

SEVEN WAYS TO DECREASE ANXIETY



ONE: Manage the Body

This issue is the primary element of successful anxiety management. Failure to focus on our physical health can undermine all other anti-anxiety strategies. Take care of your body with exercise, adequate sleep, and by limiting exposure to the following substances: Caffeine, Alcohol, Tobacco, and Sugar. Consider a physical examination that includes tests of thyroid function, vitamin D levels, and other body systems.

TWO: Breathe

This may seem too simple, but the truth is we often do not breathe properly throughout our day which can greatly increase anxiety symptoms. Taking time to breathe deeply in our belly will slow down or even stop the stress response of anxiety and panic. To practice, place your hand on your belly, close your eyes, and inhale through your nose. As you inhale fill your belly with air, pushing your belly in to your hand as it expands. Exhale through your nose as you pull your belly button back toward your spine. Pausing to take three deep belly breaths throughout your day will calm your nervous system and reduce anxiety symptoms.

THREE: Mindful Awareness

Bringing our attention to the present moment can help ease and distract an anxious mind that is functioning on auto-pilot. Take a moment to close your eyes, take a deep breath, and notice what sensations you feel in your body. Do not judge them as good or bad, just notice them as an objective observer. Next change your awareness from your body to your surroundings by opening your eyes and finding three things you can see, three things you can hear, and three things you feel. Repeat finding two things you can see, two things you can hear, two things you can feel. Repeat again finding one thing you can see, one thing you can hear, and one thing you can feel. End with a final deep breath.

FOUR: Practice Thought Observation

Throughout your day, pause and be an observer of your thoughts. Take a moment to notice what you are thinking about, what you are saying to yourself inside your own head. Then take a moment to focus on your breath and make a conscious choice to let the thoughts go. People find they have to be persistent in this exercise as worry can have a life of its own and ruminative thinking is often the brain's default state. Practice this thought-stopping technique regularly to get control over anxiety producing thoughts that tend to happen without our conscious awareness.

SIX: Plan Your Worry

Spending a set period of time for “planned worry” can actually decrease the persistent worry that can take over our day. Set aside a period of time to worry about whatever situation is on your mind, ten minutes should be enough. During this time feel free to imagine all the what-if's and the worst case scenarios. Think through anything you might be able to do to change the situation, feel whatever emotions come up about the situation without judgment. If necessary schedule another time for “planned worry” in the future. Whenever thoughts about the issue come up outside of your planned time, remind yourself you already worried and have another time scheduled to worry later, then stop thinking about it. The truth is that we accomplish as much during these ten minutes as we do when we ruminate all day!

SEVEN: Learn to Plan Instead of Worry

People often see anxiety as planning or trying to prepare for the future. The truth is a plan only needs to be made once; anxiety needs to go over things multiple times. To change this pattern, start by identifying the problem clearly. Create a list of problem solving options then pick one to implement. Write out your action plan, then practice thought-stopping by reminding yourself you already have a plan when the topic comes to mind again. Take a deep breath, let go of the thought, and move on with your day.