



## Practical Tips for Managing Anxiety

Anxiety is a natural response to uncertainty. Anxiety helps us identify potential threats in order to avoid danger, enhances our motivation to better prepare for an upcoming event or situation, and increases our empathy for others who are dealing with similar situations. It's important to note that chronic stress and anxiety can lead to challenges in both our physical and mental health. We innately want to avoid unpleasant feelings, but with anxiety and worry, the intensity of the negative feelings can actually be increased by avoidance. Below you will find some practical ideas that can reduce anxiety. Be curious and see what works for you!

### In the Moment

- **Ask yourself** “Am I holding the right amount of tension for the situation that I am in?” Pay attention to where any extra tension is. Breathe into the tension and say “relax;” breathe in and say “relaxing;” breathe in and say “relaxed.” Create a visual reminder (like a sticky note, screensaver, or wallpaper) that you will see often.
- **Make a plan.** Worry is an effort to find a problem to solve. Planning is the way to solve a problem. You have to know what the problem is to make a plan. If you can't make a plan, there isn't a problem and let go of the worry.
  - What can I do about xxx?
  - What is your desired outcome/goal?
  - Brainstorm possible solutions
  - Pick one and formulate action steps
  - Carry out the steps
  - Evaluate
- **Stuck on a particular worry or “what-if” thinking?** Use this [Problem Solving worksheet](#).
- **Practice Mindfulness Skills.** Mindfulness is the flip side of anxiety. Mindfulness is simply paying attention to what you are experiencing by being present, at the moment, and without judgement. You can do this anywhere, anytime, in any place. The key is to be intentional about what you are doing. Strive to make it part of your day. *Use reminders on a phone or wearable device, block off time on your work calendar, and practice breathing techniques at specific times of the day such as before a meal, or when you are in the bathroom. Check out these resources for more ideas:*
  - [Mindfulness Basics](#)
  - Take Five: [handout](#) and/or [webinar](#)
  - Intentional Grounding – Mind/Body/Spirit: [handout](#) and/or [webinar](#)

- ❑ **Picture a dial of your anxiety.** Pay attention to where the dial is turned. Imagine turning the dial down and what it might take to do that.
- ❑ **Tap into your five senses.** Name five things you can see, four things you can hear, three things you can touch, two things you can smell, and one thing you can taste.
- ❑ **Anchor word or phrase.** Choose a ready cue to help ground you when you notice your anxiety or worry starting to increase - “At this moment, all is well,” “calm,” “relax,” etc.
- ❑ **What you pay attention to grows.** Write down your top five “worst case” scenarios and then write down five “believable” best case scenarios. Because we don’t know the future both lists are possible. Are you giving them equal time in your thoughts?
- ❑ **Schedule a 10-minute worry time every day.** The goal is to get in touch with what is worrying you and then let go for the rest of the day. If a new worry surfaces outside of the worry time, write it down for the next scheduled time.
- ❑ **Two sentences or two-word breathing.** Say in your mind, “smell the roses” on the inhale and “blow out the candles” on the exhale. Or say in your mind, “strong” in the inhale and “calm” on the exhale.
- ❑ **10 yawns.** Yawn 10 times in a row, whether you need them or will create relaxation and focus.
- ❑ **Observe your thoughts.** Recognize thought as just thoughts and feelings are not facts. When you are in a worry or anxiety spiral, try writing out the thoughts and label them as useful or useless.

## Engage the physical body

- ❑ Go for a walk/be outside in nature. For a different perspective, stand or lay under a large tree for two minutes looking up.
- ❑ Count and wiggle your fingers or toes.
- ❑ Tense and release your muscles working from your head to your toes.
- ❑ Wash your hands with cold water and pay attention to the sensation.
- ❑ Increase laughter. Laughter reduces stress hormones and increases oxygen in the brain. Find a favorite video clip or funny picture/meme to have on hand that makes you laugh.
- ❑ Reduce or eliminate your use of caffeine or alcohol. Both have been known to impact stress and anxiety.
- ❑ Examine your own body stance and posture. It’s very hard to be in a relaxing state if you are holding your tension high (like at your shoulders).
- ❑ Consider starting a practice of yoga or other activity that will bring you joy.

## Work with your physical environment

- ❑ Is your home/office soothing or does it create stress? Reduce physical cues in your environment that might be creating or increasing your anxiety. Ideas to get you started can be found in the [Declutter Your Home](#) handout.
- ❑ Establish routines. Consider starting a morning routine or establishing a consistent bedtime routine. Check out this handout [Improve Sleep](#).
- ❑ Engage in a process where you wrap up items at work to leave work at work. Establish consistent end and start times. [Consider at end of workday checklist](#).

## Seek support and plan

- Don't be afraid to ask for help. Some people benefit from counseling and medication support. Talk with your primary care physician to discuss options for your specific situation and ask for a referral to behavioral health.
- Many employers offer an Employee Assistance Program as a benefit. Through this program, you and/or your family members may be eligible for short-term support at no cost to you. This service is 100% confidential.
- Assemble a personal toolkit to pull out when your anxiety dial is turned way up! Items you could include are coloring books, pictures that make you laugh/smile, a daily one-sentence journal, a worry jar, etc.

*The above tips are not meant as a replacement for therapy and/or anxiety medication. They are practical ideas to add to a tool belt of resources and options when dealing with anxiety on a day-to-day basis. Please consult with a mental health professional regarding a formal diagnosis of any anxiety disorders.*

## Check out these links to learn more:

- [NIMH » Anxiety Disorders \(nih.gov\)](#)
- [Visit WebMD to](#) learn more about anxiety and depression talk therapy, medications, exercise, relaxation techniques, and more.
- [Manage depression & anxiety](#)
- [Anxiety and Depression: Coping and Self-Management Skills](#)
- [Anxiety Disorders and Depression Research & Treatment | Anxiety and Depression Association of America, ADAA](#)
- [Dr. Jud – Ted Talks, Articles, Podcasts, and videos](#)
- Apps Suggestions: **Calm, Headspace, Unwinding Your Mind**

For other resources, go to: [wellfirstbenefits.com/realgoals](https://wellfirstbenefits.com/realgoals)

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