaches.org/2007/10/25/stress/>

⁴⁸ <https://microbiomejournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/2049-2618-2-41>

⁴⁹ <https://www.healthline.com/health/skin-disorders/how-to-get-rid-of-hives>

- v. Finally, kissing your romantic partner boosts your sex drive.

Romantic kissing leads to sexual arousal⁵⁰, and it's often the driving force behind a woman's decision to have sex with someone. And, as we all know, there's nothing better to reduce anxiety levels and boost the love hormones than sex.

17. BREAK UP WITH YOUR PHONE

Spending too much time on your phone can cause you to feel anxious. One study⁵¹ has found that anxiety created by using a phone operates on a feedback loop:

Because phones keep you in a persistent state of anxiety, the only relief from this anxiety is to look at your phone. The irony is that the more you use your phone, the more anxious you get about using your phone.

Of course, not enough is known about the long-term effects that phone-induced anxiety can have on your overall health. However, a lot of us are watching our phones for up to six hours a day, and if you're constantly connected, you're going to feel anxious.

Are you becoming dependent on your phone to feel complete, calm, or okay? It seems that many of us now need our devices and what they offer: communication, information, and entertainment.

Of course, this stream of information keeps us from feeling bored or agitated. We are so used to being distracted by our phones that when we do turn our phone off, we are left with the agitated, anxious feelings which seem to have been normalized.

To put it another way, what we expect from being present and in the moment without a phone to distract us has changed; we are now so used to ongoing stimulation that we feel anxious without it. It makes us think that something is missing, that we should be doing something, that something is wrong.

⁵⁰ <https://www.healthline.com/health/boost-your-libido-10-natural-tips>

⁵¹ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0165178118306073>

Consequently, we end up picking up our phone to seek some relief from that anxious state. It's as if our phones hypnotize us and make us do something to us that influences how we feel about ourselves.

When Woody comes to me for a coaching session, he sits down and puts his phone on the chair beside him. He then switches the phone to silent. Throughout our session, it lights up every few minutes, and each time Woody looks down for a few seconds to register what has come up. However, he also glances down at his phone even if a message hasn't come in.

We talk about his need to keep an eye on his phone, even when there are no notifications. He says he's aware that his behavior increases his anxiety stops him from being able to be fully present, whether it's with me or anywhere else. He feels that whatever comes up maybe too important to miss, and he doesn't feel it's in his power to switch the phone off.

As a society, it seems we feel we should be available at all times. We should be able to be contacted 24/7. We should be at everybody else's disposal without any thought for our mental health. It creates relentless anxiety. It is as if we are waiting for the call that is going to tell us our loved one has died. That's the type of anxiety we are living with. It's like never quite being finished with the job, whatever that is.

We don't rest any more as we are vigilantly waiting at the ready as if the shotgun for the start of the race is about to happen. And the problem is, we've got used to it and we think this is normal.

Technology was supposed to make our lives easier. However, the more people I speak to, the more people share how they feel burdened and trapped by all the responsibilities that come with technology.

It used to be that we could actually have a conversation with someone by picking up the phone and calling them. Now we send a message to see if they are available for a phone call. So now, we communicate by email or a messaging app. Of course, all these systems bury us in time-consuming instructions to remember passwords, accept cookies, delete invitations to receive emails, all to just communicate with somebody else.

It seems that we don't get together in the flesh anymore because we don't have the time even though we know that meeting with friends is brilliant for our mental health.

Irina, 29, explain to me about her experience at work.

"The elevator takes 20 seconds to arrive at my floor, and I noticed that 20 seconds was unbearable unless I picked up my phone. I just couldn't stand there thinking my thoughts any longer. It's like I experience withdrawal symptoms in just 20 seconds. It's crazy! "

How To Break Up With Your Phone

All you need to undertake this break-up is a willingness to use your phone less. Here are some tips to help you:

- i. **Delete apps** and curate notifications.
- ii. **Delete everything you don't use** on your phone daily. That's mainly apps, but it could be any distraction: games, messaging services, photo editors, etc.
- iii. **Try a new app.** Yes, that sounds counterproductive to use your phone to become less dependent on technology. However, there are apps designed to help you understand your phone usage, break phone addiction, and to find your phone-life balance. They help you take back control of your device so you can "consciously connect."
- iv. **Turn off your push notifications.** A paper⁵² published by Oxford University found,

"Problematic smartphone use is facilitated by characteristics of the technology, including the frequency of alerts and messages. Popular apps, like the Facebook app, are designed in ways that increase the amount of time people spend on them."

Being constantly informed by receiving continual updates on what's happening is distracting. If you're being interrupted by notifications every

⁵² <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2055207618759167>

few minutes or a few times an hour, you are never properly focused on what you're doing at the time. It's impossible not to constantly reach for your phone when you're in the digital of 'anxious if I don't, anxious if I do' loop. Turn off as many notifications as you can live without.

v. Try a tech-free break

Designate one hour per day where you don't check or use your phone. Apparently, a third of people between 18 and 24 don't even go to the bathroom without their smartphone. It's like we feel 'naked' without it. If you have one hour per day where you can set yourself the challenge of not checking your phone, like a work break or going to the gym, you can gradually wean yourself off needing it all the time. It makes it easier to check your phone less and also be able to relax without needing a phone to distract you.

vi. Use an alarm clock. We use our phones as an alarm clock, but problems come with the blue light exposure interfering with sleep. With notifications and trying to sleep, knowing this giant of a communications device is just there within reach, prevents deep sleep. A simple fix? Buy an alarm clock. This means you won't have your phone by the side of the bed, automatically reducing the temptation to scroll through Instagram just before you go to sleep.

vii. Switch your screen to grey. Turn your screen from color to grey. Part of the attraction of your phone is bright colors – oh so addictive! Turning your phone to grayscale in settings makes your apps such as Instagram far less appealing in black and white than they are in color.

18. PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION (PMR)

You know the story... with anxiety comes muscle tension. One of the reactions to fear and anxiety is painful and stiff muscles. When we are anxious, we clench our shoulder blades, tense the jaw, or hunch our back. All of these things lead to muscle aches and pain, as well as exhaustion.

How do you respond to anxiety? Do you “tense up” when you’re feeling anxious? Do you grind your teeth, clench your fists, or get headaches? Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) can be very helpful in cases where anxiety is especially associated with tense muscles.

It’s part of a process that helps our bodies prepare for potentially dangerous situations. Whether that’s running away from a maniac with a knife or not getting enough ‘likes’ on an Instagram post, our bodies respond in the same way. Sometimes it’s impossible to notice how your muscles become tense. Perhaps you clench your teeth slightly, so your jaw feels tight. Or, maybe your shoulders become sore. All of these can lead to backaches and headaches.

Research⁵³ has shown that PMR helps to overcome the normal reaction to the fight or flight response. As we know, in evolutionary terms, this reaction developed as a way to help us survive a threat, either by running away or by meeting the opposition head-on. Over time the flight or fight response has become a common reaction to feelings of fear that often are out of proportion with reality.

Unfortunately, when it’s not needed for actual survival, the flight or fight reaction tends to bring on many uncomfortable physical symptoms, including accelerated heart rate, sweating, shaking, and shortness of breath, all largely the product of an influx of stress hormones.

Relaxation techniques, including PMR, have the reverse effect on the body because they elicit what is known as the relaxation response. The effect of this is to lower the heart rate, calm the mind, and reduce body tension.

⁵³ Seaward, B. L. (2013). *Managing Stress: Principles and Strategies for Health and Wellbeing*, 8th Edition. Burlington, MA: Jones & Bartlett Learning.

PMR can also help you to become more aware of how your anxiety may be contributing to your emotions. By relaxing the body, you may be able to let go of anxious thoughts and feelings.

How To Do PMR

Set aside 20 minutes for yourself in a quiet, warm place where you won't be disturbed. Here's the relaxation sequence:

- Sit back or lie down in a comfortable position. Shut your eyes if you're comfortable doing so.
- Begin by taking a deep breath and noticing the feeling of air filling your lungs.
- Hold your breath for a few seconds.
- Release the breath slowly and let the tension leave your body.
- Take in another deep breath and hold it. Again, slowly release the air.
- Even slower now, take another breath. Fill your lungs and hold the air.
- Slowly release the breath and imagine the feeling of tension leaving your body.
- Now, move your attention to your feet. Begin to tense your feet by curling your toes and the arch of your foot. Hold onto the tension and notice what it feels like.
- Release the tension in your foot. Notice the new feeling of relaxation.
- Next, begin to focus on your lower leg—tense the muscles in your calves. Hold them tightly and pay attention to the feeling of tension.
- Release the tension from your lower legs. Again, notice the feeling of relaxation. Remember to continue taking deep breaths.
- Next, tense the muscles of your upper leg and pelvis. You can do this by tightly squeezing your thighs
- And release. Feel the tension leave your muscles.
- Begin to tense your stomach and chest. You can do this by sucking your stomach in. Squeeze harder and hold the tension. A little bit longer.
- Release the tension. Allow your body to go limp. Let yourself notice the feeling of relaxation. Continue taking deep breaths. Breathe in slowly, noticing the air fill your lungs, and hold it.
- Release the air slowly. Feel it, leaving your lungs.

- Next, tense the muscles in your back by bringing your shoulders together behind you. Hold them tightly. Tense them as hard as you can without straining and keep holding.
- Release the tension from your back. Feel the tension slowly leaving your body, and the new feeling of relaxation. Notice how different your body feels when you allow it to relax.
- Tense your arms from your hands to your shoulders. Make a fist and squeeze up your arm. Hold it.
- Release the tension from your arms and shoulders. Notice the feeling of relaxation in your fingers, hands, arms, and shoulders. Notice how your arms feel limp and at ease.
- Move up to your neck and your head. Tense your face and your neck by distorting the muscles around your eyes and mouth.
- Release the tension. Again, notice the new feeling of relaxation.
- Finally, tense your entire body. Tense your feet, legs, stomach, chest, arms, head, and neck. Tense harder, without straining. Hold the tension.
- Now release. Allow your whole body to go limp. Pay attention to the feeling of relaxation, and how different it is from the feeling of tension.
- Begin to wake your body up by slowly moving your muscles. Adjust your arms and legs. Stretch your muscles and open your eyes when you're ready.

Practice means progress. It's through practice that you can become more aware of your muscles, how they respond with tension, and how to relax them. Training your body to respond differently to anxiety is like any training – practicing consistently is the key.

However, There Is A BUT...

Relaxation strategies are best used as a companion to other approaches and not necessarily as a replacement to them. Sometimes relaxation strategies can actually make anxiety worse in the long run if they are used as a way to get rid of anxiety when you are in distress.

Trying to get rid of something trains our brains to see it as bad, and in this case, we teach the brain to set off the anxiety alarm even louder when the anxiety presents itself. In the long run, this makes the anxiety worse. Certainly, give this

technique a try, but if it doesn't work for YOU, you haven't failed; it doesn't work for everyone.

When Not To Use PMR

When you're In times of panic or severe distress as a way to get rid of the anxiety or as a replacement for other types of methods.

Why? It is overprotective: "This anxiety is unbearable! I must do something to make it feel better!" This trains in the idea that anxiety is dangerous, which causes more anxiety over time.

When To Use PMR

As a daily practice to lower tension and feel calmer in your body over time.

During times of distress to keep you focussed and not run from something integral to your life. Doing this exercise will not cure your anxiety, but it will keep you from avoiding the situation. When you face the anxiety, the brain learns that it's not so dangerous, and that, in turn, lowers long term anxiety.

19. BECOME ASSERTIVE

Becoming assertive can have amazing benefits for anyone suffering from anxiety because anxiety can often lead you to become timid and not be able to express yourself. Becoming assertive is a much better way for you to communicate than being tentative.

Here's What Becoming Assertive Will Do For You

- By standing up for yourself, people are much more likely to take notice of you
- It will help you communicate more effectively
- Earn other's respect
- Improve your self-esteem
- Inform people how you feel

- Improve your decision-making skills
- Have better relationships
- Ultimately feel happier

For people suffering from anxiety, a lack of assertive skills really does hold you back.

Kate, 34, explains how not being assertive affected her life.

“One of the hardest things I've faced in my life was overcoming anxiety. Often, I knew how I'd behave in a world where I had unlimited confidence. But the anxiety stopped me from doing it.

Getting past that anxiety and starting to develop true self-acceptance was really hard. And not just hard as in the way our society views hard work, but hard in the way that only comes from challenging the very essence of who you are. 'Hard' doesn't even begin to describe the encounter you have when challenging all your assumptions about how you were raised, who you are, and what it means to be you.

When I look back at my own change, I was initially operating with some old scripts in my head that held me back.

I had a light bulb moment when I realized I was more motivated by avoiding pain than I was motivated by going after rewards. To some extent, all of us are averse to risk in this way, e.g., losing £20 hurts more than the joy we get from gaining £20.

But while this half glass empty thinking exists deep in many of us, some people are more in favor of taking action toward the things they want, while others focus on what could go wrong. I fall into the second category.

So, where does this come from? It appears we have a biological predisposition to be one way or the other, which was formed in childhood.

A lot of us grow up not feeling like we have no right to put our needs first. Instead of asking for what we want in a healthy, assertive way, we learn there's less friction when we put the needs of others above ours. We tiptoe

around to avoid conflict, and sometimes, any kind of uncomfortable interpersonal situation.”

Kate realized that her old childhood scripts were affecting the way she was managing her adult relationships. As an adult, she suffered from guilty feelings when she stood up for herself and judged herself harshly when she felt ashamed. This is often a contributing factor to high levels of anxiety, and learning to become assertive is a way out of the anxiety loop.

How To Become Assertive

Studies⁵⁴ have demonstrated how assertiveness can significantly reduce anxiety symptoms, as well as overall social anxiety. Assertiveness training is really not that difficult, it’s a matter of practice, once the correct mindset is in place. You may not have even thought about how assertive you are with people because it’s so ingrained in you. However, if you analyze and change your communication skills, then you can learn to interact more healthily and effectively.

Having coached Kate, I gave her some tasks to do, which would challenge her lack of assertiveness and showed her some techniques to change that around.

Traits For Assertive Communication:

- Clearly state your needs and wants
- Maintain eye contact
- Listen to others without interruption
- Have an appropriate speaking volume
- And a steady tone of voice
- With confident body language

⁵⁴ <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/cpsp.12216>

Tips For Practicing Assertiveness:

- I. Respect yourself. Your needs, wants and rights are as important as anyone else's. It's fine to express what you want, so long as you are respectful toward the rights of others.
- II. Express your thoughts and feelings calmly. Giving the silent treatment, yelling, threatening, and shaming are all great examples of what not to do.
- III. Take responsibility for your emotions, and express them calmly and factually.
- IV. Try starting sentences with "I feel..."
- V. Plan what you're going to say. Know your wants and needs, and how you can express them, before entering a conversation.
- VI. Come up with specific sentences and words you can use.
- VII. Say "no" when you need to. You can't make everyone happy all the time. When you need to say "no," do so clearly, without lying about the reasons. Offer to help find another solution.

Examples of Assertive Communication:

- "I've been feeling frustrated about doing most of the chores around the house. I understand that you're busy, but I need help. How can we make this work?" The speaker takes responsibility for their feelings without blaming, and clearly describes their needs.
- "I won't be able to take you to the airport on Friday. I've had a long week, and I want to rest." The speaker respects their own needs and wants by clearly saying "no."
- "I'm having a hard time sleeping when your music is on. What if you use headphones, or I can help you move the speakers to another room." The speaker describes their needs while also considering the needs and wants of the other person.

Assertive Communication Practice; How Would You Respond Assertively?

Before responding, consider what your wants and needs might be in each situation:

Your Partner: "I know you have plans for the weekend, but I really need you to watch the kids. I have a friend coming to town, and we made plans."

Your Assertive Response Is:.....

Situation: You've just received your food at a restaurant, and it was prepared incorrectly. Your sandwich seems to have extra mayo, instead of no mayo.

Your Assertive Response Is:.....

Your Friend Asks: "Hey, can I borrow some money? I want to buy these shoes, but I left my wallet at home. I'll pay you back soon, I swear. It won't be like last time."

Your Assertive Response Is:.....

Situation: Your neighbor is adding an expansion to their house, and the crew starts working, very loudly, at 5 AM. It has woken you up every day for a week.

Your Assertive Statement Is:.....

Kate talks about how she worked through the exercises:

" I was aware of these ideas but had previously dismissed them as 'not going to work,' but Alex really encouraged me to look at the specifics. I took baby steps to push myself out of my comfort zone and applied her suggestions.

I purposely put myself in uncomfortable situations, and I sometimes really embarrassed myself. You don't always see it during the tough times, but progress is inevitable when you prioritize taking action over everything else.

Things have got better, and I couldn't be more grateful to be able to say that my social anxiety will never hold me back in life the way it used to when I was in my late teens and early 20s.

My goal wasn't to eradicate my feelings of anxiety; it was to transform my relationships despite it. And that's what I've achieved."

Personal Assertiveness Tips:

- I. Practice being assertive on a friend or a low-risk situation like on a naughty child. Evaluate yourself and build up to a more difficult situation like your boss.
- II. Remember, there is nothing wrong with expressing your opinion and seeing your needs as being just as important as anybody else's.
- III. Detach yourself from other people's expectations of you. If you feel you're correct, just say what you think and be prepared for people to disagree with you.
- IV. You need to confirm that you've understood and that you want a response. So, you need to ask other people have they fully understood what you're asking, and more importantly, that you request a response. You might ask questions like:
 - What are you thinking?
 - Are you thinking the same?
 - How does that sound?
- V. Be 100% crystal clear when you're asking for what you want. If others are confused about what you're asking for, or there is scope for doubts, frustration and mistakes can happen.
- VI. Be specific in what you want and ask for clear and achievable goals that the other person can provide.
- VII. You are just as important as anyone else. Your opinion and experiences are just as valid as anybody else's. Don't hide in the crowd.

- VIII. Be sure you know what you want. It's often helpful just to take a breather and count to 10 before making a decision. Think things through before you commit.
- IX. Are you sure you understand what the other person wants from you? If you ask the other person to repeat the question, you are validating what the person said, and assuring them that you understand.
- X. It also helps you to understand what is being said fully so that you don't assume the worst.
- XI. Consider mistakes to be your teacher. We all have to learn from the beginning. If you make a mistake, forgive yourself because mistakes are the teachers.
- XII. Be flexible. Don't let people walk over you, but be prepared to change and meet the needs of people around you if the results call for it.
- XIII. Remember Darwin's theory of evolution. It's not the smartest or strongest animal that survives. It's the one that adapts to its environment the best.
- XIV. Being assertive and negotiating with people is a skill anyone can learn. If you weren't taught as a child, now's the time to start learning. Just like learning to ride a bike, it just takes practice.

Don't Get Upset About Conflict

If a politician got upset every time she/he had a debate in the Senate, they would be nervous wrecks. People will always have different opinions to you, and conflict is sometimes unavoidable, so just be assertive and go with the flow. Keep your voice even and firm.

20. HAVE PLENTY OF SEX

For anyone suffering everyday anxiety, you know how that can lead to low libido. The fallout from anxiety can impact your sex life and then exacerbate your anxiety by potentially causing relationship issues.

When you react to anxiety, and your body goes through the fight or flight response. You'll experience an increase in heart rate, blood pressure, and breathing rate while non-essential functions, like sex drive, are acutely diminished. This is to allow the body to focus on what matters in that instant: running away or standing and fighting. Having sex at that moment doesn't figure.

The fight or flight response will also cause the release of hormones cortisol and epinephrine, which, at high levels, can impact on sex drive by decreasing your interest in sex.

In addition to the physical effect of anxiety, there is also a psychological aspect. Anxiety can cause you to have a busy, frazzled mind, distracting you from wanting sex or being present during sex. It can also impact your mood, leading to depression, which can diminish libido in its own right.

Lastly, out of control, anxiety leads to unhealthy habits like smoking, drinking, overeating, and poor lifestyle choices like lack of self-care and exercise. These can influence how you feel about yourself, and your body, and that is bound to interfere with your healthy sex life.

Reasons To Have Loads Of Sex

One study⁵⁵ published in the Archives of Sexual Behavior in 2007 comes right out with it: sex reduces anxiety. And another study⁵⁶ in Science Direct also in 2007 explains that it's the physical touch from one person to another in safe and consensual sex that decreases anxiety.

⁵⁵<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/171092362>
ordinalpos=19&itool=EntrezSystem2.PEntrez.Pubmed.Pubmed_ResultsPanel.Pubmed_DefaultReportPanel.Pubmed_RVDocSum

⁵⁶ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0306453007000698?via%3Dihub>

Sex isn't a cure-all, but it can have an immeasurably positive impact on your mood, as well as your physical health! The feel-good hormones and chemicals that are released during sex can temporarily reduce symptoms of both depression and anxiety.

These include dopamine, endorphins, and oxytocin, which boost your mood, increase compassion, and help you bond with your partner⁵⁷.

As the levels of those chemicals increase with sex, the level of cortisol, the primary stress hormone, also lowers with sex. It all points to more sex and less stress.

Here are 8 More Reasons To Have More Sex

I. Sex boosts self-esteem

Sex is like food; it becomes important only when you're not getting enough. It's not so much a matter of the more, the better, but none can be quite harmful.

There is some evidence a lack of sex is associated with feelings of depression and low self-worth⁵⁸. It seems that if someone believes their partner is losing interest in them, this impacts their self-esteem and, consequently, feelings of attractiveness. Those of us who measure their self-esteem by how others respond to their sexuality are particularly vulnerable to fears of rejection.

Furthermore, there is a lot of social pressure to be sexually active, and not having a sex life can feel socially stigmatizing. So, having sex can unburden someone from social pressure and enhance their self-esteem.

Although all of us have fundamental psychological needs we need to fulfill to remain mentally healthy, having sex isn't strictly a fundamental human need, but it's an important part of the love connection.

The distinguished psychologist Abraham Maslow believed there were five categories of fundamental human needs: psychological needs: safety, love/belonging, esteem, and autonomy.

Of course, once we have in place water, food, safety, shelter, etc. we are physically sorted out. But to be happy and stable, we need to be fulfilled in love and

⁵⁷ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-03-03/regular-sex-benefits-your-mental-health-too-the-conversation/8322520>

⁵⁸ <https://bhkisisa.org/article/2015-03-04-lack-of-sex-linked-to-depression-in-women-says-survey/>

belonging. This means we need friendship and family, a sense of connection, and intimacy, emotional or sexual.

Maslow believed that if too many of these needs go unmet for too long, our mental health will be negatively affected. As a follow up from that, one study⁵⁹ suggested that in certain situations, social isolation can even be a predictor of early death.

II. Sex enhances intimacy with your partner

Couples who don't have regular sex can, inadvertently, set up the beginning of a vicious cycle. One or both of you doesn't feel like sex, then you start to resent your partner for not having sex, and you gradually grow further and further apart until you eventually don't even want to have sex with your partner.

Regular sex with a partner makes a big difference in how you get on. Being sexually close with your partner frequently allows you to connect with them on a much deeper level emotionally.

III. Sex makes you smarter

Having sex changes your brain chemistry in all kinds of ways, and there is evidence that sex actually increases your brain's capacity.

You may find your analytic thinking skills are enhanced, and your memory power is improved or even that when you climax, every part of your brain is enhanced⁶⁰. This works because the blood flows in and carries a surge of nutrients and oxygen to the brain cells.

IV. Sex makes you live longer

Our society places a great emphasis on youth and beauty. Few people over the age of 25 want to either look or feel older. Billions of dollars are spent every year on the pursuit of youth. One study reported having regular sex can make both men and women look between five and seven years younger than they actually are.

Looking younger carries with it a whole suite of benefits such as increased confidence, happiness, and enthusiasm.

⁵⁹ <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.0954-6820.1988.tb19363.x>

⁶⁰ <https://rucore.libraries.rutgers.edu/rutgers-lib/45675/>

V. When we look younger, we tend to feel younger.

Sexual activity has also been associated with living longer and healthier⁶¹. Not only does your mental health improve, but your physical health also improves. In an average sex session, you burn between 70-100 calories. Exercise makes you physically healthier, improves your mood, reduces stress, and helps you better cope with it. Sex also increases your feelings of self-satisfaction and energy levels.

VI. It takes your mind off of other things.

Sex is a kind of temporary escape from anxiety. There's a lot to focus on when having sex like how to please your partner, what turns you on, and the sexual pleasure itself. It's harder to allow your mind to wander as the happy hormones take over...what better way to practice mindfulness than sex.

VII. Sex Helps You Sleep

if you usually have trouble sleeping, trying having sex before bedtime. The hormones released will help you feel relaxed and ready for bed. If you have an orgasm, then the hormone prolactin is released, which will make you even sleepier because sexual satisfaction is a great stress reliever. It's also a way to feel more intimate with your partner; when you feel less frazzled and happier in your relationship, those feelings will contribute to better sleep.

VIII. Masturbation is just as beneficial.

Single? No problem. Masturbation comes along with its own set of benefits. On top of those feel-good hormones, masturbation can also help you learn about your own body to figure out what you do and don't like so that you can better communicate with your partner, making for better sex overall.

Masturbation is even linked to better body image⁶², creating a sense of well-being, increasing the ability to have orgasms, improving sexual satisfaction, improving sleep, and reducing anxiety.

Just go and have some great sex, have fun and revel in pleasure.

⁶¹ <https://www.bmj.com/content/340/bmj.c810>

⁶² <https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/stress-and-sex/201401/touchy-subject-the-health-benefits-masturbation>

21. BE WITH NATURE

If you ever want a simple way to help reduce anxiety, look no further than out the window. Taking a walk in nature is one of the best self-help tools there are.

Our environment has the power to reduce your anxiety; it's official!⁶³ Regardless of age or culture, humans find nature the go-to place for stress release. It's all about what you are seeing, hearing, and experiencing all the time you're outside that's lifting your mood.

Why not make exercise green? You know the list of benefits to exercising: mental, physical, physiological, emotional, improves attention span, increases energy, improves cognitive functioning, is an anxiety buster, a natural antidepressant and helps us lose weight.

But sometimes, as much as you know all these benefits, it's hard to get motivated to exercise regularly when you always feel your back's against the wall with the damaging effects of anxiety.

It's like, 'How do you think exercise is going to help me when I can't get into the lecture theatre for my one class this week??'

I get it. I've had it. But again, anxiety is something we're doing to ourselves, and breaking the patterns, we CAN turn to nature to help. It's one of those things where you have to force yourself outside for the first time to really get why it's going to make you feel better.

Start by finding somewhere that's appealing to you, somewhere to walk or cycle that'll capture your imagination: a park, somewhere next to water or forest.

Even inner cities have places that have nature-like surroundings. Once you start, the beauty of your natural surroundings will keep you motivated to continue.

Another reason to get out into the fresh air is that it reduces anxiety more than exercising indoors. One study⁶⁴ found people who walk a natural had less anxiety and an overall better mood than people who exercised indoors.

⁶³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19121124>

⁶⁴ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18370595>

Nature Soothes

Being submerged in nature helps you cope with anxiety. You are genetically encoded to find trees, plants, water, and other nature elements engrossing. This is because you're absorbed by nature scenes and distracted from your anxiety.

One study⁶⁵ demonstrated this by offering 50% of patients recovering from surgery a wall to look at, and 50% offered a view of trees outside. Needless to say, the patients who started at the trees had a much better tolerance of pain and fewer negative effects that are often connected to having surgery.

Even as I'm writing this and I'm thinking about trees, I feel soothed and calm. Do you?

Nature Relaxes

When people are hoping to relax, they choose settings like the forest, beach, or mountains. Even looking at those scenes or hearing the sounds of nature reduces stress and anxiety, and increases a feeling of calm. The research done in hospitals, offices, and schools has found that even a simple plant in a room can have a significant impact on stress and anxiety.

Some public health researchers⁶⁶ even suggest that being around nature reduces mortality.

Nature Mends

Being in nature, or even viewing scenes of nature, reduces anger, fear, and anxiety. The color green is the go-to color for a soothing room. Why's that? Because it reflects the color of nature. And that increases pleasant feelings.

Being in nature not only makes you feel better emotionally, but it also contributes to your physical wellbeing, reducing blood pressure, heart rate, muscle tension, and the production of stress hormones.

Nature Renovates

The impact of nature on general wellbeing is quite staggering. I sent out a poll to my fellow recovery friends, and 95% of those I asked said their mood improved after spending time outside, changing from depressed, stressed, and anxious to

⁶⁵ <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/6/9/2332/htm>

⁶⁶ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0169204611003665>

calmer and more balanced. It appears that time in nature or scenes of nature is associated with a positive mood, and psychological wellbeing, meaningfulness, and vitality.

Barbara, 46, explains:

"I've been getting out into nature and walking, either on my own or with dogs, to manage my anxiety disorder for years. It helps to keep me calm and physically healthy, and I love taking the time to be mindful of all the beautiful green spaces around me, even when living in a city. Watching the birds and squirrels always has a calming effect and takes me out of my head."

Furthermore, time in nature or viewing nature scenes increases our ability to pay attention. Because humans find nature inherently interesting, it naturally focuses on what we are love about nature. This also provides a respite for our overactive minds, refreshing us for new tasks.

Nature Connects

Finally, time spent outdoors helps us make connections with other people. One study⁶⁷ showed that time in nature connects us and the larger world and that those that love with more green space around their homes knew more neighbors and had a stronger feeling of community.

They also felt more connected. It suggested that people who had trees and green space around their building reported knowing more people and having stronger feelings of unity with their neighbors. Interestingly, it also pointed out that those who lived in greener spaces were better able to help each other because they had stronger feelings of belonging than tenants in buildings without trees.

In addition to this greater sense of belonging, people with a green space also had a reduced risk of street crime, lower levels of violence and aggression between domestic partners, and a better capacity to cope with life's demands. This was especially the anxiety of living in poverty.

The researchers identified this connection by measuring brain activity. It was found when participants viewed nature scenes, the parts of the brain associated with empathy and love lit up. But, when they viewed urban scenes, the parts of

⁶⁷ <http://lhhl.illinois.edu/about.htm>

the brain associated with fear and anxiety were activated. It appears as though nature inspires feelings that connect us and our environment.

Biophilia

Before you think we're getting a bit too 'greenie' with this subject, it isn't just an idea for hippies – most of us know a simple pleasure and mood-lifting effects of exercise in the wild like camping out under the stars. Now the science is following what we already knew: we're so drawn to time spent in nature. They've given this instinct a name – biophilia. Or, the innate human need to care about and connect with nature.

The great news is that it's easy to get yourself a dose of the good stuff mother nature provides. Here are some ideas:

Bring Nature Inside

- Bring flowers or plants for your home by using natural materials, for example, leaves, flowers, feathers, tree bark, or seeds to decorate your living space.
- Organize a space to sit by a window where you can look out over a view of trees or sky. Or you can grow plants or flowers on windowsills.
- Take photos of your favorite places in nature. Use them as backgrounds on a mobile phone or computer screen, or print and put them up on your walls.
- Listen to natural sounds, like recordings of birds, singing, waves, or rainfall.

Get Nature Outside

- Just get a walk in a green space like a local park.
- If you enjoy writing in a journal, try doing this outside.
- Eat meals outdoors like a picnic in a local park.
- Or eat in your garden.
- Watch the stars and try to read the night sky. This also gives a sense of perspective and how tiny we really are. Give your eyes time to adjust, as it can take about 20 minutes before you can fully see stars in the dark.

- Exercise outside. Run or jog through a local park, or do yoga outdoors; by yourself, or look for classes in your local area.
- Join a local walking or rambling group.
- Follow a woodland trail.
- Visit the seaside and go beach-combing for exciting things.
- Try geocaching.
- Be mindful. Find things to see, hear, taste, smell, and touch, like grass under your feet or the feeling of wind and sunlight.
- Help the environment
- Go on an organized litter picking walk, for example, in the park or on the beach.
- Volunteer for a conservation project.
- Plant helpful seeds, such as berry bushes for garden birds or flowers, to help bumblebees.
- Build an animal habitat, for example, build a hedgehog house or create a pond if you have enough space.
- Connect with nature through animals. Watch out for wildlife. If you don't live near the open countryside, you can visit local parks to look for squirrels, fish, insects, ducks and other birds.
- Volunteer at a local community or city farm.
- Hang a bird feeder outside a window or build a small wooden nesting box on a tree or under a windowsill.
- Birdwatch. You only need a book or app.
- Offer to be a pet sitter in your local neighborhood. Volunteer to walk dogs for an animal shelter. Borrow a friend's dog for occasional walks.
- Be part of a nature survey. This might involve counting birds, animals or insects in a particular time and place, or reporting individual sightings of wildlife.

Tim, 54 says:

“I started volunteering at the weekend when I was in a really anxious frame of mind, and it really helped me recover more quickly. I work full-time in an office, so doing something so active in such a different environment at the weekends is a lovely contrast.”

How To Overcome Your Mental Blocks

You may have anxiety that stops you from connecting with nature. If you're not used to being outside, you may find it uncomfortable or unfamiliar. You might get tired easily or have difficulty doing physical activities.

It could be that you find spending time outside or around other people challenging. You may be worried about costs. Or, you feel low or unmotivated or feel unsure if it's the right time for you to start something new.

Tips to overcome mental blocks:

- Start small. Maybe spend just five minutes paying attention to nature in your everyday life.
- Do things that relax you. I like to sit under a tree or gaze at the stars when I'm outside.
- Go out with someone. There are many groups you can join for walks.
- Join a volunteer group doing something like helping clean the beach or plant in the forest.
- Go out when your energy's high.
- Plan so that you get good weather.

Simon, 31, says:

“I volunteer with a local city farm. At first, I was really nervous, and my anxiety was sky high, but I slowly built the confidence I learned new skills, made friends, and really enjoyed being outside. It built structure in my week and became something to look forward to. This job gives my life purpose and meaning, which I've not had since I haven't been well enough to work for a

while. It's become important for my recovery, as well as helping build a sense of hope for my future. You don't need to have gardening skills or knowledge to get involved in garden/horticulture projects because they teach you everything. You just need a willingness to get your hands dirty!"

22. ACCEPT THE ANXIETY

It's three o'clock in the morning, and you're anxious, and while the whole world isn't exactly falling apart, it definitely stretches endlessly before you. Your mind is incapable of holding one thought for more than a few seconds and is, basically, a cavern of zaps and bolts that escape and travel up and down your spine.

Have you ever that that, when you hear a car driving by outside, and you think, 'I would do anything to trade places with that driver, or with anyone awake at this hour. Not because they were panicking for no reason but because they were leaving a nightclub or driving to work happily, in their own space, not knowing there was someone else fantasizing about their life.'

Anxiety takes many forms, some of them contradictory because you're trying to survive so you can be aloof, dismissive, or rejecting. But anxiety is rooted in fear and is actually a fear disorder. You can't have an anxiety disorder because anxiety is a disorder of fear.

We live in a culture that discourages us from understanding our anxiety. We are told to get over it, or else to use it as a motivator towards hitting targets or a goal. "Just use the anxious energy to get you going in the morning,"

Easier said than done. I once was told by a professional to put my anxiety in a box, close the lid, and forget about it. Not sure that person had ever really experienced anxiety because they would have known that this is practically impossible as the anxiety will just climb out of that box as soon as your back is turned.

The famous 13th-century Sufi poet, Rumi, famously compared emotions to unexpected visitors. Joy? Depression? Meanness? His advice was to let them in – laughing - but that’s not what we do. Instead, we hide from them or pretend not to notice. We want to bury anxiety, resentment, or anger. We’re told that we should trade it in for gratitude. This properly positive pressure to deny our negative feelings is very real.

However, there’s a change in contemporary psychological studies⁶⁸. They are demonstrating that acceptance of those negative emotions is the better way to regain and maintain peace of mind. Whether the acceptance is practiced through the lens of ancient Eastern philosophies or in increasingly popular forms of modern treatment like mindfulness-based cognitive behavioral therapy, accepting our dark emotions is now backed by a body of evidence connecting the habit to stronger emotional resilience, which reduces our anxiety symptoms.

Acceptance Is Having A Moment But How Does It Work?

To practice acceptance, it involves not trying to change how you’re feeling. It means to stay in touch with your feelings and take them for what they are. This acceptance of negative emotions is paradoxically linked to long-term psychological well-being.

According to one piece of research⁶⁹, the magic of acceptance is in its blunting effect on emotional reactions to stressful events. It’s that mechanism that can, over time, lead to more resilient psychological health, including higher levels of life satisfaction.

By accepting dark emotions like anxiety, it doesn’t bring you down as you would expect; instead, you're telling yourself it’s OK, and you’ll be OK. You're not involved in putting a lot of energy into trying to escape the anxiety. Instead, you're surrendering your need to control and accepting that you're limited. Sometimes, accepting your limitations can be soothing because you stop trying to reach for the moon, which is both fantastical and sets you up to fail.

Of course, acceptance doesn’t mean being resigned to a negative, anxiety-inducing situation, especially when the situation is within your control.

⁶⁸ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0005796705002068>

⁶⁹ <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2017-30458-001>

Accepting situations is more complex and depends on context. For example, we need to accept death, but we don't need to accept unfair treatment from a boss. That would only lead to worsening mental health.

There's also the cultural leaning towards only "thinking positive" and constantly pursue happiness. This puts you into a grasping/striving frame, which is the antithesis to a state of calm contentment, which is what you want if you suffer from anxiety. This even takes place when there is something to be anxious about. For example, losing your job can create a lot of stress and reframing it by thinking, 'Well, it's not of such a big deal,' or 'I'm going to learn and grow from that,' doesn't necessarily work.

It's a challenge. When we live in a world where the corporate "The Western World" want their customers and employees to be delighted all the time, it becomes both unreasonable and unattainable. We've also become a highly individualistic society. People buy into the belief that "it's all about me, it's all on me, I need to succeed, and if I don't succeed materially, that's a reflection on me and my character." In this type of society, it's natural for us to start applying judgment to the negative mental experiences that we have.

How To Make Acceptance Work For You

Have you ever asked yourself, "Why am I so anxious?" or "How do I get rid of this anxiety?" That's the opposite of acceptance. Instead of trying to figure out why you're anxious, just allow yourself to be anxious. You don't even need to know why you are anxious.

I know it sounds counterintuitive. But when you actually move toward your anxiety and just allow yourself to experience it, without trying to flee the situation or reason your way out of it, those awful anxiety feelings and bodily sensations tend to dissipate.

Anxiety never stays at one level. It oscillates up and down, often influenced by what you're thinking. If you accept that you're anxious, you are no longer fighting it. When you fight the feeling, you are saying to yourself, "This is awful! I can't cope!" "Something bad is going to happen." And then what happens? You get more anxious.

You may attempt to manage anxiety by avoiding situations that you believe could cause you to be anxious. Or you may attempt to manage anxious thoughts by ruminating or doing things to make sure you are safe. These strategies only work in the short term, if at all.

If you can stay in the anxiety-causing situation or stay with the disturbing thoughts long enough and say to yourself:

“It’s OK that I’m anxious,”

The anxiety is likely to dissipate on its own. You don’t need to do anything about the anxiety! And, if you can take it a step further and challenge yourself to want to feel more anxious, then you are taking bold steps to conquer your anxiety.

It can seem that asking to feel more anxious is hard to do in practice because every part of you is saying you need to get rid of the anxiety. We are wired to respond to danger by gearing up our sympathetic nervous system so that we can get out of harm’s way.

This is not the easiest thing to do, but if you haven’t tried accepting your anxiety and actually asking yourself to be more anxious, try it. You are likely to discover that moving toward your anxiety, instead of away from it, will ultimately leave you feeling less anxious.

How To Practice Acceptance Through A Panic Attack

It’s possible to calm yourself through a panic attack. Yes, even during a panic attack! Let me talk you through how to deal with it with the following words. I recommend you record these words and play them back to yourself when you have a panic attack. There’s nothing more soothing than your own voice.

Read this into your phone:

Right now, just acknowledge the panic attack. So, the panic is growing inside of you. The symptoms and sensations are growing, shortness of breath, chest pains. The sweating, shaking, you feel dizzy.

Listen to me now and understand this. This panic attack is happening to you because you're empowering it, you're giving it energy. For now, just accept that you have very, very high anxiety. It's just your body dumping excess adrenaline.

People might tell you to calm down, and you may be telling yourself to calm down. But right now, you don't have to calm down. You just have to accept this is where you are at, but be reassured it will end soon. It may go on for 10 or 15 minutes, and then it will come to a stop.

So, for the moment, just try not to control it. I know that sounds contradictory, but it works. Just accept that you are in a state of high anxiety, and it will work itself out. It will end itself; you don't have to make it end.

While you're listening to me, just find a spot on a wall or something in front of you and stare at it. Now you come aware of your periphery vision. Just notice what is on the edges of your vision. You will feel the sensations of anxiety, but you don't have to do anything about it. Just ride it out until it comes to a natural end.

Right now, you don't have to do anything except be aware and accept where you are. It is all going to be okay in a moment. Now listen to this over again until the panic subsides. And it will.

Acceptance is a kind of mindfulness-based therapy, and it can be pared down to three steps:

- I. Accept your reactions
- II. Be present
- III. Wait for the anxiety to dissolve.

Whether it be a situation you cannot control, something in you that's hard to change, or emotion that overwhelms you, accepting it can allow you to move forward—obsessing, worrying, and playing things over and over keep you stuck and in this sense, asking why can leave you helpless.

I would invite you to accept reality and work with what you have.

23. SLEEP WELL

When it comes to managing anxiety disorders, research⁷⁰ is telling us that while a full night of slumber stabilizes emotions, a sleepless night can trigger up to a 30% rise in anxiety levels. Yes, that's 30%!!!

Researchers have found that the type of sleep to reset an anxious brain is deep sleep, also known as non-rapid eye movement (NREM) or slow-wave sleep. This is the state in which the brain reorganizes connections in the brain and makes for a natural healer for anxiety.

How many times have you woken after a good night's sleep and just feel so much better for it? We all have because sleep is a natural antidote to anxiety as long as we get it every night.

Then again...when you add in that anxiety can actually cause sleep problems in the first place, you have to ask the question: which come first, does a bad night's sleep cause anxiety, or does anxiety cause sleep problems?

It's a frustrating routine, you know the one, your mind starts racing as soon as your head hits the pillow. You're thinking about everything you didn't do and should have. Or, all the things you shouldn't have done but did. Then you catch a glimpse of the time and realize how late it already is.

It's hard to tell whether you're having trouble sleeping because you're anxious, or you're anxious because you can't sleep. The answer maybe both. It's a two-way street because anxiety can cause sleep problems, but lack of sleep can cause anxiety.

Tips To Get A Good Night's Sleep:

1. **Sleep Schedule.** We are creatures of habit, and therefore we have a hard time adjusting to changes in our sleep patterns, so stick to a sleep schedule. Go to bed and wake up at the same time each day. Sleeping in at the weekend won't make up for the lack of sleep during the weekdays; it will also make it harder to get up early on Monday morning. Set the

⁷⁰ <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0569x2sd>

alarm for bedtime as well as wake up time. This will get you into the habit of going to sleep at the same time. Setting up a sleep schedule is probably the most important tip.

- II. Avoid drinking alcohol before bed because having it that night may help you relax but can rob you of the important REM sleep. REM sleep is a deep sleep that you need to repair your anxious brain. Drinking also affects your breathing at night, and this can make you wake up in the middle of the night, and we all know how hard it is to get back to sleep once we are awake at 2 AM!
- III. Take a hot bath before you go to bed. The drop in temperature after being in the bath might help you feel sleepy. Also, simply lying in a hot bath is soooooo relaxing.
- IV. Don't lie in bed awake, tossing and turning and watching the clock. If you're still awake after 20 minutes, all your anxiety is cranking up, the best thing to do is get up and do something else and until you feel sleepy. Being anxious about not being able to get back to sleep will simply create more insomnia.
- V. Don't exercise late in the day. Don't exercise later than three hours before bed. But do exercise earlier in the day because it helps you sleep better.
- VI. Avoid caffeine because it takes up to 8 hours to wear off. Tea, some fizzy drinks, coffee, and chocolate all contain caffeine. Having these drinks in the afternoon can affect your sleep pattern.
- VII. Ditto nicotine is a stimulant, and smokers often only sleep likely. You may also wake up early because of nicotine withdrawal.
- VIII. Check the medications you are taking because some medicines disrupt sleep. This is also true for some over-the-counter medicines and herbal remedies, especially for coughs or cold. Pharmacists will be able to tell you if there is something in them that will affect sleep.
- IX. Don't eat too late and too much. Large meals can cause indigestion, which interferes with sleep. Also, drinking a lot in the evening may stimulate your body to wake you up in the night to go to the toilet.

- X. Relax before bedtime. And make sure you schedule in some wind-down time before bed. Relaxing things like reading or listening to music is perfect, whereas scrolling through your Instagram account could create stress hormones to be released, and this affects your sleep.
- XI. Don't nap after 3 PM because the late afternoon naps can make it harder to sleep at night.
- XII. Keep your bedroom dark and cool. Bright lights or warm rooms inhibit deep sleep.
- XIII. Don't have a clock is facing you when you wake up in the middle of the night. Insomniacs have a habit of checking the time, and this can spark an anxious moment, which will prevent you from falling back to sleep.
- XIV. Make sure you have daylight exposure for 30 minutes every day. Daylight exposure is important for regulating sleep patterns.
- XV. Finally, and very, very importantly, don't have gadgets in your bedroom. Notifications, bright lights, noises, and vibrations are a distraction from sleep. It's best to put all phones and screens in another room. It will make your bedroom feel less like a battlefield and more like a sanctuary.

Create A Sleep Diary

One of the best ways you can tell if you are getting enough good quality sleep is by keeping a sleep diary. A sleep diary could help you to identify exactly what it is that's keeping you from getting the right amount of shut-eye.

Blame It On The Moon

The term "lunar cycle" refers to the moon's orbit around the earth. As the moon revolves, its appearance or "phase" changes. There are eight lunar phases. The phase that primarily affects us is the full moon phase when we can see the entire moon.

Research⁷¹ shows that we tend to not sleep as well on nights near a full moon. It takes us a little longer to fall asleep, and then we sleep 20 minutes less. This is

⁷¹ <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/full-moon-sleep-cycle-research-super-blue-blood-lunar-event-space-sky-a8187446.html>

because our melatonin levels drop around the time of the full moon, in response to the light it reflects.

Sweet dreams.

24. MUSIC – GET YOUR GROOVE GOING

Here's a brilliant scientifically-proven way to reduce your anxiety: get your headphones out and listen to some music.

Music has long been popular as a way of relaxing and restoring peace. For centuries, indigenous cultures have used music to enhance their well-being and improve many health conditions.

Music is really in tune with your emotions. Depending on what you're listening to, it can help you get in touch with your feelings and either feel like a relief or soothe the path to calm them down like anxiety.

Everyone has their different type of music or specific song which works. For some people, it transports them to a poignant time in their past when they were in a better place. Or it may be that it gets you excited about your future. Sometimes the artist just seems to be singing about your life and the connection you have to that artist, and their song may be what you need that moment. After all, we want to connect with others to know how we feel. Then again, it may just be what you need to bring you into the present moment where everything is OK.

With anxiety, some people want to listen to calming music, which helps them feel calmer, but others want to express their anxiety by dancing it out. Part of feeling anxious is feeling you lack a sense of control. So, listening to electronica or dance music when you're anxious can let out your anxious energy.

I love listening to fast-paced music at exactly 130 beats per minute while I'm running. Running to the beat is so powerful it almost carries me the whole way. It can be very cathartic and a brilliant outlet for anxious energy. When I'm running, I'm also dancing, but you wouldn't know it if you were looking. It skilfully lifts my

mood. Add in the fresh air, being outside, and the benefits of exercise, I am truly transformed by the time I'm done.

Part of listening to music is that it makes you stay in the moment when the essence of mindfulness is in play. That really can support you when you're feeling particularly anxious. It's especially supportive when you're listening to someone else singing about anxiety.

Take Billie Eilish. As she transitioned from adolescence to adulthood, her songs were talking to millions of adolescents and young adults who were identifying with her lyrics.

Now neuroscientists have taken the idea of music helping anxiety one step further. A study from UK based Mindlab International has specified ten tunes to give you the most bang for your musical buck.

The study induced anxiety through puzzles then introduced certain songs, all the while, researchers measured brain activity as well as physiological states that included heart rate, blood pressure, and rate of breathing.

According to the study leader, Dr. David Lewis-Hodgson, the top song produced a greater state of relaxation than any other music tested to date. The song is called "Weightless" and resulted in striking a 65 % reduction in the participants' overall anxiety and a 35 percent reduction in their usual physiological resting rates, which is quite remarkable.

The study findings reported that "'Weightless' was so effective, many participants became drowsy, and Dr. Lewis-Hodgson actually advised against driving while listening to it as it could be dangerous.

Here's a list of the top ten songs recommended for anxiety by Dr. Lewis-Hodgson's study:

- 1) "We Can Fly," by Rue du Soleil (Café Del Mar)
- 2) "Canzonetta Sull'aria," by Mozart
- 3) "Someone Like You," by Adele
- 4) "Pure Shores," by All Saints

- 5) "Please Don't Go," by Barcelona
- 6) "Strawberry Swing," by Coldplay
- 7) "Watermark," by Enya
- 8) "Mellomaniac (Chill Out Mix)," by DJ Shah
- 9) "Electra," by Airstream
- 10) "Weightless," by Marconi Union

There's also a free 10-hour version of "Weightless" available on YouTube if you want a longer listening experience.

White Noise

White noise is becoming increasingly popular as a way of reducing anxiety. It's a constant ambient sound designed to reduce the difference between background sounds and a 'peak' sound like a door slamming. It gives you a better chance to sleep through it undisturbed. If you have difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep, white noise could help mask activity from inside and outside the house.

Nolan, 32, says,

"I moved to London from Cork and after a few months felt very, very lonely, and anxiety came with it like an unwelcome cousin! That was when I began to listen to white noise. A friend had suggested I listen to rain sounds. It not only drowned out my thoughts but didn't actually allow them to exist at all for the time that I'm listening. I outgrew rain sounds and moved onto pure white noise, which produced a gratifyingly neutral effect. The panic attacks I was accustomed to became fewer and fewer. I started listening to it on my journey to work, and when I stood on the tube grasping the clammy handrail at 7 am, my heart rarely hammered as it once had. The noise kept everything more or less the same, obliterating my nerves.

After I learned to love white noise for what it did for me in public, I began to love it in private, too. Once, while enduring a panic attack in bed, having

checked my bank balance, I turned it on. It was a Saturday early evening, and I put a white noise playlist on my headphones and lay there under the heavy sheet of it until my body stopped shuddering, and I was feeling as blank as the sound itself. I was able to sleep because it had exhausted me and, therefore, I was able to work the next day, and for that alone, I began to consider it a kind of magic.”

A 2005 study⁷² showed white noise could improve functioning in adults with attention deficit disorder. It seems to have a positive effect on sufferers of depression too. It seems to reduce agitation.

You can find lots of white noise recordings on YouTube and other play software. Spotify even has whole playlists dedicated to white noise tracks. It even has one for babies.

25. VISUALIZATION

Visualization is a powerful technique involving mental imagery to achieve relaxation. It's similar to daydreaming, but visualization is accomplished through the use of your imagination.

The reason why visualization can help you cope with anxiety and panic attacks is this: consider how your thoughts wander when you feel panic or anxiety and that when you experience a panic attack, your mind focuses on the worst thing that can happen, which makes you more scared? Visualization reverses that process by expanding your ability to rest and relax, focusing your mind on more calming and serene images.

Can you remember the last time you felt overwhelmed by anxious thoughts or were unable to focus because of something weighing heavy on your mind? Possibly not that long ago.

⁷² <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1389945704002242>

Studies have shown, including this 2004 one⁷³, that visualization activates the same neural networks that actual tasking a performance does. This strengthens the connection between the brain and the body. The study found that whether people performed physical exercises or just imagined doing them, they could gain the same strength by simply using the mind's power.

It might sound a little bit 'woo-woo,' but research shows that these mini-meditations can help reduce anxiety and improve performance. The interesting thing is that the brain can't distinguish between a real memory and an imagined one. This means when you vividly imagine something coming to fruition, you can create new neural pathways that are going to give your brain a real clear point of focus.

Visualize how an interview will go, and your brain will understand the fluidity of that situation like it already happened. Or, thinking about having a perfect day can change the way your day goes.

So, here are some visualization techniques for you to try. Before beginning any of these techniques, make sure your environment is set up, so you're comfortable for your comfort. Try to eliminate any distractions, such as phones, pets, or television. And, find a quiet place where you will most likely be undisturbed. Remove heavy jewelry, watches, or restrictive clothing. Relax by either sitting or lying down in a position that feels comfortable and safe.

It can be helpful to slow your breathing down with some deep breathing. Close your eyes and try to let go of any tension you may be feeling throughout your body. You may want to try the Progressive Muscle Relaxation exercise in tool 18 before you begin your visualization.

Set aside 5 to 15 minutes. You can adjust the visualizations to suit you and your personality better. For example, on Serene Beach, you might want to change the chair for a hammock.

⁷³ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0028393203003257?via%3Dihub>

Serene Beach

Beaches are one of the most popular visualizations due to their calming and tranquillity. This is a visualization exercise that you can practice on your own. Feel free to change it to better suit your needs and imagination. Use it to relax, unwind, and briefly escape from your everyday tasks.

Imagine that you are resting on a white sandy beach, and you feel safe, calm, and relaxed as you think about the following:

The sound of soft waves as the tide gently rolls in

The weight of your body sinking into your beach chair

Turquoise water and a clear, blue sky

The warmth of the sand on your feet

The large umbrella you're sitting under keeping you slightly shaded, creating just the right temperature.

Relax your face and let go of all the tension in your forehead, between your eyebrows, around your neck, and your throat. Soften your eyes and the muscles around your eyes. Allow your breath to slow down and match the rolling waves of the water. There is no effort to be here; spend time just taking it all in.

Once this relaxation feels complete, imagine that you get up and slowly walk away from the beach. Remember that this beautiful place is here for you whenever you need to come back. Take your time and slowly open your eyes.

Stop Sign

If you're experiencing overwhelming anxiety in the form of intrusive thoughts where they play out the scenes like mini-movies in your head: car crashes, financial ruin, health crisis, then this is for you.

Replace the intrusive, unwanted thought with an image of a Stop Sign on an empty street with only a clear blue sky and green grass in view. As you focus on this Stop Sign, you repeat the word "stop" multiple times until nothing else can enter your consciousness. Whenever you feel any intrusive thought enter your mind and disrupt your feelings of stability, this will help.

The Blue Light

This is great for when you're about to tackle a difficult task. Or maybe you're trying to decompress after you've completed it. Both can create lots of anxiety, and this light visualization can be very helpful for relaxing.

Visualize yourself surrounded by a glowing ball of blue light.

Breathe in the light and allow it to fill your whole head.

As you breathe out, visualize tension leaving your body as black smoke.

Let it dissolve completely in the light around you.

With each breath, allow your body to gradually fill with the healing blue light until your entire being is clear, like a blue crystal.

Ball of Wool

Another visualization to help you unwind after a long and stressful day. It can be used to make the most of your evenings and recharge your batteries for tomorrow.

Picture a small ball of wool holding all of that residual tension from the day.

Find the tip of the wool and imagine it slowly unrolling. The strand gets longer and longer, and you can actually feel your tension unwinding.

When the wool is completely loose, you can relax and enjoy the night.

Visualization For Sleep

If you're prone to tossing and turning when the lights go out or find yourself examining the ceiling at 3:00 am., then this is for you. It's vitally important to get plenty of sleep because the cost of insomnia is so much higher than an extra cup of coffee the next day when you're anxious.

Visualizations for sleep are a close cousin of meditation, and they can shift brain wave activity toward deep, restful sleep. When you've snuggled into your bed and are ready to sleep tonight, let one of these two visualizations carry you into deep restorative sleep.

Turn The Dial Down

Just as you've adjusted the light in the room just the way you want it, whether it's pitch black or with some soft light, imagine doing the same inside yourself. Imagine dialing the light down behind your eyelids to the same restful setting within. Now do this with sound. Do you know all those voices that accompany you during the day, like the ones that remind you of your jobs or berate you for not getting the jobs, right? Imagine dialing down the volume on all those internal voices, and keeping the volume off for the same amount of time you intend to sleep.

The River of Sleep

Visualize yourself sitting beside a gently flowing stream with leaves floating along the surface of the water. For the next few minutes, take each thought that enters your mind and place it on a leaf... let it float by. Do this with each thought – pleasurable, painful, or neutral. Even if you have joyous or enthusiastic thoughts, place them on a leaf and let them float by.

Consider that on many occasions in your life, you've been carried easily from wakefulness into sleep, as easily as that leaf floating by. Like a river with a set course, a part of you already knows the way to restful sleep. Let yourself be carried now; just let go. Feel yourself being carried on that safe and gentle current into deep, deep rest and finally sleep.

Allow the stream to flow at its own pace. Imagine that the chatting is silenced when the window is fully closed, and you can drift off to sleep without background conversations.

Try one of these visualizations to support your recovery when you feel anxiety creep in - uninvited.

26. HAVE A GOOD CRY

Crying is a natural response we have to a range of emotions, including sadness, grief, joy, frustration, and anxiety. And according to science⁷⁴, it's good for you!

People cry more than you may assume, and that means both men and women. Having a good cry can sometimes be just what the doctor ordered, and we may be doing ourselves a disservice by not tearing up regularly. Interestingly, humans are the only animals to cry tears.

Why Do People Cry?

It's simply a natural response to emotions.

You may FEEL a profound difference between happiness and sadness, but the BODY doesn't make a distinction. Intense situations can provoke overwhelming reactions. Whether the trigger is winning the top prize or a crisis, the body produces stress hormones as part of the preparation for the fight-or-flight response.

Crying healthily activates the body because letting down your guard, and your defenses is a very positive and healthy thing. The same thing happens when you watch a movie, and it touches you, and you cry... that process of opening into yourself... it's like a lock and key.

The Japanese are such strong believers in the health benefits of crying that they've taken it to the next level. Some Japanese cities have 'crying clubs' called 'rui-katsu,' meaning 'tear-seeking' where people come together to indulge in a good old-fashioned sobfest. To get themselves going, they watch really, really sad movies. Why? Crying releases anxiety, and is a great practice when it comes to staying mentally healthy.

Research is backing up that theory. Studies⁷⁵ of the various kinds of tears have found that tears act as a safety valve by releasing excess anxiety hormones like cortisol. If left unchecked, chronically elevated levels of these hormones can cause physical problems and play havoc with your mood. As anxiety often precedes a good cry, the sense of calm often felt afterward is at least in part due to hormonal release.

⁷⁴ Becht, M. C., & Vingerhoets, A. J. J. M. (2002). Crying and mood Change: A cross-cultural study. *Cognition and Emotion*, 16(1), 87-101

⁷⁵ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4035568/>

Emotional tears (as opposed to tears you get when peeling an onion) also contain more mood-regulating manganese than the other types. Anxiety tightens muscles, so when you cry, you release some of that tension.

It also activates the parasympathetic nervous system, often referred to as the 'rest and digest' system where the muscles relax, heart rate slows, and the body generally conserves energy and restores the body to a state of balance.

3 Benefits Of Crying

Have you tried to suppress tears, seeing them as a sign of weakness? Our Western culture definitely tries to quash the idea that crying is OK. But science suggests that doing so could mean missing out on a range of benefits.

Researchers have found that crying has a self-soothing effect when you:

- I. Regulate your own emotions
- II. Calm yourself
- III. Reduce your distress levels

Helps You Relax

By self-soothing, it activates the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS), which helps you to relax.

Gets Support From Others

As well as helping you self-soothe, it can help you get support from others around you. One study⁷⁶ demonstrates how crying is primarily an attachment behavior, and it rallies support from the people around you. This is known as an inter-personal or social benefit.

⁷⁶ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4934120/#B30>

Helps To Relieve Pain

In addition to being self-soothing, crying out emotional tears releases oxytocin and endorphins. These chemicals make you feel good and may also ease both physical and emotional pain. In this way, crying can help you reduce pain and promote a sense of well-being.

Enhances Mood

Crying may help lift your spirits and make you feel better. As well as relieving pain, oxytocin, and endorphins can help improve mood. This is why they are often known as the 'feel-good' chemicals.

Aids Sleep

Crying can help you sleep better as a result of lowering stress and anxiety and increasing oxytocin and endorphins. Your mood is calmer, your mood is enhanced, and there's pain relief. All of these will help you fall asleep more easily.

Fights Bacteria

Crying helps to kill bacteria and keep the eyes clean as tears contain a fluid called lysozyme. Not that this has got anything to do with anxiety, but one study⁷⁷ found that lysozyme had such a powerful anti-microbial property that it could even help to reduce risks presented by bioterror agents, like anthrax!

Improves Vision

Basal tears, which are released every time a person blinks, help to keep the eyes moist and prevent mucous membranes from drying out. When the membranes dry out, vision can become blurry. But the lubricating effect of basal tears helps people to see more clearly.

⁷⁷ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21645824>

Has Spiritual Benefits

A good cry can also be very healing and a little harder to define, but the benefits include:

- A greater ability to 'hold yourself together'
- Give you a feeling of being more supported and upheld
- Help you feel more grounded
- Help you develop a deeper connection with your inner self
- Enhanced your self-love and self-care
- Gives an increased ability to be mindful
- And also, the ability to pause and see the bigger picture
- Helps you get you out of your mind and into your body
- Offers more connection with your true feelings and perspectives
- Reduced physical ailments and illnesses
- And of course, less anxiety!

When To See A Doctor

Crying, of course, may also be a sign of feelings of being overwhelmed or depressed. You'll know if you're crying if you're depressed because:

- it happens very frequently
- it happens for no apparent reason
- you can't work out what's triggered it
- it starts to affect daily activities
- it becomes uncontrollable

If you are experiencing symptoms of depression, maybe see a professional about the type of treatments available. Or read my best-selling book: *Beat Depression And Reclaim Your Life*⁷⁸.

⁷⁸ https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/075350989X/ref=dbs_a_def_rwt_bibl_vppi_i1

27. COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY (CBT)

What's good about therapy is that it helps you discover the root cause of your anxiety. You can look at situations in a new light and learn several ways to bring down anxiety symptoms.

Specifically, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) can help you cope with anxiety while finding ways to solve your problems. CBT offers various tools for overcoming fear and teaches you how to use them effectively.

What Is CBT?

It's a kind of treatment where you talk about your issues with a therapist who will then focus on changing your attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts that affect your feelings and behavior. Hopefully, you will then find ways of how to cope and deal with your problems.

It's a combination of cognitive therapy, where you examine how you think about things with behavior therapy, which is what you do. It can help you in dealing with situations not based on feelings but by changing how you see things.

For example, if you're invited to a party, any thoughts you have about it will affect their feeling, as follows:

- If you want to go, the feeling you'll have is happiness or excitement.
- If you'd rather watch a movie, your feeling is rather neutral.
- If you don't want to go, you're feeling anxious.

The idea of going to a party can elicit various feelings from different people. So, if you have anxiety, any negative thoughts you have will only heighten it. The idea behind CBT is to change how you think by changing the way you feel.

How Is CBT Different To Other Therapies?

It differs from other therapies in these ways:

- Practical. It helps identify specific problems and tries to solve them
- Highly structured. You and your therapist discuss specific problems and set goals for you to achieve rather than talking freely about your life
- Focused on specific problems that are happening now and it's mainly concerned with how you think and act now rather than attempting to resolve past issues
- Collaborative. Your therapist does not tell you what to do but will work with you to find solutions to your current difficulties

Stopping The Cycle Of Negative Thoughts

There are helpful and unhelpful ways of reacting to a situation, often determined by how you think about them.

For example, if you've lost your job, you might think you've failed and that you're not capable of getting another job. This could lead to you feeling hopeless, lonely, depressed, and tired, so you stop going for jobs that you're excited about. You could become trapped in a negative cycle, sitting at home alone and feeling bad about yourself.

But rather than accepting this way of thinking, you could accept that many people lose their jobs, learn from your mistakes and move on feeling optimistic about the future. This optimism could result in you trying for another job or finding new avenues for future employment. You may start evening classes and develop new skills.

This is a simplified example, but it illustrates how certain thoughts, feelings, physical sensations, and actions can trap you in a negative cycle and even create new situations that make you feel worse about yourself.

CBT aims to stop negative cycles such as these by breaking down things that make you feel bad, anxious, or scared. By making your problems more manageable, CBT can help you change your negative thought patterns and improve the way you feel.

It aims to help you get to a point where you can achieve this on your own and tackle problems without the help of a therapist.

It Can Last Up To One Year

CBT appears to help anxiety-related disorders associated with many improved results according to research⁷⁹ published in 2019. The study shows that CBT for anxiety disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder is generally effective for up to one year following treatment completion. This is new information because CBT has often been seen as a short term 'quick fix.' However, this piece of research points towards CBT being more effective than previously thought.

Fiona, 46, says:

"The summer before I turned 28, I felt like I was swimming through a hot, sour fog. I was exhausted all the time. I couldn't sleep. Sometimes I'd wake up in the middle of the night and cry. There was no real crisis in my life; my job, friends, relationship, and family were all fine. It made me even more anxious because about what was wrong with me??

After a few months of this, I thought, 'I need help!' So, I started looking for counselors online, and I made a list and started emailing possibilities.

The shopping period was brief, as the first two suggested that I was dissatisfied with my life (seriously?), and the second one smoked her way through a pack of cigarettes (I know right!)

The third seemed more normal, and that was reassuring. She was warm and insightful, and I liked her voice. We went through how my life was panning out, and though I couldn't quite describe why, after I saw her, I felt clearer and calmer. A few sessions later, I noticed she'd got into my head as I found myself naturally thinking about things she'd said. I continued to see her on and off for years.

⁷⁹ <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/article-abstract/2756136>

It took time and effort, which was be in short supply as I was wading through piles of whatever life had dumped at my feet. But ironically, the more daunting the process was, the more I benefited from the results. "

How To Find A CBT Therapist

You might be able to access CBT on the NHS through Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT). This is an NHS program available in England that can provide CBT as a treatment for various mental health problems, such as anxiety. You can usually get in touch with them directly (self-refer). However, IAPT is not available in all areas, and the waiting lists can be long.

Doctor's Surgery

Some counselors and psychologists offer CBT on the NHS at GP surgeries. Your GP may also be able to refer you to CBT in your area or give you a login for an online CBT program. Some NHS Trusts have specialist therapy services.

Private Therapy

You may want to consider seeing a therapist privately, but there will be a charge for appointments. You can find a private therapist through various organizations like the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), which is a membership organization and a registered charity that sets standards for therapeutic practice.

The BACP has a 'find a therapist' directory of registered and non-registered therapists. The BACP also has guidance about finding the right therapist for you.

The British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapists (BABCP) has a register of accredited CBT therapists. Therapists on the register have specialist skills and knowledge and have undergone relevant training and supervision.

28. AROMATHERAPY

Aromatherapy is the practice of inhaling the scent of essential oils to improve your well being. The theory is that they work by stimulating the smell receptors in your nose, and they send messages to your nervous system. They are thought to have a subtle effect on the body's chemical and energy systems. Because of this, aromatherapy is often used as a natural remedy to relieve anxiety and stress.

What Are Essential Oils?

Essential oils are derived from roots, seeds, flowers, bark, and other natural plant products. They are concentrated compounds that are connected to a plant's scent, a crucial part of pollination.

Aromatherapy may be a recent discovery, but it has been used for centuries by ancient societies who cited their benefits in healthcare, religious ceremonies, beauty treatments, and skincare, oral hygiene, and food preparation.

As long ago as 3000BC, Ancient Egyptians cultivated the oils from plants, apparently, and combined the oils with a solvent method of animal fat. They used them as part of their religious practices - and in cosmetics. These practices were then used by the Ancient Greeks, with physicians such as Hippocrates advocating the benefits of holistic approaches to medicines. So they've been around forever!

How Do They Work?

They work holistically on our mind and body for an enhanced sense of wellbeing. They are used to help to lift your mood as natural healing through their unique ability to harness some medicinal properties.

The basic principle is actually quite simple. Different oils stimulate different responses in our hypothalamus gland, which then triggers the production of a different hormone. The hormones then produce different responses within the body as chemical messengers are sent to specific cells, leading to less anxiety, better sleep, or more energy, depending on which oil is inhaled.

How Does This Specifically Affect Anxiety?

It's complicated. There are a lot of vague claims about how essential oils work. But they are definitely not recommended to cure or treat a severe illness. However, there is a bit of evidence to suggest that essential oils can help in some areas. One study⁸⁰ found that aromatherapy might help reduce anxiety, and other studies have found that lavender might help with sleep.

However, you must be careful not to believe every claim you read because the therapeutic potential of these oils is vastly oversold. There are clinical studies that suggest that they can be beneficial in very particular contexts—particularly when the endpoint is subjective, like pain and anxiety. But the studies that are done are generally not robust enough.

Nevertheless, some people do get a real benefit from using essential oils for anxiety.

Rosa, 41, says:

"I suffer from anxiety - particularly when I become overwhelmed - and then panic attacks usually set in. I suffer panic attacks differently to other people because, for me, I struggle to breathe and get a pain in my chest, and they also hit me when I am not expecting it, so don't even notice that I am feeling overwhelmed. One hit me randomly one day when I was driving, and I knew I had to look for some help because I had my daughter in the car with me, and it was dangerous! I looked around and started using essential oils to help ground me when I have anxious feelings. I have noticed such a positive difference. So now, I diffuse essential oils every morning to help me focus, and I feel more energized, especially when I wake up feeling tired. I recognize the days where I forget to put on the diffuser, and I start to get flustered and realize I haven't switched the diffuser on. The oils have become an anchor to ground me. When I start to feel a panic attack coming on, I turn to either lavender or rose. I have these oils in a roller, and I keep them in my handbag, so it's always at arm's reach when out of the house. I roll them behind my ears, and I feel the benefits of feeling calmer and the panic attack easing within 30 seconds.

⁸⁰ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4606594/>

It seems like there's a close connection between the aroma and my emotions. It's weird because sometimes a certain smell can trigger a memory from years ago, a bit like a flashback. In my office, while I work to help me focus, in the evenings to help everyone calm us down after a busy day and the kids like to diffuse it at night to help them sleep."

What's The Harm?

As long as you're using essential oils safely, there's not much risk. Yes, there's the money and the possibility of developing a rash from an allergic reaction.

But if you enjoy dabbling in essential oils, that's great. Some people rely on them for support, and some science advocates their powers. They're worth trying out for those particularly anxious moments, and they may even be of huge benefit.

29. SET BOUNDARIES

How often do you say YES, when you mean to say NO? How many times do you agree to do something before considering the consequences of it? When we think of anxiety, its causes, and ways to reduce it, we rarely think about boundaries.

Nonetheless, the lack of clear and healthy boundaries is a cause of anxiety for many people.

Imagine the following scenario:

Your friend, who is moving into a new house, is asking you to help this weekend. 'There's no one else that can help me, and I know I can always count on you,' she says. You say 'Of course!' without even thinking about it. 'I'm her friend, I should be there for her,' you think. When you get home, you remember that you planned to spend the weekend studying for the exam you have next week... but now it's too late! You already promised your friend to help her. She is counting on you. If you tell her, you can't help her after you already agreed she would be upset and disappointed. She depends on you!

'Well...' you think to yourself, 'I can help her for a few hours in the morning and study in the afternoon. That's not what I planned, but I can do it; it's not a lot to move, and it will be over in a few hours.'

On Saturday, you arrive at your friend's place, only to discover that she hasn't packed anything and instead expects you to help with that as well. 'We have all day' your friend says, 'so I figured it would be much easier if I waited for you to help me, rather than packing everything all by myself.' Your first instinct is to say, 'No way! I have an exam to study for, and I can only help you for a few hours!' But you look around and understanding the impact you leaving her all by herself would have, you choose to say, 'Okay...' realizing that you will not study for the exam today.

You start to work, pack and move the furniture and boxes from her apartment to the van she rented. Thoughts are coming up, 'Why did I say yes in the first place? Couldn't she prepare everything in advance? Why didn't she give me a heads up? Maybe I should have said NO. Why didn't she pay for professionals to do this?' Slowly but surely, anger starts to build in you and start to feel resentful towards your friend. You feel manipulated and used. You become bitter, and at some point, you turn the anger towards yourself with thoughts like 'Why am I always doing this? Why can't I say no? Why can't I put myself and my needs first? What am I so afraid of?'

As the day continues, your anger turns to anxiety about the coming exam. You know you are behind and that you won't have enough time to study. You start to get worried and anxious you might fail. You get home exhausted, restless, and unable to fall asleep due to the worry and anxiety surrounding the exam. Your worry grows and becomes bigger and bigger; you will fail the class, not graduate on time, you won't get the job you wanted to apply for, and so on.

Sounds familiar? Have you ever said YES when you mean to say NO? But you couldn't help yourself? Maybe to be the chief bridesmaid for a 'friend,' who was more of an acquaintance you never really liked? Requiring you to spend days of doing all the 'dirty work' for her. Or you took on a project at work that no one else

wanted, only to find that you are stuck spending late nights and weekends without receiving any help or appreciation from your colleagues?

Building healthy boundaries is one of the most difficult yet important aspects of reducing anxiety. But being assertive is challenging because we don't like saying NO. We try to avoid confrontations because we don't want to hurt anyone's feelings. At first, setting boundaries may feel unnatural and even selfish. Others might say that we are selfish for setting boundaries because, to some, setting boundaries sounds like a negative thing. But having clear boundaries can actually create freedom. If you set a boundary or say no and someone experiences it as a negative, that is their issue, not yours.

One of our basic needs is structure. We ensure structure by developing a boundary system within which we safely operate. Structure gives our lives form. Boundaries and form offer us safety and allow more efficient use of energy.

There is an old joke about the man who "got on his horse and rode off in all directions." Without boundaries, we have no limits and easily get confused. We go this way and that, wasting a lot of energy. We lose our way. We become muddled because we don't know when to stop; we don't know how to say no.

Setting boundaries is also a test of your relationship. If you can't say no to someone because you feel there will be consequences, then what kind of a relationship is it? That isn't the kind of relationship you want. Setting boundaries isn't about hurting people; it's about being kind to yourself. It's about taking care of your own needs. It's about self-respect and self-worth.

Habits like people-pleasing, doing something because you don't want to offend, hurt, or anger someone or being afraid of disappointing or being a disappointment, are toxic. In many cases, these habits will induce anxiety. For some people, who don't know how to set boundaries, they avoid certain people or situations to protect themselves, but this only generates additional anxiety. The more they avoid, the more anxious they become.

Setting boundaries is, I believe, the most important thing in taking care of yourself. It's not easy to set boundaries or say no. It's often not the popular decision. However, it's a huge relief to stop doing what you don't want to do. Most of the

time, setting a boundary comes with lots of guilt. Still, there is nothing more helpful and important than keeping healthy boundaries.

There isn't a lot of specific science to back up the power of setting boundaries. There are plenty of books that talk about how setting boundaries can be a powerful force to reduce anxiety symptoms. One such book, *Behavior Principles in Everyday Life*,⁸¹ explains how cognitive restructuring (changing your behavior) has been used successfully to treat a wide variety of conditions, anxiety, social phobias, relationship issues, and stress. Brene Brown is a great writer on setting boundaries and overcoming the guilt that goes with it.

Remember, you are as important as other people, if not more, and setting boundaries are taking care of your needs, and that will help reduce your anxiety.

What's Important To You?

It's important to take a day off when you feel you need to rest, take a holiday, let go of relationships that are negative, abusive, controlling, criticizing, or an energy drainer. It's also pretty crucial that you don't overextend yourself or always be available. Likewise, you don't need to explain everything or even answer the phone. It's necessary to prioritize yourself sometimes.

Basically, it's important to remember that it's OK to not be there for everything and everyone all the time. You can build up your self-awareness and assertiveness to express your feelings and needs. It's OK to ask for what you want and say no to what you don't want. A good indication of a lack of boundaries is when you spend more time talking and thinking of other people's needs over your own.

Saying 'no' without feeling guilty about hurting someone else's feelings is possible. People have the right to refuse a request without feeling guilty. Remember that other people's problems are no more or less important than your own and that you are not required to solve all the world's problems. If you have personal obligations that conflict with requests by others, then diplomatically refuse to offer your support at that time. Do not let other people's comments generate feelings of guilt.

⁸¹ A Baldwin, J. D., and Baldwin, J. I. *Behavior Principles in Everyday Life*. Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1998

Setting and maintaining boundaries is difficult at first. However, with practice and experience, you will find it gets easier. Honing your skills will give you a sense of power and control over your life. It will increase your confidence, reduce stress and anxiety. It will also lead you to better relationships, which will improve your quality of life. As you say no to other people, you start to say yes to yourself.

Tips For Setting Boundaries

Personal boundaries are the limits and rules we set for ourselves within relationships. A person with healthy boundaries can say, “no” to others when they want to, but they are also comfortable opening themselves up to intimacy and close relationships.

- **Know your limits**

Before becoming involved in a situation, know what’s acceptable to you and what isn’t. It’s best to be as specific as possible, or you might be pulled into the trap of giving just a little bit more, over and over, until you’ve given far too much.

- **Know your values**

Every person’s limits are different, and their personal values often determine them. For example, if you value family above all else, this might lead to stricter limits on how late you will stay at work, away from family. Know what’s most important to you, and protect it.

- **Listen to your emotions**

If you notice feelings of discomfort or resentment, don’t bury them. Try to understand what your feelings are telling you. Resentment, for example, can often be traced to feelings of being taken advantage of.

- **Have self-respect**

If you always give in to others, ask if you are showing as much respect to yourself as you show to others. Boundaries that are too open might be due to misguided attempts to be liked by elevating other people’s needs above one’s own.

- **Have respect for others**

Be sure that your actions are not self-serving at the expense of others.

Interactions should not be about winning or taking as much as possible. Instead, consider what's fair to everyone, given the setting and relationship. You might "win," but at the cost of a relationship's long-term health.

- **Be assertive**

When you know it's time to set a boundary, don't be shy. Say "no" respectfully, but without ambiguity. If you can make a compromise while respecting your own boundaries, try it. This is a good way to soften the "no" while showing respect to everyone involved.

- **Consider the long view**

Some days you will give more than you take, and other days you will take more than you give. Be willing to take a longer view of relationships, when appropriate. But if you're always the one who's giving or taking, there might be a problem

Personal Human Rights

Setting Boundaries carries with it a set of personal human rights which are widely acknowledged by therapists, including Davis, Eshelman, and McKay (2002), and involve the following:

- 1) To say no and not feel guilty
- 2) To change your mind about anything
- 3) To take your time to form a response to a comment or question
- 4) To ask for assistance with instructions or directions
- 5) To ask for what you want
- 6) To experience and express your feelings
- 7) To feel positive about yourself under any conditions
- 8) To make mistakes without feeling embarrassed or guilty
- 9) To own your own opinions and convictions

10) To protest unfair treatment or criticism

11) To be recognized for your significant achievements and contributions

Remember why you are setting boundaries; it's to reduce your anxiety symptoms.

30. TAKE A NAP

It's 3:00 am. You're staring at the ceiling. It's all perfectly still and eerily quiet. But, your brain feels like you've got a thousand angry, trapped bees swarming in your head. There's no way you can drift off.

Sleep, as we all know, is absolutely vital for bodily repair, cognitive function, and anxiety. It's a no brainer. It's generally recommended to get eight hours of sleep a night. However, if you are suffering from anxiety, that's not something that comes so easily.

Your mind whirrs at night, you can't 'switch off,' and you're pleading with your brain to just give you a break, just for a few hours, please. You wake up in the morning, feeling grouchy. Maybe really early. You're irritable, sluggish, and very anxious.

Extended problems with sleep have been proven⁸² to increase our risk of heart disease, developing diabetes, having a reduced immune system and more importantly having a reduced cognitive function and more anxiety.

When you're suffering from anxiety, your adrenaline levels are constantly running higher than 'normal,' and you can forgive your body for not wanting to fall asleep when it thinks that it's in danger and needs to be moving pretty sharpish. But it's hard to feel the love when you're at 3:00 am and on the brink of tears.

To counteract this anxiety loop, it's worth looking at napping. Napping is nothing more than a brief sleep that helps recharge your brain and body. It can be done in just a short amount of time.

⁸² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6473877/>

Some people may argue that napping isn't good for you and that they only make your energy levels worse, but they're mistaken.

Are Naps Good For You?

Naps are absolutely good for you. One study⁸³ has demonstrated how napping can improve your mood, but it must be short!

Although they have a lot of negative stigmas, they are one of the most powerful tools when it comes to improving your mood. They also can increase productivity, intelligence, and overall health.

Benefits Of Napping:

- NASA performed a study⁸⁴ that proved 20 minutes of napping is more effective than 200mg of caffeine.
- And it also proved that a 40-minute nap increases your alertness by 100%.
- Napping for a little bit after lunchtime can help students study better and make workers make less errors at their job.
- Snaps (small naps), can also reduce the negative effects of anxiety.
- Napping can improve memory and boost brainpower⁸⁵, and if you have the time to take an hour to a 90-minute nap, your mental fatigue can disappear. When you take enough naps, your intelligence and creative ideas will come out. Just like your body, your brain needs its rest as well.
- It's going to make your emotions better regulated.
- It can also be healthy for you in terms of your heart and muscles. If you lack sleep, it can lead to excess cortisol, which can then lead to glucose intolerance and an increase in abdominal fat, which may trigger diabetes and heart disease.
- Increases your human growth hormone (HGH). The human growth hormone is an important hormone produced by your pituitary gland. It plays a key role

⁸³ https://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/indhealth/45/2/45_2_301/_article/-char/ja/

⁸⁴ <https://priceconomics.com/the-nasa-studies-on-napping/>

⁸⁵ <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/180304#1>

in growth, body composition, cell repair, metabolism, and it only releases when you're asleep.

- It improves your immune system, a vital service because chronic anxiety pushes it down. A thirty-minute nap can help reverse the impact on your hormones⁸⁶ of a poor night of sleep. This study explained, "Our data suggests a 30-minute nap can reverse the hormonal impact of a night of poor sleep," said one of the JCEM study's authors, Brice Faraut, Ph.D., of the Université Paris Descartes-Sorbonne Paris Cité in Paris, France. "This is the first study that found napping could restore biomarkers of neuroendocrine and immune health to normal levels."
- It lifts your spirits for anyone, no matter who you are or how old you are according to on study⁸⁷ This would explain how you put down a toddler for a nap, and their mood is suddenly better.

Sleep And Anxiety

It's a strange phenomenon that no expert has really clarified, and the question is this: is it that not enough sleep makes you anxious or that anxiety makes you not sleep? Which way round is it?

It can feel really scary when you suffer from anxiety, and you don't get enough sleep. Nothing gets better; it only gets worse. One study⁸⁸ showed that when you don't get enough sleep, you have a lot more activity in the areas of the brain that are associated with anxiety.

The study also warns that those who lack sleep are at a greater risk for developing an anxiety disorder because sleep deprivation makes you anticipate the worst, faster, and more often. It also suggests that those who are naturally more anxious and, therefore, more likely to develop a full-blown anxiety disorder are acutely vulnerable to the impact of insufficient sleep.

⁸⁶ https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2015-02/tes-nrh020615.php

⁸⁷ <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1365-2869.2008.00718.x#ss2>

⁸⁸ <https://news.berkeley.edu/2013/06/25/anticipate-the-worst/>

“These findings help us realize that those people who are anxious by nature are the same people who will suffer the greatest harm from sleep deprivation,” said Matthew Walker, a professor of psychology and neuroscience at UC Berkeley and senior author of the paper.

The results suggest that people suffering from such maladies as generalized anxiety disorder, panic attacks, and post-traumatic stress disorder may benefit substantially from sleep therapy.

“If sleep disruption is a key factor in anxiety disorders, as this study suggests, then it’s a potentially treatable target,” Walker said. “By restoring good quality sleep in people suffering from anxiety, we may be able to help ameliorate their excessive worry and disabling fearful expectations.”

“It’s been hard to tease out whether sleep loss is simply a by-product of anxiety, or whether sleep disruption causes anxiety,” said Andrea Goldstein, a UC Berkeley doctoral student in neuroscience and lead author of the study.

“This study helps us understand that causal relationship more clearly.”

Let’s Talk Napping

If you think napping is the lazy way to get through the day, it’s not. Napping has many health benefits, so let’s talk all things napping.

All these suggestions are your best-case scenario. If none of these can take place, literally falling asleep at your desk will work too.

- Pick a dark room. Blocking out the light will help you fall asleep quicker. If it’s not possible, get a sleep mask to give you artificial darkness.
- Get your temperature right. If it’s too hot or too cold, chances are you aren’t going to sleep very well, or you might have problems falling asleep. It’s recommended that the temperature is between 60-67°f.
- Keep a blanket or comfortable jacket handy in case you want to be a little warmer than your environment. For example, you may want to go to your car, and it’s a little cool.

- Grab some earplugs to close down the surrounding noise.
- Then again, you may find it impossible to sleep without some kind of white noise. In this case, install a white noise app on your phone or find a track on YouTube.

How Long To Nap?

Here are a few round figures when it comes to nap times:

2-5 minutes:

Effective nap time for when you are so tired you just can't continue doing what you're doing. This nano nap is great just to stop the world from going around for a few minutes. Sleepiness. Lay your head down in a safe place, set the timer and hope for the best.

5-20 minutes:

This optimal and recommended nap time frame is best for increasing your focus, stamina, and increasing alertness⁸⁹. A mini nap works best when you lay down flat.

20-50 minutes:

This is best when taken around midday, after food, and is the average nap time. This midday nap helps the brain get rid of information that's unnecessarily stored in your short-term memory⁹⁰. It also improves muscle memory and your ability to remember important facts. Great for before a test.

50-90 minutes:

The complete sleep cycle in just a short amount of time; this is a long nap that allows your body to reach REM sleep. Best for those who both physically and mentally tired as it gives your body the proper time needed to repair itself⁹¹.

For lots of people, naps are good. But for others, they can make you feel groggy. Studies have shown⁹² that you should not nap for more than 20 minutes at a time

⁸⁹ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/20078758-motor-skill-learning-and-performance-a-review-of-influential-factors/>

⁹⁰ <https://www.simplypsychology.org/short-term-memory.html>

⁹¹ <https://www.webmd.com/beauty/features/beauty-sleep#1>

⁹² <https://psychcentral.com/blog/the-art-of-taking-a-nap-the-right-way/>

because it can put you into REM sleep, which isn't the best for feeling refreshed. If you prefer, you can cut it down to about 10-12 minutes, but it might not make you feel rested enough. It all depends on what your body needs.

31. MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is the art of living in the present moment. It's where you learn, not only to observe your thoughts but also to observe yourself observing your thoughts.

The bottom line is that research⁹³ has shown that mindfulness helps to reduce anxiety. It teaches us how to respond to anxiety with an awareness of what is happening in the present moment, rather than simply acting instinctively, unaware of what emotions or motives may be driving that decision. By having awareness for your physical and mental state at the moment, mindfulness allows for a more flexible reaction to a difficult situation. A mindful person reflects rather than reacts.

It's a process that leads to a mental state characterized by a non-judgmental awareness of what's happening in the present moment. For example, sensations, thoughts, bodily states, and the environment. It helps us to distance ourselves from our thoughts and feelings without judging them as good or bad.

How Mindfulness Works

If you focus your attention on the present moment, you will counteract obsessive thinking and worrying. Worrying about the future and obsessing about the past are generally flawed thinking processes. Of course, it is important to learn from your past and plan for the future. However, when you spend too much time outside of the present moment, you can get very anxious. In such cases, mindfulness can be an important tool to help you better focus on the present moment.

Mindfulness works in several ways. It encourages you to open up and accept your emotional state so that you are better able to identify and process your emotions. It also encourages you to see things from a different perspective.

⁹³ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/20350028-the-effect-of-mindfulness-based-therapy-on-anxiety-and-depression-a-meta-analytic-review/>

If someone snaps at you, for example, you might blame yourself and worry that you've done something to upset them. But by distancing yourself from your immediate response of being hurt, you might recall that person saying they had a hard day at work, and perhaps they snapped at you because they were tired and anxious themselves.

This different perspective might alleviate some of your anxiety and negative feelings.

Benefits Of Mindfulness

The practice of mindfulness has been around for thousands of years, but it's now being recognized as a powerful tool to change the wiring and the makeup of our brains.

- **Mindfulness Reduces Anxiety.** Mindfulness is probably the most revered alternative treatment for anxiety. One study in 2013⁹⁴ that took place over eight weeks demonstrated that mindfulness significantly reduced anxiety. Significantly.
- **Mindfulness heals the body.** A further study⁹⁵, including over 3,500 adults, showed that it lives up to its reputation for anxiety reduction associated with poor physical health. Normally, anxiety causes increased levels of the stress hormone cortisol, which produces inflammation-promoting chemicals called cytokines. They can disrupt sleep, promote anxiety, increase blood pressure, and contribute to fatigue and foggy thinking. In one eight-week study⁹⁶, mindfulness reduced the inflammation response caused by anxiety. It can also improve symptoms of any anxiety-related, including irritable bowel syndrome, post-traumatic stress disorder, and fibromyalgia.

⁹⁴ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/23541163-randomized-controlled-trial-of-mindfulness-meditation-for-generalized-anxiety-disorder-effects-on-anxiety-and-stress-reactivity/>

⁹⁵ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24395196-meditation-programs-for-psychological-stress-and-well-being-a-systematic-review-and-meta-analysis/>

⁹⁶ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0889159112004758>

- **Mindfulness May Prevent Depression.** Depression and anxiety are close cousins, and it's good to know there's one approach that can help both disorders. Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) helps when dealing with a lot of negative thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about yourself. It helps you to recognize that it's happening and engage with it differently and respond to it with compassion. One study⁹⁷ showed MBCT helped a recurrence of depression to be as effective as antidepressant medication. That is big news!
- **Mindfulness Boosts Brain Power.** Some researchers are finding that even short mindfulness training may improve cognitive abilities. In one 2010 study published in 2010,⁹⁸ researchers assigned 24 people to receive only four sessions of mindfulness training. The results showed that their mood lifted, and they had reduced fatigue and anxiety and increased mindfulness. Moreover, their visuospatial processing, working memory, and executive functioning were considerably improved.

Researchers concluded that the findings suggested that only four days of meditation training could enhance the ability to sustain attention and boost brainpower.

How To Practice Mindfulness

This mindful meditation is ten minutes long, and if nothing else, this is the meditation to do every day. By bringing this meditation into your daily routine, you will begin to feel profound changes within a few days.

The best way to personalize this meditation is to read the script off the page and into a phone, PC, or other recording devices. Your own voice is the one your mind accepts the best. Make sure you're in a quiet, still frame of mind when you record it. In the script, there are dots to indicate a pause of approximately one second. Music is not necessary to accompany these meditations.

⁹⁷ [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(14\)62222-4/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(14)62222-4/fulltext)

⁹⁸ <https://www.journals.elsevier.com/consciousness-and-cognition>

How often should I meditate?

It's recommended to practice two meditations a day to reduce anxiety fast, perhaps one in the morning and one in the evening. Each meditation is ten minutes long, but if you wanted to meditate for longer, you could re-record the meditation inserting longer pauses to ensure you are getting the most fulfilling experience each time you settle down to meditate.

What if I can't?

The meditations are there to give you the time to be . . . well, you. Can you take the time to be yourself? It's hard to find the time to be you because you may be too busy trying not to be you! This is why you have to make the space available. This is 'the work' that helps us beat anxiety fast. If you can't make the time, then you could sleep ten minutes less each night to practice the meditations; they are the foundation of your recovery from anxiety.

Where should I meditate?

It's important to feel comfortable, safe, and undisturbed. Can you make the space to meditate where you won't be interrupted, and you can relax? Being relaxed, comfortable, warm, and safe will help you to focus on each meditation so that you can allow the power of each meditation to seep into your soul and nourish you from within.

You can lie down or sit down; it's up to you. You can close your eyes or keep them open, whatever feels more comfortable. The idea is to be awake, but if you fall asleep, that's not a problem, and what it tells you is that you have a sleep debt. Once you wake up, if you have time, return to the meditation.

A note on thoughts while meditating:

One thing to note is that our minds want to travel. They love to be active and will play a huge part in this meditation. This is normal, and the key is not to fight the

mind. If you find thoughts are dominating you, try to be kind to yourself and not criticize yourself.

No one starts meditating with a still mind. Everyone experiences lots of thoughts. Sometimes the thoughts are completely manic. This is normal. The way to manage them is simply to let them go – let them float away – like a cloud in the sky floating past you. Once you notice you are having thoughts, simply bring your attention back to your breath.

Peace happens when you accept your thoughts as part of the meditation. If you try to stop them, then they become all-powerful, and you won't feel the peace. If you allow the thoughts to be just as they are, you are no longer dominated by them.

Mindfulness Meditation For Anxiety

Get yourself into a comfortable position lying down on a bed or a blanket. Make sure you are undisturbed and warm. If you prefer to sit up, then make sure you are sitting on a chair with a back that can support you and with your feet firmly on the floor. If you practice yoga and you want to sit in the lotus position, that is also fine as long as you can support your back.

Close your eyes and take a large breath in and slowly let it out . . . breathe in again and slowly let it out, which will instantly decrease anxiety levels.

Now bring your awareness to your body . . . and get a sense of where your body is lying or sitting on the bed or chair. Allow yourself to explore the places where physical contact is made with your body. Feel a connection to the solid structures that you are sitting or lying on . . . And now, focus your attention on your feet as if two pairs of hands are touching your feet on either side. Feel the sensations and the warmth on your feet while these invisible hands are caressing them . . . Feel every part of your feet as the warmth from the hands caresses your soles and your toes and the tops of your feet and the heels and ankles . . . Now bring your attention up to your calves and become aware of the hands caressing each calf . . . Now bring your awareness to the shins and feel the hands caressing these parts of your

legs Now bring your attention to your knees and thighs and imagine the two pairs of hands holding the tops of your legs and feel the warmth flooding through this part of your body And bring your awareness now to your abdomen and feel the hands being placed on either side of your abdomen and feel the warmth flooding through you And now bring your attention to your chest area and feel the two pairs of hands holding your chest area one in the front and one in the back and become aware of the physical sensations in your chest and around it as the warmth travels through your body And now feel the sensations as hands move up to your shoulders, and you feel a pair of hands warming each shoulder And now feel the sensation of the hands going down your left arm all the way to the fingertips. . . .And now the hands are moving down your right arm warming it up as they move down to the fingertips And now feel the physical sensation of both sets of hands moving from your neck up to the top of your head and encasing the whole of your head with warmth as they caress it.

Now bring your attention to your breath And notice the pattern of your breath as it moves in and down into the abdomen and up and out through the nose Just be aware of the physical sensations that take place while you become aware of your breath As you stay with your breath, your mind may wander on thought but just let the thought disappear like a cloud moving along the sky And gently bring your attention back to your breath and become aware of your breath going into the abdomen and out through your nose. . . .Observe each breath at a time. . . .You can notice that right at this moment you can accept the way it is. . . .And as thoughts return be kind to them and let them go and bring your attention back to your breath Knowing that right at this moment everything is the way it's meant to be Your body, your breath, your thoughts are all as they are meant to be And allow yourself to accept this moment and to surrender to this moment Allowing the breath to be just as it is.

Following this meditation twice a day for one week will reduce your anxiety symptoms. It certainly takes a leap of faith to get started, but the results will be quite extraordinary.

Jane, 32, says:

"Before I was diagnosed with anxiety a decade ago, I genuinely believed everyone woke up with a sinking feeling in the pit of their stomach every day. I'd heard people speak of anxiety, so I thought it was normal, but now I know that being anxious and having an anxiety disorder that requires medical attention are two different things. Anxiety is a normal feeling in the body, like happiness, sadness, or jealousy. There's a big distinction between anxiety and anxiety disorders.

It was especially bad in the morning because I struggled to deal with the day ahead. Waking up meant I had to organize my day to ensure I didn't miss anything. I also had to be careful not to say anything that would make me obsess all night. I went through the tasks in my head over and over again. If I were doing something new or unusual that day, I'd wake up too early with anxiety. I'm talking 4:30 AM! Everything new made me scared, especially when it centered around people or expectations I had to fulfill. Talking on the phone felt awful, and socializing was practically impossible.

At that time, I was an influencer, leading a London based fashion blogging group. That meant socializing with many other bloggers and going to lots of events. It was a nightmare, and I'd sometimes prepare for an event week in advance. I found it easier to chat with a wine glass in my hand and sometimes would inadvertently have one too many drinks to try and drown out the anxiety, and that caused more problems.

During a particularly tough time, when I was having family issues, I woke up every day for months when I couldn't catch my breath. I had to get help immediately and ended up seeing a psychologist who recommended I look at mindfulness. I thought she was crazy; how could a meditation help?? But at that time, I had to stop throughout the day to breathe. And sometimes I couldn't. I was living in a state of panic 24/7 - like having one long, non-stop panic attack.

So what helps me? Meditation. I had to go for broke, so I signed up for a week's retreat to learn mindfulness meditation. For seven days straight, I learned from a teacher who - to this day - is the most patient person I've ever met. I had questions like: What is this? What is this place? What am I doing? How does this work? With no escape from my thoughts, the meditation practice initially amplified my anxiety. Then something interesting happened; I started noticing my negative self-talk. The stories I was telling myself for so long 'I can't cope,' 'I'm an idiot,' or 'I'm going to mess up everything I do.' Through meditation, I started to be able to shine a light on, 'oh, this is how my mind talks to me. But, (a big BUT) It's not the truth. For me, that first meditation retreat was transformative, and I was given tools to process my emotions. And that brought down my anxiety. I had been in a really bad place, multiple panic attacks, not knowing what to do about them, and it was really impacting my life. But now I have a regular practice, and it's brought me peace. I no longer experience panic attacks, even in moments of high anxiety. It's not just about relaxing or getting centered, which I can find through exercise, it's also the insight into, well, where is this coming from? What is at the bottom of it. It's this path to clarity, self-love, and awareness, and I think that's the best promise of mindfulness."

32. LEARNING TO FORGIVE YOUR INNER CHILD

Meet Your Anxious Inner Child

Imagine, you walk into the kitchen, and there is a small girl in distress. She's fidgeting, maybe biting her nails, pacing, washing her hands, or scrolling through a phone. She looks up at you with wide eyes and an open mouth. You stare at her from the doorway, trying to make sense of what's going on. She ignores you and

goes back to what she was doing. She starts rubbing her hands together or doubling up in pain. You watch and wait to see what she'll do next.

She begins to move rapidly around the kitchen, muttering things like:

"I can't go to the meeting."

"I'm going to get fired."

"Everyone will think I'm an idiot."

"They'll see me go red."

"I can't cope."

"How can I stay on my own?"

"No one likes me."

"No point in going out to the party."

"I hate me, what's the point?"

"Why does life feel so difficult."

"What's wrong with me?"

"What can I do to manage this situation?"

"Or change it?"

"Am I good enough?"

"Can I get out of this?"

"I'm going to be so nervous I'm going to lose my shit."

"They're going to know I'm a fraud."

You're not quite sure how to handle this situation because it's not one you've come across before. Nevertheless, you have options. You could take her to the doctor for some anti-anxiety drugs. You could book her in for a session of CBT. You could try to calm her down by talking through each problem she thinks she has and explains how she could see it differently.

Or....you could love her.

Who Is This Child?

That child is us, our heartbeat. It holds all our emotions. It's the free, curious, and joyful part of us. It's a very real part of us that believes in and offers love. If we look around at children at play, they are laughing, shouting, exploring, and screaming with delight.

They love being with other children and take great pleasure in having fun. They have a natural sense of justice, a desire to grow, and learn, and they want to be loved. They trust implicitly that everything's OK. They have a joy in the wonder of being alive.

This child in us also carries our pain, stores our anger, and carries our anxiety. This is how our anxiety manifests; it lives in the deeper part of us, the part we may have been unable to access or even know about. It's so deep, and we can't catch it, control it, or even slap a label on it. But it lies in the deep caverns of our inner child, and, if we don't claim this child, those deep anxieties will stay lodged within our core. Sometimes, all it takes is something small to trigger the old anxieties. Many of us are frightened by the thought of uncovering this soft and vulnerable part of us, this inner child because we've never healed the part of us that suffered some previous trauma. This trauma may have taken place as an adult, but the way we handled it is rooted in our childhood.

We also can't bear hearing the words 'inner child' because it makes some of us cringe and run for cover. We can't bear the thought of acknowledging it, as if claiming our inner child and our emotional world will make us feeble and pathetic.

We are ashamed because it is childlike. It's where we store our secrets, the things we would never tell anyone else, and the habits we carry out which, if anyone else were to see, we would die of embarrassment. It's the seat of our deep longings that society has tried to shame us for having: sexuality, the need for intimacy, hunger for affection, being touched, or nurtured.

However, this inner child is our emotional heartbeat, and if we want to heal our whole life, we have to start with this tender part of us that so badly needs our love and compassion. We begin by understanding why this loving human being feels so vulnerable and why they are fearful and anxious; something has happened to prevent them from being fully alive and able to express themselves.

Let's first understand why it's so vital to get our emotional health right and, if it's not healthy, how it turns into anxiety.

Why Our Emotional Health Matters

Many of us have been raised to believe that having emotions makes us pathetic, and we were told over and over again, 'stop being so emotional.' Instead, we were encouraged to 'think' rather than 'feel.' Thinking and being rational are very much lauded in our Western culture as a model for 'strength,' in contrast to being emotional, which is seen as 'weak.'

However, emotions are energetic and need to be expressed. They are present in our psyche before we're even aware of them. They are a way of expressing ourselves to the world when we have a basic need. If we feel curious, we express it on our face before we can voice it.

Have you ever seen a tiny child who sees a spider for the first time? Its eyes become wide, and it stares at the spider, only looking up to the parent to see if this is something to be scared of. If the parent signals it's OK, the child will look back to the spider and may even move closer to it. If the parent signals the spider is a threat, the child may back away and express that through moving the head backward.

We grow older and, if we're lucky, we're encouraged to express our basic emotions fully:

- Curiosity
- Anger
- Joy
- Sadness
- Surprise
- Fear.

What often happens, sadly, is we are encouraged to express the positive ones, i.e., curiosity, joy and surprise but not so much the 'negative' ones, i.e., anger, sadness,

and fear. The problem is that when we repress the more 'negative' emotions, we also repress the 'positive' emotions. In fact, we repress everything.

The inability to express ourselves leads to issues of a different nature because it blocks our growth in a way that's unhelpful to our mental health. Repressed emotions become a burden and affect our decision making. If we block out an upset and don't share how we feel about it, the accompanying emotions stay in us.

The world of psychology suggests that when emotional energy is blocked, and the upset is not shared, our minds become less capable. According to various studies, including one published in Science Direct⁹⁹, suppressing emotions is linked to poor physical health. If we avoid sharing how we feel about a confrontation, for example, we hold onto resentment.

Over time the mind is diminished because the blockage becomes more intense every time another upset happens. Each new, distressing experience becomes disproportionate to what's actually going on because we always relate to the one big thing that originally upset us.

If we have a series of upsetting incidents throughout our lives, and we haven't had the opportunity to express the feelings attached to them, the emotional energy is frozen, and many of us, as adults, are unable to identify any emotions at all. We may have taken on-board the 'no feel' rule that dominates so many families. Some families may also have a 'no talk' rule where any discussion of emotions was not allowed.

How Repressed Emotion Turns Into Anxiety

There's a 10-year-old boy gaming on the TV when his angry father comes in and switches the TV off. The boy is enraged but, seeing the anger in his father's eyes, says nothing. He doesn't want to get the sharp end of his tongue. He gets up and walks out of the room. What's happened to his rage? He hasn't said anything for fear of the consequences. Instead, he pushes it down inside him.

⁹⁹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3939772/>

If he's done that once, he's probably done it a million times. The rage never goes away; it's just hidden away. Probably along with lots of other rages. There could be a whole heap of them buried inside him. Instead of letting out his rage and cleansing himself of the fury, letting it go and then settling down again, the boy has learned to avoid it.

Then We Were Grown Up

The highest cost of repressing our emotions is anxiety, amongst other mental health issues.¹⁰⁰ Once we reach adulthood, other costs include neurotic tendencies, compulsive behaviors, and addictions. We've all been there! We're so anxious we've had to have a drink or smoke, binge watch TV, shop, eat junk food, scroll social media or find some other distraction as if we're trying to run away from ourselves. It takes a lot of energy to keep these emotions repressed. If we think of all the unexpressed hurts and furies, we've buried deep inside, unable to let them out, and then we banged a dustbin lid down on top of them.

The unhealed accumulation of unresolved upsets fester, and they mute our positive experiences. They can also affect our relationships as we can't bear to let anyone see inside of us. Imagine if someone were to open that dustbin lid and look inside? What would they find? It's too scary. Hence the phrase 'keep a lid on it.'

As adults, that control mechanism turns into anxiety. The fear of being out of control has turned into a kind of madness, and we don't trust the world to be safe. In fact, we never did.

Learning To Love Through Self-forgiveness

The soulful way through is to re-connect with that frightened inner child.

One simple way to do this is through self-forgiveness, just as we would do for that child who we saw in the kitchen, anxious and scared. You can just feel her anxiety bully throwing out those harsh messages: What's wrong with me? I can't cope. I hate myself. No matter how hard we try, it can feel almost impossible to simply

¹⁰⁰ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0005796709000527?via%3Dihub>

knock these thoughts out of our heads. Instead, we learn to forgive ourselves because our inner child is paralyzed by fear.

The first thing we forgive is how much we hate ourselves because the truth is that all we have been trying to do is survive. None of us has been trying to be anxious. We didn't choose to practise self-hate. No, we have tried to feel better, safer, and more confident. We've just allowed the anxiety bully to rule us, harm us, and intimidate us.

Try saying this out loud:

You are forgiven for simply trying to survive life.

Here are some things to consider forgiving ourselves for:

Trying our best to stop being anxious

Trying hard to control anxiety

Punishing ourselves when we get it wrong

Trying our best to please others

Trying so hard to get right

Feeling like we're letting everyone down

Beating ourselves up for saying the wrong thing

Harming ourselves mentally when we don't deliver

Setting goals that were too high for us

Trying to be the person we're not

Turning to distractions that have not helped like alcohol, drugs, food, etc.

As we let go of trying to be perfect, self-trust will grow, and we'll gain the belief that we can recover from chronic anxiety. One perfect way to start this journey is to write a letter.

A Letter of Self-Forgiveness

Since the 1970s, studies have shown that emotional writing can have a beneficial effect when we put our experiences into words. This is because keeping secrets can be damaging, and, according to this study¹⁰¹, getting the contents of our emotional world out of us and onto paper can result in life-changing alterations in mood, especially for people with anxiety.

Before you begin your letter of self-forgiveness, imagine your anxious self trying to do everything right. If you can't see that younger part of yourself, find a photograph which will help you to understand the part of you which is suffering. Put aside 20 minutes in a quiet and safe place to write your letter.

Start your letter: Dear... and add your name.

Then begin writing the letter.

You may want to start with a paragraph explaining why you are writing the letter.

You may want to describe how you see your inner child trying valiantly to get it right. However, you may just want to get stuck into forgiving yourself.

You can write it as a list or simply let the words drop out of you.

There is no right or wrong, just what feels right for you.

Remember, no one will ever see this letter, and you can be heartfelt and honest.

You may want to write just one letter, but you can write many letters.

There are no rules; simply follow your heart.

Write with love for that part of you that has been trying so hard to get it right.

No one will ever see this letter.

¹⁰¹ RESEARCH ON WRITING APPROACHES IN MENTAL HEALTH EDITED BY LUCIANO L'ABATE, LAURA G. SWEENEY

When we write from our hearts, to begin with, it may invoke feelings of sadness. This is quite normal. It's generally short-term lasting only one or two hours, like when we see a movie that makes us feel a bit sad, but also a bit wiser. Being aware of this is really important. This sadness comes about because we've acknowledged our suffering. After one or two hours, we will feel closer to ourselves, marking a powerful and positive start to the journey.

This is a letter that Jenny, 52, wrote when her anxiety had almost beaten her. Forgiveness is beautiful and heartfelt.

"Dear Jen. I know you've been trying so long and so hard to control your anxiety and you feel like a failure because it hasn't worked. I want you to know that I am very aware of how hard you try. But maybe it's time to stop trying so hard. Because you know it hasn't worked out and you just get more and more anxious. I can see you're anxious about being anxious, and sometimes you forget why you were anxious in the first place. I know you've been trying your best, it's not like you've been trying to be anxious. I'm here to help now, and it's time to stop. Please let's stop harming ourselves. Let's stop trying to change things we can't change. Let's stop trying to make things different when we can't. You have done an amazing job of trying really hard. You have nothing to be ashamed of because you've done your best. We're going to try a different way so you can take a rest, knowing that things are going to get better. You can relax because now there are two of us here to get to the bottom of your problems. Just for the moment, I would like you to stop trying to get it right. You are right, just as you are. It's time to think of another strategy, and, together, we can make it work. I love you, Jen, and I'm here for you."

When you've written your letter, sit quietly and let whatever feelings you have come up.

Please remember you may feel sad, and this is both normal and healing. Repressed emotions may surface, and this is a great way of setting them free. Little by little, feel each one as you forgive yourself for having kept them pushed down. There's no shame in having suppressed them, and it was not your fault. If you feel the need for some extra support while you allow this healing journey to take place, there's a list of appropriate sources for you to consider at the end of the book.

You can tuck the letter away, dispose of it, or even read it aloud to someone you trust.

Self-forgiveness is a process that lasts our whole lifetime. We're so familiar with the story we tell ourselves about how 'bad' we are or how 'useless' we are; we've almost become hardened to the myth that we're bad people. Feeling guilty about things we think we've done might stop us from doing things to others in the short term but, long-term, the self-hate, and blame only leads to increased anxiety.

Do we really want to live our lives with the belief that there's a looming hammer over our heads waiting to drop on us at any moment? We can't punish ourselves anymore. We are good people, and we've done nothing wrong. When we learn to forgive ourselves daily, we release that throbbing worry.

By holding ourselves with the compassion of forgiveness, we learn to see our innate goodness.

Who Wrote The Letter?

It's interesting when we write a letter like this because we are writing to someone, but we are also writing from someone. Who is this person we are writing from? Our inner parent.

Our parent is the grown-up part of us. It's the loving and nurturing bit that is the center of our inner wisdom and knowledge. It's the problem-solving part of us that can gently and lovingly guide our inner child. It protects our inner child by signaling things that need addressing, and it helps to keep us safe.

By using our inner parent, we can learn to accept and nurture ourselves. It can help us to leave behind the past and begin to love ourselves unconditionally. Becoming in

tune with this part of us gives us a second chance to live fully through nurture and self-forgiveness.

We can tune into the parent and become aware of how to avoid re-creating relationships and situations which have harmed us in the past. The inner parent has the power to allow the inner child to be alive, spontaneous, and free.

If we tune into our inner wisdom through this parent figure, we can learn to heal our broken selves and come out of isolation. Learning to connect the parent and child healthily also improves our relationships with other people. It can be a beacon of light to guide us through life's storms.

However, the parent can often be a harsh voice, continually criticizing us like the anxiety bully. It's white noise in the back of the head, gnawing away with mean jabber. When we talk about this anxiety bully, we're actually referring to a voice that comes from deep within our subconscious brain. It's a running dialogue that reflects the dark side of our childhood or any stressful experiences we went through, such as being routinely criticized, ignored, or dismissed.

Parents who raise children in this way usually have their own negative parent to deal with, which results in self-hatred, constant self-criticism, or chronic low self-esteem. After experiencing that style of parenting, it's hard not to take on board the same style of self-talk for ourselves.

We can hear it as the little voice in our head or on our shoulders telling us about us and how the world sees us. It gives updates all day long like 'see, I told you so, you're rubbish' and we take these on board as being real.

However, these messages are from the past and are out of date. They prove that this is where our anxiety comes from: the anxiety bully. For any of us who suffer from chronic anxiety, this is the root of it. However, we can recover our self-respect by challenging this voice.

33. DIVIDE INTO THREE

When you're very anxious, your head's buzzing with voices; voices that tell you lots of different things that sometimes make sense but, often, don't.

That inner buzz of white noise only adds to your anxiety with statements like:

- you're useless
- you're no good at anything
- you've always been a failure etc.

Have you ever stopped to ask yourself: who's that voice I'm hearing?

We are all made up of different voices because you'll have noticed another voice which says:

- Why are you so mean?
- Leave me alone
- I hate you

There's also a third voice which gives the reassurance:

- It's going to be OK
- Don't let them get to you
- You've got through this situation before

If you don't understand these different components of you, it can feel as if you're 'losing the plot.' With voices spinning around your head flagging up differing values, principles, ethics, 'right and wrong' agenda, suppressed feelings, opinions, beliefs, hidden agendas, plans, schedules, motivations, competitions to win, struggles to maintain, lies to cover up and judgments to be made, even someone without anxiety can feel out of control pretty quickly.

So here's a tool, based on Transactional analysis therapy (TA), that is accessible to everyone: 'Divide Into Three.'

What's Transactional Analysis Therapy (TA)?

TA is a practical approach to therapy to help create changes in your relationships and your life. It's completely focused on the ways you relate, whether that is at work, home, or in your love life.

It doesn't spend hours looking at your past to find answers to your problems, but believes that it is your social interactions, in the present moment, have a powerful impact on your sense of self and your emotional well being. TA sees each social interaction as a 'game,' and by learning to understand and control this game, you can change the ways you think, feel, and act, leaving you to live by a new 'script.'

TA has been studied¹⁰² as a technique to help people overcome anxiety to much acclaim. The most exciting outcome is that it helps you to feel in charge of your own life again. The model 'Divide Into Three' is my simple way of using TA for people who suffer from anxiety.

Divide Into Three

'At the innermost core of all loneliness is a deep and powerful yearning for union with one's lost self.' Brendan Francis

Identifying some of the messages that gallop through your mind is the first step to 'Divide Into Three.' Dividing into three is about listening to the messages in your head, the judgments on your shoulder, and the feeling in your stomach. It is about understanding that how you talk to yourself makes you behave and feel the way you do.

This tool grabs the essence of your thoughts and feelings and evaluates them to determine which part of you is the directive and which part is the respondent. You will begin to see how you are controlled and, after some practice, you will find you have many more choices than you thought you had. When you are chronically anxious, you feel you have no choices, and this might make you feel hopeless.

¹⁰² <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0531513106000045>

It helps you hear what's being said internally, how it affects you, and what the correcting course of action is. It can be hard work, but when your spirit is in the ditch, and you have tried everything else to make yourself feel better, you have no choice but to take the risk. It will provide you with lifelong opportunities to change your outlook and reduce your anxiety.

To begin to divide into three, you have to make a distinction between the three parts of you:

- I. Adult
- II. Parent
- III. Child

THE ADULT

The adult sits in your brain and is the wise part of you that can give you information about what is best for you without judgment or criticism. It has no emotions attached to it; it is purely objective.

The best way to identify this part of you is to think about a scenario that is going on with someone you are not close to. Take an objective view about what you think is right for them. Have an overview of their situation and get a non-judging response together in case you are called up for your opinion. This is the 'intellect.' It is the sage, the wisdom, or the higher self that you can develop to help you through times of decision.

The voice will get stronger the more you listen. It is that little murmur you often ignore, which is letting you know which direction to take. This voice sits in the brain rather than in the heart. It is the seat of all your knowledge. The adult is a direct link to our Higher Self. It transcends emotion, and you can start to lean on the wisdom it has to offer as a beacon through your dark times.

The adult has only your good at heart and would never give any advice that would harm you. It attempts to communicate with you at any given opportunity, but this

only comes in quietness – and when you're anxious, you're reluctant to stop 'doing' or 'thinking.' The adult strives to create wholeness in you that will serve to bring together you fractured parts.

THE PARENT

Your parent sits on your middle torso and often on your shoulders. This is the part of you that shows judgment and can be helpful or unhelpful. You need to judge things that go on around you; you need to assess what is happening and then make conscious decisions for yourself. The parent, like the adult, contains no emotion, although the way it addresses you can be loving or critical. It works logically based on the map that was formed in the past.

However, the negative parent can often be harsh in its criticism, and the severity of the criticism directly depends on how you were criticized as a child. You can hear it as the little voice in your head or on your shoulders that tells you about yourself. It will say how the world sees you and may give a regular 'See, I told you so' to reaffirm harsh condemnation that you were given in childhood. However, these messages are way out of date.

Another way of identifying a negative parent is to become aware of how you view others. If you think of someone you know and picture what you think of them, you are using the parent. It is important to be aware of what those thoughts are because how you view others is generally how you view yourself. You can only see the world as a reflection of yourself, and it's a good guide to understanding how you are to others. You need to have this parent inside you, but you have to change it so that it becomes a softer parent who makes assessments and guides you with a firm but gentle voice.

I was in a waiting room and a man was talking to his three-year-old daughter, who refused to put on her coat as they left the doctor's office. He bent down and talked to her at her level. He then said, 'We have to put on your coat because it's very cold outside; now shall we do this firmly or gently?' After a whole minute, during which the man just sat, the little girl said, 'Gently' and held out her arms. This is the touch we need to give to ourselves. We took on the script that our parents fed us whether we wanted to or not. As children, we had no choice. But as adults, we can change

the way we talk to ourselves because we now have the power to do this for ourselves.

The first step is just to recognize this 'parent.' Whether it is a loving voice or a horrible voice, for the moment, don't try to change it. This voice is your 'ruler' for better or worse. It is the voice that judges you – for good or bad. This voice is the intermediary between your 'adult' and your 'child.' It is not always rational – indeed, it may never be rational. It is a mirror of your parents' authority. This may be to your good, but if you have become very anxious, then the chances are this parental voice needs some adjustment.

You need the parent inside you to become a good judge. You need to make judgments on the world to protect you. People who have well-developed judges trust themselves when dealing with others. They are relaxed in others' company because they don't feel threatened. This is how to develop the parent in you – to become a good judge of yourself and others.

THE CHILD

The child is your feelings or emotions. This is the part of you that cries laughs, feels joy, anger, frustration, jealousy, rage, and pain. Your child will live in your torso, which extends from your ribcage to the bottom of your stomach. Different parts of your torso may hold different feelings. Fear often lives in the top of the stomach or the ribcage; joy often lives in the bottom of your stomach.

The state your child is in is dependent on the relationship between your adult and parent. If you are anxious, it's because your child has had no voice or good parenting for some time, maybe never. Inside many people with anxiety disorders lives a traumatized child. This is a child who has had to withhold the possibility of joy because it feels dangerous to need love or want contact with others. Children who have been neglected or abused will not trust adults; similarly, your child will not trust your own parent for care and guidance, and You respond to the world like a child who has been let loose.

Conversely, if You begin to develop your parent self, using these methods, You will better access your adult self to give you the wisdom you need to take care of

yourself. Your Child self will feel less isolated and will trust a little more. Learning to talk to yourself is the fastest route towards building self-trust and, although it is difficult in the beginning, You must persevere. Once you've learned to do this, you will have a skill that will keep you moving forwards toward reducing your anxious symptoms.

LEARNING TO TALK TO YOURSELF

Learning to talk to yourself is the basis on which you can move forward and away from your anxious state. It really works, so please just have some faith for the moment, and, in time, you will see how this will help you to reduce your anxiety. How? Once you begin this practice, you will easily identify the different parts of yourself, and you will pinpoint the voices that are creating your anxiety.

To illustrate the power of talking to yourself, take a moment out, and relax. Recognize something that is a big worry in your life. Think about the worry and recognize the negative feeling that you have in your child self. Sit with this feeling for a moment. Next, from your adult self, find the antidote that would make your worries go away. Now, imagine that the antidote has been put into place. Really, really believe that it has happened, and whatever was worrying you isn't there anymore. Now feel the difference in your child self.

This shows how powerful thoughts can be and how much they dominate you. The exciting discovery is that you can change the thoughts that affect the way you feel. It really is this simple. You have the power within you to succeed, whether you believe it or not. The difficult part is breaking old habits that have been with you for a long time. The habits are often lifelong. But they can be changed.

Examples Of Child And Adult Talk

Here are some examples of problems the child experiences and the responses that the wise adult offers. It may help to write yours down:

Child: I am afraid that people are judging me when I get to the school gates.

Adult: That thought stems from way back when you were a child, and you felt judged every day. That may have happened then, but it is not happening now; in fact, you have no evidence that people are judging you. You imagine a completely outdated scenario and it is time to look at the actuality. They are probably more concerned with judging themselves and what others think of them. When has anyone ever made it clear that they are judging you? Having said that, if someone does judge you, it says more about their insecurity in your company than it says about you. It's time to brush that thought away.

Child: I am scared of losing my home and living in a cardboard box.

Adult: I understand that you feel that way, but that thinking is the power of your invention. No matter how tight things have been financially between us, we have always found the resources to ensure our home and bills have been paid for. You have had that fear for about twenty years, and at no point has it ever come true. You are scaremongering, and you have to put that thought away because there is no evidence to support your belief.

Child: I will never feel anything but hopeless.

Adult: I can feel the hopelessness in you, and I appreciate that it is very depressing. However, you have felt this way before, and it has passed. You have come away from feeling hopeless and, let's look at the evidence that you have actually touched on joy. It feels more familiar for you to stay feeling hopeless because it's been with you, on and off, since you can remember. But this is not your natural state, and you will move away from it again. Just be patient and, remember, this too will pass.

You can now start to see the child part of you as an actual child because, emotionally, this is how you really are.

Many of us still react to the world in a childlike manner, especially if we are anxious. To understand this, imagine yourself today with a small child by your side. Every time you need to respond or deal with someone, this child is responding on your

behalf. If you are anxious, this part of you will not be equipped to deal with the world in an adult way.

Because a child cannot cope with the adult world, he will act in a way that may seem strange to others. You can see this all around you. People may act like bullies, buffoons, teenagers, or 'high school prom queens' to cope with the adult world for which they are not equipped. My way of dealing with the world when I felt like a child without a parent was to pretend I had somewhere else to go and pretending to look busy, therefore minimizing any rejection I might get from others. If you appear as an adult to others, it is common to feel like a fraud. Or feel the 'imposter syndrome.'

The maturity and happiness of your child is paramount to beating your anxiety. Take some time out to imagine this part of you. How old is your child? Is he happy or sad? Is she afraid or confident? What is he wearing? What facade is she presenting? Ask yourself these questions, and you will gain insight into your soul. Once you have begun to get a glimpse of this Child, you can start to mobilize the adult and loving parent to help him grow up.

If you are anxious, it is because you are stuck. You need to learn to re-parent yourself with trust, humor, and love. This is why some people seek other people's help; they are not sure what is 'normal.' When they go for therapy, they are paying for a 'parent' figure to teach them how to re-parent them. This is why it is so important to find a good therapist so that you do not damage yourself further.

Get into the habit of talking to yourself as you would like to have been talked to as a child. If it becomes the guiding tool that you turn to when you are anxious, then you will gradually stop the downward spiral of anxiety.

If you have been anxious for a long time – in my experience more than two years – you might find this exercise difficult, because the child in you does not trust the parent in you.

A simple exercise to start this process is to look back over the last year and identify what you feared would go wrong at the start of the year. Write these fears on a piece of paper. Then, identify what actually did go wrong and write this down as well. You will find two things. One, your worst fears didn't come true, and two, what

did go wrong was unexpected. Your trust in your judgment was misplaced. People often do this. We focus on what may go wrong. We become anxious about something that may happen. It is an easy habit to get into. This is where we need to employ our reason by removing the thoughts that generate fear. Most of our fear is based on something that might happen.

This approach to learning to trust ourselves is no different from the way we would strive to build trust with an abandoned child brought to our home for us to look after. We would see a frightened child who trusted no one. We would have to work hard to build a relationship that was based on firmness, fairness, love, and consistency. Over time the child would open up in the knowledge that he could take steps towards you, ask for what she needed, and expect to receive much of what was asked for. As the child's confidence grew, she would become softer, gentler, and more fulfilled. He would become more playful and excited about life. She would return the love and respect tenfold. This is your payoff. This is how you will feel if you talk to your self as a wounded child.

You may need to show your child evidence that you are up to the job. As the trust grows, you will recognize the opening up of your soulful self, and the quest for contentment will be underway. As your child becomes more trusting and confident in the world, you will experience a joy that comes with confronting a real or imagined authority. You will open parts of your spirit that you didn't know existed. You will enjoy the company of others without needing to compete. You will discover the secret of happiness is found simply in being alive.

34. WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU'RE VERY, VERY FRIGHTENED

If we weren't sometimes afraid, we wouldn't survive. We'd be walking into traffic, stepping off roofs tops, and carelessly handling creatures that could harm us. We'd hang out with people who have rubella or tuberculosis.

In all mammals, fear serves to promote survival. The evolution of humans happened because the people who feared the right things survived and passed on their genes. The trait of fear and the response have been beneficial to the human race.

Charles Darwin, a 19th-century naturalist, geologist, and biologist, said that the 'fear response' was a result of the instinctive tightening of muscles triggered by an evolved response to something frightening. To prove his point, he went to the London Zoo reptile house and, trying to remain perfectly calm; he stood as close to the glass as possible while a puff adder lunged toward him on the other side.

Every time it happened, he grimaced and jumped back. In his diary, he wrote, "My will and reason were powerless against the imagination of a danger which had never been experienced." He concluded that the entire fear response is an ancient instinct that has been untouched by the nuances of modern civilization.

We're no longer running for our lives in the wild, but if we suffer from anxiety, we often live as if we are. This instinct is still in use, and it serves the same purpose today as it did when we might run into a lion while carrying water back from the river. Only now, we're carrying a smartphone and walking down city streets. The decision not to take that shortcut through the deserted alley at midnight is based on a rational fear that serves to protect us now as it did then.

Darwin never experienced the bite of a poisonous snake. Yet, he reacted to it as if he was in danger. Most of us have never been bitten by a spider, but our heart will skip a beat at the sight of a large thing in the corner of the room.

Unfortunately, humans have the often unfortunate gift of anticipation. We anticipate the terrible things that might happen to us. We've often seen these on the news: terrorist attack, a plane crash, or tornado. Most of us have never experienced any of these things and never will. But, that doesn't stop us from sitting on a plane with a white knuckle grip on the armrests. Anticipating a fearful catastrophe can provoke the same response as actually experiencing it. This had its benefit: humans who felt rain, anticipated lightning. Therefore they remained in the cave until the storm passed.

You Weren't Born With Fear

We are not born with fear. Fear comes from your natural instinct for self-preservation. So, your fears are then based upon learned behaviors and environmental factors that stem from your upbringing and their influences. However, we are born with reflexes. We naturally pull away from the fire to protect ourselves from danger.

Why do some people fear dogs as if they were monsters, and others consider them part of the family? Some previous mini trauma has set up a barrier towards dogs and is still prevalent today. One study¹⁰³ has suggested that conditioned fear, or fear from learned behaviors or environmental factors, can convert into anxiety disorders. It also states that anxiety disorders are '...costly and debilitating conditions..' which need to be identified and some type of therapy applied. The one the study suggests above all others is exposure therapy.

Exposure Therapy

Exposure Therapy helps you retrain your brain to stop sending the fear signal when there isn't any danger.

People struggle with panic attacks and phobias because they recognize that their fears are illogical, so they try to talk themselves out of fear. But that doesn't help, and they end up trying to avoid the fear which just strengthens it.

Exposure Therapy helps to retrain your brain to let go of phobias, anxiety attacks, and other forms of anxiety disorders.

It does this because when your brain gets a signal of danger, it triggers the fight or flight response. The amygdala, a little almond-shaped part of your brain, is what makes these fight or flight decisions. It works quickly, without your conscious awareness, because speed is vital in protecting against threats. But you feel the effects in your body.

Because the amygdala doesn't know the difference between an imminent threat and a false threat, it doesn't care how many times it scares you unnecessarily. It just aims to keep you alive by not making any false negative mistakes.

¹⁰³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4629237/>

Exposure therapy is a form of treatment designed to retrain this part of your brain. Your amygdala is always watching, passively, in the background, for some sign of danger. When it sees one (either true or false, it makes no difference), it presses the fight or flight button and fills you with adrenaline to help you run or fight. It learns by association, not reason or logic. When you run away from apparent danger, the amygdala stands down and goes back to quietly watching. If you run away from a terrorist brandishing a knife, that's a good thing. But if you run away from a cat, that's a bad thing because the amygdala will be conditioned to see the cat as dangerous and will make you afraid next time you see one.

How Exposure Therapy Works

The amygdala learns by association. It associates the cat with danger. It doesn't learn by conscious thought. This is why you can't simply talk yourself out of a panic attack. The fear is stored as a conditioned fear and can't be calmed by more conditioning or logic.

The amygdala only learns something new when you've become afraid. The rest of the time, it's on autopilot, passively watching. So, if you stay away from what you fear, your amygdala will keep on believing the same old fears, without a chance to learn anything new. If you keep running away from the scene every time you have a panic attack, your amygdala learns that you should leave to be safe.

To get your amygdala to learn something new, you have to activate it by exposing yourself to a trigger that gets you afraid. If you have a cat phobia, that would be a cat. If you have a panic attack whenever you see a cat, you need to stay there with that fear until it gets lower.

That gives your amygdala the chance to learn that it got all frightened about nothing. That way, it can learn that cats aren't the threat that it had been conditioned to believe. With repetition, you build new neural pathways that let you get on with your life without being disrupted by panic attacks.

The Claire Weekes Method

Dr Claire Weekes' MBE was an Australian doctor who is considered by some as the pioneer of modern anxiety treatment. A central theme of her method was to 'float' through anxiety.

Float

Because panic is the dominating force, this must be addressed. An anxious person must realize that, when they panic, there are two fears involved: the first fear and the second fear.

The first fear is the fear that comes automatically. You immediately recoil from it, and as you do, you add a second fear to the first. The second fear is the fear you add to the first fear. An example of the second fear is, "Oh, my goodness! Here it is again! I can't stand it!". It is the second fear that is keeping the first fear alive, keeping you sensitized, keeping you frightened.

When you spot the second fear, apply these four concepts: Face, accept, float, let time pass.

So instead of a structured exposure to fears, as in traditional exposure therapy, this technique is to have total acceptance of the fear as the way out of distress and panic. The problem is inside, not outside. To address it requires total acceptance of what feels unacceptable. It's the fighting against fear, anxiety, and panic that perpetuates the problem.

This protocol is just six words: face, accept, float, let time pass. It's not that you have to eradicate all the stresses of life, but to find your way out of the distress. It is simple but not always easy.

Here's what each of these protocols means:

- I. **FACE** requires you to acknowledge and understand that the cure comes from within you. It means facing the things, and situations that make you fearful as well as facing the anxiety symptoms than many of us would rather avoid. The notion of facing fearful

situations but having the option of running away if you panic or go beyond your comfort zone doesn't facilitate a long-term cure. Instead, it is necessary to face fear and panic symptoms and to learn to deal with them. The long term goal is to learn to cope with panic so that it no longer matters if it does happen.

- II. **ACCEPT** involves learning to co-exist in a kind of truce with the physical symptoms of anxiety and panic, no matter how uncomfortable they can get. Fighting the fear and its often terrible physical symptoms can spark more fear and thus perpetuate the panic. Immobilizing the fear lies in acknowledging the physical symptoms and discomfort and trying to flow with them. Acceptance aim to try not to fire up existing fear with more fear. Obviously, this isn't easy and requires practice. But, by practising acceptance, you grow that little voice that says, 'It doesn't matter anymore if panic comes.' This is the only voice to listen to. As it grows, it will always come to help you in setbacks, even if you find yourself almost helpless on the floor.
- III. **FLOAT** is the idea that instead of fighting and forcing our way past anxiety, it is more effective to physically and mentally take the path of least resistance and float towards, through, and past the anxiety. It's like floating on a boat on a stream, allowing the current to take you where you need to go. Floating helps to remove the rigid and exhausting physical and mental fight that you might find yourself in when confronting fear. It, therefore, removes the second fear, and it can be a very pleasant antidote to fear and panic.

How To Float

You don't really have to learn to float. A block of wood can float, and so can a person. What you might have to learn is how to not get in your own way; how to simply let floating happen.

The block of wood doesn't have to do anything to make it happen. It just floats in water as will you if you just lay down on the water. You may find it hard to let go and trust in your body's natural ability

to float. Your mistrust may lead you to do things to try and stay afloat like splash around.

But, that's not actually floating, that's panicking! Floating is to stop holding tensely onto yourself, trying to control your fear, trying to do something about it while subjecting yourself to constant self-criticism. To teach yourself to float, you lay back, lay your head on the water, lay your arms and legs out, and lie still. The most important part of floating is to do nothing, let go, and let time pass. Dr. Weekes described this as "masterly inactivity," and her technique has really stood the test of time.

If you combine this technique with mindfulness that allows you to bring your attention to the present moment, you will fast track your panic attack recovery. If you stop trying to hold yourself together and you relax your grip a little, you won't fall apart. In fact, it's your struggle to keep a grip that maintains the anxiety!

- IV. **LET TIME PASS** asks from us an understanding that recovery can take time. It takes time for an anxious body to heal and for the heightened memory of fear to extinguish gradually. We live in a society that's instant and fast, and this can be counterproductive to a recovery that requires time. Setbacks will happen, but that will provide you with an opportunity to build and forge your recovery on repeated practice and experience so that the techniques become truly ingrained.

35. TACKLE YOUR SHAME & RELEASE YOUR ANGER

Shame is a powerful emotion that can cause you to feel defective, unacceptable, or even damaged beyond repair. You may sometimes confuse shame with guilt, a related but different emotion.

The difference between shame and guilt:

- When you feel shame, you feel that your whole self is wrong.
- When you feel guilty, you're making a judgment that something you've done is wrong.

When you feel guilty about the wrong thing you did, you can take steps to make up for it and put it behind you. But feeling convinced that you are the thing that's wrong offers no clear-cut way to feel more positive about yourself.

From the day you were born, you were learning to feel that you were OK or not OK, accepted, or not accepted. Your self-esteem was shaped by your daily experiences of being praised or criticized, lovingly disciplined or punished, taken care of, or neglected.

Over time, intense feelings of shame can take hold of your self-image and create low self-worth. Feelings of shame often stem from what other people think. You may become super-sensitive to what feels like criticism, even if it isn't, and may feel rejected by others. Inside, you may feel painful self-contempt and worthlessness.

Evidence¹⁰⁴ is increasing that serious problems can occur, and anxiety can grow when shame gets deeply woven into a person's self-image and sense of self-worth.

Shame & Anxiety

Tackling your shame is at the crux of your recovery from anxiety. Because shame is the root of self-loathing, it's impossible to avoid feeling ashamed for feeling anxious. When you feel stuck and imprisoned, it is shame that binds you to the anxious feelings. When you experience shame, you are not open to the world, you cannot receive from others, you don't trust yourself not to fall apart if you talk about it and you feel of little value.

Shaming is something that you experience as a child. If you feel deep shame, you have a hangover from the way an adult has habitually cruelly addressed you. Adults are constantly shaming children. You see it everywhere. Just walk into any supermarket, and you can see a child being called some obscenity or suffering some awful humiliation. As an adult, you continue to talk to yourself in this manner. If

¹⁰⁴ Davidoff F. Management of Shame in Quality Improvement. *Shame: The Elephant in the Room*. Qual Saf Health Care. 2002;11:2-3

you hadn't been shamed as a child, you would not take it up as an adult. It just wouldn't happen.

Some Examples Of When You Might Feel Shame And Anxiety At The Same Time:

- Too often you feel you are doing the wrong thing at the wrong time, e.g., You turn up at a party wearing full evening dress when everyone else is in jeans.
- You expose your weakness, e.g., When someone sees you cry
You feel less than you are, e.g.
- You simply don't feel good enough in others' company no matter how many times they tell you that you're great
- You judge yourself harshly, e.g., At the school gates, works 'do' or your local gym, when everyone else looks as though they have a perfect life and you feel like a social leper
- You feel you have been exposed, e.g., you accidentally send a bitchy email about someone to the person you were vilifying when it was meant to go to your best mate
- You feel you are living a lie and you must do everything and anything to keep up the lie to the point of exhaustion

When you feel shame, you believe that the very core of you is contaminated and needs to be kept a secret because, if it gets out, it may contaminate everyone else. Shame grabs your head and pulls it down so that others can't see you. It leaves you believing that you are worse than anyone else. Fear of being found out about how shameful you are drives you to lies. All your actions are governed by how you can dodge being 'found out.' Being 'found out' means the end of you because you couldn't survive the humiliation.

When your shame becomes unbearable, your denial will kick in. This will make you incapable of feeling shame. But this may become a temporary life-saver (although not always pretty!) until you feel better and you can face reality a little at a time.

However, until the shame is confronted, you are trapped. This is because, as a child, you could not confront your tormentors. After all, you needed them for your very survival. The shame that was bestowed on you is still in charge. But as an adult, you have choices, and you can heal this shame.

The healing must start from a different place to healing other parts of your trauma, e.g., your grief. Healing your grief starts when you feel backed up against the wall with nowhere else to go, and you feel forced to confront your pain.

Healing your shame comes from the opposite corner because you need to feel a little safety and security before you can possibly open up to your shame. The very nature of shame is its ability to hide at the drop of a hat with denial, quickly setting you up to say, 'There's nothing wrong with me!' or 'This is not happening,' or 'I have no idea what you're talking about.'

Healing Shame

The key to healing your shame is to expose it. Shame is like a bacteria that needs to be kept in the dark to grow. Opening yourself up and letting in some light will kill it off. Shame left in the dark multiplies.

Start by exposing it to yourself. The following exercise will help you uncover your shame, making it come out of its hiding place. Then tackle it by addressing it with your Adult self.

Exposing Your Shame

Look at the table and its examples below. Outline the table in a journal and follow through the instructions if you feel ashamed about something. Don't worry what others might think – it is not intended for anyone else to read.

The exercise contains a suggestion that you open your shame to another person ('Expose it to another'). Only do this if you have someone, or a group, who will listen without judgment. If you have not found that place, wait until you find it.

What am I ashamed of? Let my Child do the talking	Expose to myself why I feel like this	Employ my Adult self to expose the truth	Expose it to another	Take action by employing my parent
I feel ashamed because I boasted to my friends	Because I felt inadequate in their company and I wanted to feel superior to make myself feel better	I am not inadequate, and I do not need to boast about my achievements to prove this	I will explain how I feel and how I use boasting on several occasions to boost my self-worth	When I next feel like boasting, I will tell myself I don't need to put myself above others to feel OK; I am an adequate person the way I am
I feel ashamed because I pretend I have more than I do	Because I think no one will like me unless I have wealth	Being wealthy does not bring friendships. In fact, it can keep people away from you, and maybe this is what you need at the moment	I will open up to my feelings of loneliness and share the emptiness that I fill up with self-pretense	I will begin to grieve the absence of accepting myself just the way I am; I will work towards self-fulfillment by comforting my sad and lonely child

Healing shame involves getting to the heart of the pain. You will find pain you didn't know you had. In the first example in the table, the pain of needing to boast comes from the anguish of feeling worthless without the props. Like a child, you cling to a fantasy that you have to 'do' and 'own' to be accepted by others. You believe that no one will like you if they knew what you are like inside.

But with accurate counseling from your adult self, you can come to terms with the pain and view it in a new light. You can see that this is a childlike reaction to the world that keeps you from the world and your potential joy.

As you begin to expose things that you feel ashamed about, you will feel better about yourself and will find yourself wanting to expose all of it. It's as though you have cleared out a messy drawer that you have been avoiding for years. Now you

want to get the rest of the drawers cleared and then tackle under the bed. The feeling that comes with exposing shame is liberation.

Look At Your Behaviour

Another way to tackle shame is to look at your behavior and identify how it has both protected and enhanced you. The goal is to take steps towards bringing the lighter side of your behavior more into focus and diminish the way it has created negative patterns.

In this exercise, you have a grid with four columns. Identify your behavior pattern, how it has had a negative influence, how it has protected you, and, finally, how it has enhanced you.

Don't judge yourself – that's not important. What is important is that you can identify your behavior because your anxious behavior has both negative and positive aspects to it. You've behaved in ways that have protected you, and it is time to learn how you can alter your behavior to your best advantage. That is the ultimate responsibility that you can take, and it will make you have self-compassion and reduce anxiety. Some simple examples are outlined below:

My Behavior	The Negative Influence	How It Has Protected Me	How It Has Enhanced Me
I am messy	It keeps my brain fuzzy and unable to gain clarity	It keeps me feeling calm and keeps me busy, so I don't need to address my problems	It has taken me away from depression by giving me another fixation
I am always angry	I have lost the trust of those close to me. I have been out of control	It keeps me from getting close to others and therefore my own loneliness	It has enabled me to express my frustration and let it out rather than eating me up inside

I am aloof	I have lost my own sense of self by pretending things are different from the way they are	I can feel better than others, which has given me temporary relief from my own shame	It has kept me from closeness to others which I have not been ready to bear
I say when I am depressed	I have driven others away who could not handle my depression	It has kept me from having to feel 'happy' when I'm just not up to it	It opens me up to my real feelings and helps me move forward towards security
I am kind and considerate	I have ignored my own needs	I haven't had to expose my own needs – which has felt unsafe	I have received good feelings through others' gratitude

When you begin to outline your modes of behavior, you will respect yourself. Your behavior has worked well for you in many ways by keeping you safe from the outside world. You can expand on the positive traits of your behavior while reducing the negative ones.

For example, although being messy has helped you to stay busy, you can start to take steps to clear up some of your messiness, which will bring you some peace of mind. If you are always doing things for others, it may be time to stop unnecessary good deeds and concentrate on performing more good deeds for yourself.

Your negative traits may have been learned as a child and served their purpose well. If you are recovering from anxiety, then the negative behavior has outstayed its welcome, and it is time to say goodbye. You have new tools to change your behavior patterns and self-destructiveness. Your negative behavior will diminish as you appreciate how to turn your actions into positive enhancements. This will heal the shame that goes alongside the negative behavior.

Part of the shame story is also learning to tackle anger. There may be a heap of anger stored somewhere in your psyche. Many people I've worked with have

identified their hidden anger and have found ways of releasing it. To their utter amazement, this has decreased their anxiety.

Addressing Your Hidden Anger

Now that you have begun to purge yourself of your toxic shame, and to treat yourself with more compassion, you will start to feel safer, allowing buried feelings to surface. The most common buried feeling people have if they are anxious is anger.

Anger can be frightening to many of us. The consequence of being around other people's anger may have required you to submerge your own. This is often done to try to appease someone and protect yourself from something you could not face.

This is common in children, where an angry parent is frightening to a child, so you learn to pacify the adult to save yourself from harm.

However, your own anger is often even more frightening. If it weren't, you wouldn't bury it, and you wouldn't be anxious. I have never met an anxious person who has not buried anger. This is the most common reason for anxiety.

Anxiety itself is the emotion caused when the fight or flight response is activated. It can become unhelpful in situations where the physical effects of fight or flight are not to your advantage, or the response continues for a longer time. It creates a variety of unwanted physical and mental experiences that can impact your quality of life.

But the fight or flight system is called that for a reason. Once it's activated, it triggers the physiological responses that are thought to enhance survival in a dangerous situation - to react with the bodily tools necessary to flee or to fight.

But when the fight or flight system is activated without the presence of physical danger, the emotions you experience can be more complex than fear alone.

For example:

- Irritation Anxiety can make you sensitive to becoming annoyed and irritated. Being constantly irritated about feeling bothered by others can make you

respond by becoming angry. Or, you may be frustrated by anxiety in general, and anger becomes an outlet.

- **Loss of Control** Anger is also a natural response when you don't feel you're in control. Anxiety can make you feel as though you are losing control. This is especially common in panic attacks because you can't control them. If you suffer from anger issues, you may be experiencing the effects of no longer feeling in control of your life.
- **Desire to Pass Blame** You may think that others are contributing to your anxiety, especially when the anxiety is so hard to understand. This may cause you to pass blame - intentionally or unintentionally - to others as a way of explaining away your unusual symptoms.

It's important to remember that while anger can be a symptom of anxiety, it can also be a cause. If you have anger issues, they may cause stress in your life, such as upsetting those close to you, which leads to further anxiety. It becomes a cycle of anger and anxiety.

Are You Carrying Hidden Anger?

Anger encompasses many factors. It doesn't just mean seeing yourself as a raging, screaming banshee! You can feel irritated, frustrated, infuriated, annoyed, or snappy.

A good indicator of anger is when you don't want much to do with someone you care about. You want to turn away, and you don't really know why. If you've been anxious for a long time, you may feel numb when you talk about hidden anger. You can't feel anger because it is just not safe.

A Checklist For Hidden Anger:

Chronic pain in the neck or jaw

Sarcasm

Ironic humor

Boredom, apathy, disinterest
Nightmares
Smiling when you don't want to
Controlling your voice
Grinding your teeth at night
Becoming irritated at irrelevant things
Body tics or spasmodic movements that you are unaware of
Stomach ulcers
Constant cheerfulness and 'grin and bear it' attitude
Refusing eye contact
Clenching a thumb in a fist
Over-politeness
Not sleeping or sleeping too much
Frustration at everything around you
A feeling of one's life not being good enough

Read through this list to see if you recognize any of the scenarios. You might be so frightened of expressing anger that it may come out in tears. If you tell yourself that it is wrong to feel anger, you may feel so guilty, and you end up trying to act as though you are sad or hurt. This is manipulative behavior that you may not even realize you're doing.

However, you have learned to do this to protect yourself, and as you talk to yourself more, comfort yourself, and take care of yourself better, you will feel less guilty for feeling angry and more confident that you have a right to feel angry.

You have a right to feel angry. Anger is simply another feeling. It's no better or worse. It's just a feeling. The scary part of anger is when it's not expressed because a build-up of unexpressed anger leads to rage – and we are all capable of madness under the influence of rage. It is time to open the dam that has held back your anger, and, little by little, you can let it out until you have a manageable flow.

Addressing Anger

If you think you may have hidden anger, or anger you can't really identify, write down the answers to these questions:

- I. What do you feel angry about?
- II. With whom do you feel angry?
- III. Why do you feel angry?

Answer these three questions as thoroughly as you can. The answers always appear surprisingly short and succinct. There is usually a very good reason why you are angry, and you usually know what that is. You can begin to address this anger now by finding the part of you that is frightened or unsure about addressing the anger. This is the Child part of you. You can address this anger by undertaking the following visualization.

Visualization Exercise To Release Old Anger

Close your eyes. Visualize yourself in a childlike state and in the company of the person that you are angry with. In this visualization, see yourself as an adult and take the hand of the child. Stand firm and tall to the person with whom you are angry. As the adult, tell the other person what you both (you and your child) are angry about. You can shout, scream, hurl insults, or just talk calmly.

Make sure you get the point across until you feel that everything has been said. Ask your child if he would like to say anything else. Explain to the other adult that you will not be tolerating their unacceptable behavior anymore. Walk away from that person, holding your child's hand firmly and, when you get to a safe place, bend down to your child and ask if that was OK, and if there was anything more you could have done.

Take the child in your arms and tell them you will never, ever let them be steam-rolled by that person again.

When you open your eyes, take in the experience. Whatever you feel, you will know that you can go back to that person and deal with their mistreatment until you feel saturated.

The more you undertake this exercise, the more you build up a strong inner core that you will never have experienced before. It is one you can return to.

Write to the person with whom you are angry. Allow your child to speak this time. Do not send the letter to the person at whom it is directed but, as an exercise for your Child self, address it to a false address (make sure it is a false address), stamp it, and you can post it. Just try this once and feel the satisfaction of it.

This exercise may bring up feelings of anger at all the other people who you have allowed to mistreat you. It may bring up sadness at the way you've allowed yourself to be ill-treated. Whatever the outcome, this simple exercise will start the whole process of diminishing the powerful and anxious effect that buried anger possesses and is a lifelong tool for dealing with many issues from your past.

As you work on your buried anger, the space that comes from releasing old feelings will be filled with new power. This will help you to fulfill your ability to deal with present-day anger. The stronger you become, the quicker and gentler you will be in confronting difficult problems in your day-to-day life.

36. CREATE YOUR PERFECT DAY

We all have our concerns about the future, and, in many cases, this type of worry is helpful¹⁰⁵. Like being worried about that date, it might encourage you to see the best in yourself.

But when that natural worry runs away with you and becomes a crazy type of chronic anxiety, it - literally - changes your body chemistry. You may be focusing on the negative things in your life, and this is usual for people with anxiety issues.

¹⁰⁵ Davey, G. C. (1993). A comparison of three worry questionnaires. *Behaviour research and therapy*, 31(1), 51-56.

When you take the worrying to a pathological extreme¹⁰⁶, it's so intrusive and uncontrollable that it can produce a significant amount of distress in the body because extra high levels of cortisol create physical problems like rapid weight gain mainly, a flushed and round face, high blood pressure, muscle weakness, mood swings, etc.

Focusing on the Negative

One aspect of this extreme worry pattern is that it is so distressing that you can only imagine a negative outcome for your future¹⁰⁷. You might become extremely fixated on the imaginary negative outcome and fail to realize that there are positive possibilities as well.

One team of researchers at King's College, London, wanted to know whether pathological worriers could be trained to imagine positive outcomes to their worries rather than fixate on negative possibilities¹⁰⁸. To investigate this question, the researchers recruited individuals with anxiety and trained them to respond to worries by imagining positive outcomes to the situations that incited their fears.

Participants were asked to identify a situation they were currently worried about, imagine how that event could have a positive outcome, and record this positive outcome in a journal. After four weeks, the results revealed that, on average, participants reported a significant decrease in their worry and experience of anxiety-related symptoms throughout the study. They also reported an increase in their feelings of optimism. Another study¹⁰⁹ reported that positive thoughts boost your immunity, which has an amazing impact on overall health. And if you've been anxious for some time, you need to do what you can to boost your immunity because it needs extra support.

It was Buddha who said, "Your worst enemy cannot harm you as much as your own unguarded thoughts." Now science appears to have proved him right after this research showed that negative thoughts could be physiologically harmful. At the

¹⁰⁶ Chelminski, I., & Zimmerman, M. (2003). Pathological worry in depressed and anxious patients. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 17(5), 533-546.

¹⁰⁷ Hirsch, C. R., & Mathews, A. (2012). A cognitive model of pathological worry. *Behaviour research and therapy*, 50(10), 636-646.

¹⁰⁸ Eagleson, C., Hayes, S., Mathews, A., Perman, G., & Hirsch, C. R. (2016). The power of positive thinking: Pathological worry is reduced by thought replacement in Generalized Anxiety Disorder. *Behaviour research and therapy*, 78, 13-18.

¹⁰⁹ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/20424083-optimistic-expectancies-and-cell-mediated-immunity-the-role-of-positive-affect/>

same time, positive thinking calms the heart rate and even boosts the immune system.

Subsequently, the scientists are always on the hunt for easily implemented forms of treatment that can help alleviate such worries. I have a solution: create your perfect day.

Create Your Perfect Day

Have you ever literally driven your anxiety sky-high with negative thoughts?

For example:

You're in your car in a bad street, late at night, and it won't start. And you think, "Oh no! This is awful. I'll be late—and this is a dangerous street." Your heart starts beating fast, and you're feeling hot and sweaty and frustrated and anxious.

You think: "I'm scared. I could get mugged—this is really bad!" Your feelings turn to stomach clenching, and it's hard to breathe, you're dizzy and fearful. You're thinking, "I'm freaking out. I'll lose control. Can't move. Can't get safe." You then experience a full-on panic attack.

These thoughts happen automatically as if you have no control over them. They have some very specific characteristics too:

- They often appear in shorthand
- They are almost always believed
- They are spontaneous
- They often include "should," "ought," or "must."
- They tend to catastrophize
- They are persistent and self-perpetuating
- No one knows you think like that because you hide it
- They repeat certain themes
- They are learned.

Imagine the effect these thoughts have on your body. They literally change your body chemistry. You know what I mean, don't you? Your body's tense and you feel awful. I used to describe it like someone had put a soluble aspirin in my blood because I felt fizzy.

But this is not your fault, and you've done nothing wrong, and there's nothing wrong with you. Since childhood, people have been telling you what to think. You have been conditioned by family, friends, teachers, the media, and others to interpret events in a certain way. Over the years, you have learned and practiced habitual patterns of automatic thoughts that are difficult to detect, let alone change. That's the bad news.

You Can Transform Your Day

The good news is, what has been learned can be unlearned and changed.

I'm going to show you exactly how to do that and how to create your perfect day every day. I use this technique every morning, and it's the most powerful driver in my life, it's a force for change.

What you may not realize is that if thoughts have the power to create anxiety, they also have the power to create joy, high self-esteem, and motivation? Have you any idea what positive effects this has on your body chemistry? It can feel like a miracle!

Scientists are now telling us that our brain can rewire itself and form new connections between neurons so that we don't continue playing over and over again how anxious we are. It's only recently that researchers have discovered the potential of the human brain to transform itself. We now understand how to alter our brain function to help us overcome previous trauma and destructive emotions. No longer is the brain thought of as hardwired, fixed, and immutable. It's now clearly thought the brain is dynamic, changeable, and adaptable.

So, when we add this into the mix, changing our brain will change our body chemistry, which will change the way we feel about ourselves and our life; it's now thought possible to create our perfect day every day.

I'm going to show you exactly how to do that....

Do This Before You Start Your Day, Every Day

What do you do when you first wake up in the morning: check your mobile? Check your text? Or WhatsApp? Or Facebook? Post something on Facebook? Tweet something? Check the news, then get a shower? Get breakfast? Get dressed, check your emails, get to work. Do the same thing you did yesterday?

The first thing most people do is they think about the problems in their life. And those problems are always based on memories from the past. So, the moment they think about the problems they're thinking in the past, right? And every one of those problems has an emotion attached to it, so they start feeling unhappy or unworthy or whatever, and how you think and how you feel is basically who you are.

Do you identify with any of this? Is, basically, who you are, taking place in the past? And if you're living your day today based on what's happened in the past, how predictable is your day going to be today? It's going to be pretty much the same today as it was yesterday.

So, here's the thing, instead, why not set up your day to be your perfect day and for you to be your ideal self?

And instead, ask yourself: What is the greatest model of myself that I can be today?

There is a part of you wants to get up and leave, ignore your instructions, and just get out of here. That's the part of you that is invested in being an anxious person and letting anxiety limit your life. But you can tell your mind this: right now, this is my time, and you're going to do exactly what I say.

When you turn back to the present moment, you're changing some aspect of yourself. With this approach, ask yourself, how do I want my day to play out today?

I know it's a lot of theory to take on board, but please go with me on this.

Take a few minutes every morning before you start your day, to set up your day. I like to set aside at least 20 minutes to really capture what I'm about set up. Find a quiet spot where you won't be disturbed, sit upright, and close your eyes.

Here's the sequence:

- I. Let your imagination be true to yourself and play out how you would like your perfect day to be
- II. This can be about anything: money, health, work, relationships or just being happy and anxiety-free
- III. Visualize and how you would like your perfect self to be
- IV. Don't get trapped in thinking – oh this can't happen to me
- V. Be free to experience a different type of consciousness, away from victim consciousness.
- VI. Become aware of how your old self feels. Ask yourself, what's the perfect thought I'd like to have? What's my perfect day?
- VII. Think about it now and start feeling it now. Imagine all those things that you think would make your day perfect..... have come true. Really come true.
- VIII. Act as if they've happened. Feel what success feels like
- IX. See yourself acting out through the day as if all your dreams have come true
- X. Notice how you feel having played out your perfect day in your head.

Notes To Create Your Perfect Day:

- You will feel the difference in your body chemistry
- You are teaching your body what your future is going to feel like before it's happened
- Embed this feeling in you before you start the day
- Don't leave the house until you've embedded the feelings of your perfect day and your ideal self inside your body

- How this ideal day plays out is not up to you; all you need to do is start wiring and firing these new thoughts and then appreciate the difference in your body chemistry.
- See how long through the day you can stay in that state.
- It's not your job to make those things come true.
- Your job is to change your body chemistry.
- Your job is to put in a new habit.
- Instead of waking up and thinking about all your problems that will never come true, think about all your possibilities as if they have come true.
- Nothing's changed on the outside, but everything changes on the inside.

When you have a more positive intention, doors start opening. There is universal synchronicity that says 'what you focus on grows.' By focusing on your perfect day, you're naturally inviting your perfect day to be a part of your life.

Then at the end of each day, before you go to bed, feel the gratitude for your life and teach your body what it feels like to be appreciative and joyful for the things that are valuable to you.

If you received a gift from someone, you would say thank you. So, at the end of the day, when you say thank you to the universe for the gifts you've received that day, you begin to repair and restore the body's natural balance. You begin to reduce your stress hormones. And the more you do that, the better you feel.

If you do these two things every day, set up your ideal day and ideal self, then steep yourself in gratitude every night, you will have positively change your anxiety levels, and you will be developing resilience, trust, and hope for your future.

It's just a practice. It's just putting in a new habit. As we discussed before, a minimum of 21 days and a maximum of 66 days will embed this new practice. Life will change as mine has. This book was part of my perfect day, and now I'm doing what I set out to do every morning, and it's happened to everyone I know who's practiced this tool. Make it happen for you too.

37. GRATITUDE

Gratitude is powerful! It's so powerful that many studies have been commissioned to research how gratitude helps cultivate happiness. The results have determined that people who consciously acquire a positive gratitude outlook have improved mental and physical health, relationships, and emotional balance.

Feeling grateful for what we have energizes us, brings out our creativity, and transforms our life. It helps us to give up feeling like a victim, buffeted by others and events.

The word gratitude comes from the Latin word *gratia*, which means grace, graciousness, or gratefulness. Gratitude is all of these rolled into one, and it's a thankful appreciation for the goodness we've received. Gratitude helps us to connect to something larger than us - people, nature, or a higher power.

It also helps those who suffer from anxiety. Why? Because you can't be anxious and grateful at the same time.

A study run by Indiana University¹¹⁰ set out to address how developing gratitude impacts on our mental health. They recruited participants who, on average, reported clinically low levels of mental health at the time and who, in general, struggled with issues related to anxiety.

They found that those who wrote gratitude letters reported significantly better mental health four weeks and 12 weeks after their writing exercise ended. This suggests that developing gratitude can be beneficial not just for healthy, well-adjusted individuals, but also for those who struggle with mental health concerns. In fact, it seems, practicing gratitude on top of receiving psychological counseling carries greater benefits than counseling alone, even when that gratitude practice is brief.

¹¹⁰ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10503307.2016.1169332?scroll=top&needAccess=true>

How Gratitude Works For Anxiety

- I. It unleashes us from toxic emotions. When people use fewer negative emotion words, they are more likely to report better mental health. Why? Because it's when we drop the negative words – rather than focus on the abundance of positive words—that we feel less anxious. More gratitude produces better mental health by shifting our attention away from toxic emotions, such as resentment and jealousy. When you focus on how grateful you are to others and how much other people have blessed your life, it becomes considerably harder for you to focus on your negative experiences.
- II. It helps even if you don't tell the person how grateful you feel for having them in your life. You don't have to communicate your gratitude to another person to feel the benefits. The mere act of feeling gratitude can help you appreciate the people in your life and shift your focus away from negative feelings and thoughts.
- III. The benefits take time. It's important to note that the benefits of focusing on being grateful don't emerge immediately. They gradually accrue over time. So, don't be too surprised if you don't feel dramatically better immediately after beginning your gratitude journey. Remember, it takes a minimum of 21 days and a maximum of 66 days to embed a new habit. And practicing gratitude is a daily habit.

Of course, if you've suffered from anxiety, it's not easy to cultivate gratitude.

Anxiety tends to make you think you're the ones who've had to put up with life's hardships, and it's almost impossible to see what you've got to be grateful for.

Becoming grateful can take a little time. Once you get over the buffer about 'having to be grateful,' you can start to write one thing a day that you feel grateful for. Just being able to sit quietly and write the words in a book is a soulful place to be, and you may feel grateful simply for that.

Other ways to find gratitude are to write a letter to someone who's done something for you when you didn't have the opportunity to thank them or write about a good

time in which you remember feeling happy. Or you could just acknowledge the tiny little things that life brings you which you so easily overlook: when the sun comes out, bird song, someone making you a cup of coffee, the smell of a lilac bush, someone laughing at one of your jokes.

It's Not Just Saying 'Thank You'

It's easy to think gratitude is simply saying 'thank you,' but it's so much more than just that.

Try to recall the most surprising and best gift you've ever received. Remember the feeling that went with it. Remember how "thank you" just didn't feel strong enough to express how grateful and appreciative you felt.

Remembering a moment like that illuminates some things that are important to associate with being grateful.

What does gratitude mean?

- It outshines all other emotions.
When you feel it, it often overpowers other feelings. Gratitude shines brighter and stronger. It shines through everything else.
- Humility accompanies it.
Arrogance, resentment, jealousy, and pride are impossible to feel when you experience gratitude.
- Gratitude is contagious.
When you feel gratitude for one thing in your life, it tends to overflow into other parts of your life, even places that you previously thought weren't 'good enough.'
- You know it's so much more than just saying, "thank you." Saying "Thank you" feels inadequate.

- Experiencing it, even just for a moment in its simplest form, can amplify positivity in your life.

Our society places a lot of importance on politeness, and that's definitely not a bad thing. But we do say "thank you" when we aren't grateful. Cultivating gratitude is about appreciating that full and happy feeling we get when things go really well in our lives.

It comes with a sense of peace that we finally did something to deserve the gift we've been given. You've probably experienced that kind of gratitude at some point in your life. But what if it could mean more than that for you? What if gratitude became a perpetual, daily feeling for not just the big things?

There's evidence to suggest that being grateful, despite your circumstances, can improve your levels of anxiety. It also brings in more things to be grateful for because life listens when you express it and responds by providing you with more things to be grateful for. That's the magic of gratitude.

How To Practice Gratitude

To learn how to experience it more frequently in your life takes practice and patience. Here are ways to do it.

- Keep a gratitude journal

This is definitely the most popular way to set up a daily gratitude practice. Habits form out of consistency. To train your brain to find the best in all possible situations, practice it every day. Don't go to bed until you've filled out your daily gratitude list. It doesn't matter 'when' or 'where.' Just find a time that works for you and stick to it every day.

- Feel it.

Feel the difference between real gratitude and merely saying 'thank you.' When you think about what you're grateful for, take a moment, even if it

really is just a couple of seconds, to feel that gratitude throughout your entire body. Make it as real as possible.

- Write it down.

This goes without saying; it is a journal after all. Don't keep it in your head. Give the written word; the power and gratitude will begin to shape your life very quickly. You'll start to feel a sense of honor to your journal, and that honor will open up your eyes to the wonderful things life has to offer.

- Be mindful

Another way to experience more gratitude in your life is to be mindful. In Tool 31, we looked at mindfulness. It really is impossible to feel grateful for the world around you if you're stuck ruminating about your past or future. Just being mindful has a tremendous impact on your life. Add gratitude into the mix, and the results are astounding, making you a happier, more fulfilled person.

- Remember the bad.

It's helpful to remember the hard times that you once experienced. When you remember how difficult life used to be and how far you have come, you set up an explicit contrast in your mind, and this contrast is fertile ground for gratitude.

- Ask yourself these three questions:

"What have I received from ___?" "What have I given to ___?", and "What troubles and difficulty have I caused?"

- Do something kind for others

The amazing thing is, when you practice gratitude, you're more likely to be kind to others, and when you are kind to others, you feel more gratitude. It's a never-ending cycle that just keeps empowering itself over and over again.

- Get a perspective

If you're reading this book, chances are you're in a safe place, and you have something to eat and a place to sleep.

There are at least one billion people in the world that don't have clean drinking water, cannot read, are in a war zone, don't have enough food to eat, have had no education or even a toilet and would possibly change their life for yours in a heartbeat. We have so, so much to be grateful for.

The research tells us gratitude is strongly and consistently associated with less anxiety and greater happiness. It helps people experience more positive emotions, enjoy good experiences, improve health, develop resilience to deal with adversity, and build strong relationships.

What's not to love!

