

Tips for Managing Anxiety Symptoms

There may be times in your life when you feel too much stress and worry. You may find yourself thinking about your problems too much, feeling bad or inadequate, and not able to turn off worried or fearful thinking. It may interfere with your ability to sleep well. It may cause you to lose your appetite or to eat too much. You may find yourself closing down and not wanting to talk to others, or avoiding doing things that you need to do.

Below are a few tips that can help you manage your anxiety.

1. Take **several slow deep breaths** into your belly. As you breathe in count to 3 or 4, hold the breath for a second and then breathe out slowly to the count of 3 or 4. Repeat for about two minutes. This kind of breathing is associated with relaxation and will help calm your mind.
2. If you can, **go for a walk**. As you walk try this exercise called 5-4-3-2-1. You are trying to identify 5 things you can see, 5 things you can hear, 5 things you can feel. Then repeat with 4 things, then three, etc. (For example, I see the tree, I see the bird, I see the road, I see the ground, I see the seed. I hear the bird song, I hear the traffic, I hear the leaves in the wind, I hear my footsteps, I hear a truck backing up. I feel the sun on my face, I feel the wind on my face, I feel the warmth of my feet in my shoes, I feel my hair move in the wind, I feel the hardness of the road.....) During this exercise you gently put your worry aside and focus on the task. If you get lost in your thoughts, then just bring yourself back to the task and start out where you leave off. You will notice after a while that you are calmer and are more in-the-moment.
3. Try to **challenge your thoughts** to see if you are being realistic or if you are being too negative or pessimistic. It sometimes helps to imagine what a good friend would tell you if you told them your worry. Sometimes it helps to write down your thought and beside it try to write down a more positive way of thinking about it. Remember something you worried about that turned-out better than you thought. Might this happen in this situation too?

4. It may be best to **share your worry with someone** who can help with the situation (like an expert), or with someone who knows you well and can help you get some perspective.
5. **Write out a plan** for addressing the problem that is worrying you. Often when you have a plan you feel better, even if the problem is still there.
6. **Distract yourself** with a task that takes up your attention. Go do something, read something interesting, or watch something that catches your attention.
7. Treat yourself well. **Be kind to yourself** in the way you would be kind to a friend who had a problem. Reassure yourself and tell yourself that you can get manage in the situation. Remind yourself that everyone makes mistakes. Then cuddle up in your favourite sweater, listen to soothing music, or have a nice hot bath or shower.
8. If you are having trouble facing a situation, then **ask someone for support**. That person may go with you, or may talk to you just before and just after the activity to help you manage your feelings.
9. If you are having trouble sleeping, try to **imagine putting your worries in a box** or on a shelf for the night. Scan your body from head to toe and tell every part of you to relax. Do some deep breathing to further calm yourself. **Think about a pleasant time** you have earlier in the day or in the week and try to remind yourself of every detail.
10. **Exercise** is also a good stress buster. Try to get out for a brisk walk, or a bike ride or skate or whatever exercise feels good to you.
11. If you are nervous about social situations **spend some time planning**. Think about things that you may be able to talk about with the people you will see. **Remember your strong points** and don't dwell on your weak points. Remember that others may be nervous, too. Remember that you can always take a breath or two to help you stay calm and grounded.
12. If you feel that you have tried all of these ideas and they just are not working well enough, you may want to talk about it with your doctor or see a counsellor.