

Coping Skills for Anxiety

Deep Breathing

Deep breathing is a simple tool that can be great for managing emotions. Not only is deep breathing effective, it's also *discreet* and easy to use at any time or place. The toughest part about deep breathing is the commitment to it in the moment.

537 (Breathing Exercise)

Sit comfortably and place one hand on your abdomen. Breathe in deeply enough that your hand begins to rise and fall. Imagine you are trying to completely fill your lungs with air. Time the inhalation (5s), pause (3s), and exhalation (7s) during *every* breath. Practice for 3 to 5 minutes at a time.

Inhale for FIVE seconds → Hold for THREE seconds → exhale for SEVEN seconds

Imagery

Your thoughts have the power to change how you feel. If you think of something sad, it's likely you'll start to feel sad. The opposite is also true: When you think of something positive and calming, you feel relaxed. The imagery technique harnesses this power to reduce anxiety.

Think of a place or situation that you find comforting. It could be a secluded beach, your bedroom, a quiet mountaintop, or even a loud concert. For 5 to 10 minutes, use all your senses to imagine this setting in great detail. Don't just think fleetingly about this place--really imagine it.

What do you see around you? What do you notice in the distance? Look all around to take in all your surroundings. Look for small details you would usually miss.

What sounds can you hear? Are they soft or loud? Listen closely to everything around you. Keep listening to see if you notice any distant sounds.

Are you eating or drinking something enjoyable? What is the flavor like? How does it taste? Savor all the tastes of the food or drink.

What can you feel? What is the temperature like? Think of how the air feels on your skin, and how your clothes feel on your body. Soak in all these sensations.

What scents are present? Are they strong or faint? What does the air smell like? Take some time to appreciate the scents.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

By flexing and relaxing the muscles throughout your body, you can achieve a powerful feeling of relaxation. Additionally, progressive muscle relaxation will help you spot anxiety by teaching you to recognize feelings of muscle tension.

Sit back or lie down in a comfortable position. For each area of the body listed below, you will tense your muscles tightly, but not to the point of strain. Hold the tension for 10 seconds, and pay close attention to how it feels. Then, release the tension, and notice how the feeling of relaxation differs from the feeling of tension.

Feet	Curl your toes tightly into your feet, then release them.
Calves	Point or flex your feet, then let them relax.
Thighs	Squeeze your thighs together tightly, then let them relax.
Torso	Suck in your abdomen, then release the tension and let it fall.
Back	Squeeze your shoulder blades together, then release them.
Shoulders	Lift and squeeze your shoulders toward your ears, then let them drop.
Arms	Make fists and squeeze them toward your shoulders, then let them drop.
Hands	Make a fist by curling your fingers into your palm, then relax your fingers.
Face	Scrunch your facial features to the center of your face, then relax.
Full Body	Squeeze all muscles together, then release all tension.

Challenging Irrational Thoughts

Anxiety can be magnified by irrational thoughts. For example, the thoughts one has of “something bad will happen” or “I will make a mistake” might lack truth and evidence, yet still have an impact on how you feel as if it were 100% true. By examining the evidence and challenging these thoughts, you can reduce anxiety.

Put thoughts on trial. Choose a thought that has contributed to your anxiety. Gather evidence in support of your thought (*verifiable facts only*), and against your thought. Compare the evidence and determine whether your thought is accurate or not. Sometimes they are true, often they are not.

Use Socratic questioning. Question the thoughts that contribute to your anxiety. Ask yourself:

“Is my thought based on facts or feelings?”

“How would my best friend see this situation?”

“How likely is it that my fear will come true?”

“What’s *most likely* to happen?”

“If my fear comes true, will it still matter in a week? A month? A year?”