

# ANXIETY

## Facts and Statistics

Anxiety disorders are the most common psychiatric illnesses affecting children and adults. An estimated 40 million American adults suffer from anxiety disorders. Only about one-third of those suffering from an anxiety disorder receive treatment, even though the disorders are highly treatable.

**Anxiety** is a general term for several disorders that cause nervousness, fear, apprehension, and worrying. These disorders affect how we feel and behave, and they can manifest real physical symptoms. Mild anxiety is vague and unsettling, while severe anxiety can be extremely debilitating, having a serious impact on daily life.

Which Is It?	
Everyday Anxiety	Anxiety Disorder
Worry about paying bills, landing a job, a romantic breakup, or other important life events	Constant and unsubstantiated worry that causes significant distress and interferes with daily life
Embarrassment or self-consciousness in an uncomfortable or awkward social situation	Avoiding social situations for fear of being judged, embarrassed, or humiliated
A case of nerves or sweating before a big test, business presentation, stage performance, or other significant event	Seemingly out-of-the-blue panic attacks and the preoccupation with the fear of having another one
Realistic fear of a dangerous object, place, or situation	Irrational fear or avoidance of an object, place, or situation that poses little or no threat of danger
Anxiety, sadness, or difficulty sleeping immediately after a traumatic event	Recurring nightmares, flashbacks, or emotional numbing related to a traumatic event that occurred several months or years before

People often experience a general state of worry or fear before confronting something challenging such as a test, examination, recital, or interview. These feelings are easily justified and considered normal. Anxiety is considered a problem when symptoms interfere with a person's ability to sleep or otherwise function. Generally speaking, anxiety occurs when a reaction is out of proportion with what might be normally expected in a situation.

## Anxiety Disorders

Occasional anxiety is a normal part of life. You might feel anxious when faced with a problem at work, before taking a test, or making an important decision. But anxiety disorders involve more than temporary worry or fear. For a person with an anxiety disorder, the anxiety does not go away and can get worse over time. The feelings can interfere with daily activities such as job performance, school work, and relationships. There are several different types of anxiety disorders. Examples include generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, and social anxiety disorder.

## What's the difference between normal stress and anxiety?

Anxiety is the body's natural response to danger, an automatic alarm that goes off when you feel threatened, under pressure, or are facing a stressful situation. In moderation, anxiety isn't always a bad thing. In fact, anxiety can help you stay alert and focused, spur you to action, and motivate you to solve problems. But when anxiety is constant or overwhelming, when it interferes with your relationships and activities, it stops being functional—that's when you've crossed the line from normal, productive anxiety into the territory of anxiety disorders.

# Symptoms

Anxiety disorders are a group of related conditions, and each with unique symptoms. However, all anxiety disorders have one thing in common: persistent, excessive fear or worry in situations that are not threatening. People can experience one or more of the following symptoms:

## Emotional symptoms:

- Feelings of apprehension or dread
- Feeling tense and jumpy
- Restlessness
- Irritability
- Anticipating the worst
- Being watchful for signs of danger
- Trouble concentrating
- Feeling tense
- Feeling jumpy
- Feeling like your mind's gone blank
- Stress
- Worry
- Butterflies
- Panic
- Nervousness
- Agitation
- The shakes
- Freaking out

## Physical symptoms:

- Pounding or racing heart
- Upset stomach
- Sweating
- Tremors and twitches
- Headaches
- Dizziness
- Frequent urination
- Diarrhea
- Shortness of breath
- Muscle tension
- Fatigue
- Insomnia
- Reduced appetite
- Difficulty sleeping

While everyone experiences anxiety, some of us feel it more often, some more deeply, some less frequently, and some less intensely. Your own experience of anxiety will depend on:

- **Genetics**—how your parents, grandparents, and ancestors experienced anxiety
- **Brain chemistry**—the type, amount, and movement of the chemicals working in your brain
- **Life events**—the situations you are faced with in your life
- **Personality**—how you look at and interpret things that happen to you

## EXERCISE 1

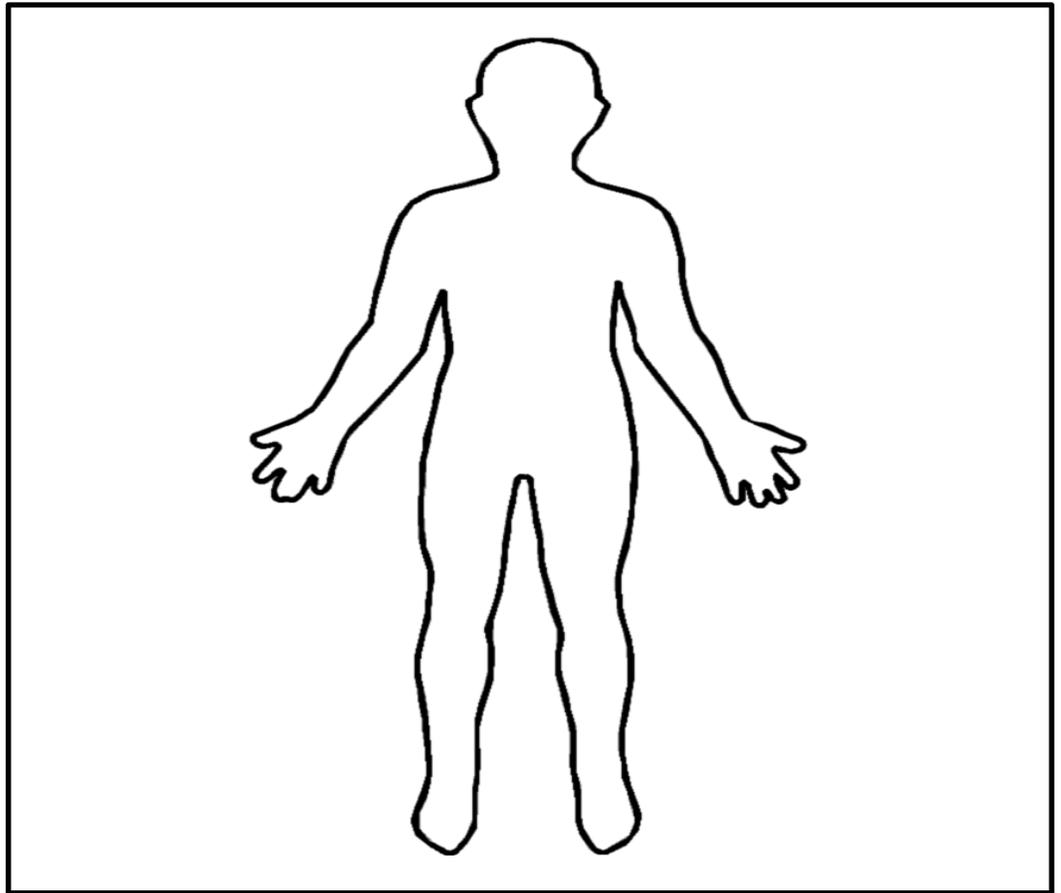
1. What words do you use to describe anxiety? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Explain how you experience anxiety in your body? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Explain how you manage anxiety when you feel it? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## EXERCISE 2

Think about the ways you experience anxiety.

what are your physical symptoms?

In the picture, make notes or marks on the parts of the body where you feel anxiety symptoms.



## Anxiety attacks and their symptoms

Anxiety attacks, also known as panic attacks, are episodes of intense panic or fear. Anxiety attacks usually occur suddenly and without warning. Sometimes there's an obvious trigger—getting stuck in an elevator, for example, or thinking about the big speech you have to give—but in other cases, the attacks come out of the blue.

Anxiety attacks usually peak within 10 minutes, and they rarely last more than 30 minutes. But during that short time, the terror can be so severe that you feel as if you're about to die or totally lose control. The physical symptoms of anxiety attacks are themselves so frightening that many people believe they're having a heart attack. After an anxiety attack is over, you may be worried about having another one, particularly in a public place where help isn't available or you can't easily escape.

### Symptoms of Anxiety Attacks

- Surge of overwhelming panic
- Feeling of losing control or going crazy
- Heart palpitations or chest pain
- Feeling like you're going to pass out
- Trouble breathing
- Choking sensation
- Hyperventilation
- Hot flashes
- Chills
- Trembling or shaking
- Nausea
- Stomach cramps
- Feeling detached
- Feeling unreal

It's important to seek help if you're starting to avoid certain situations or places because you're afraid of having a panic attack. The good news is that panic attacks are highly treatable. In fact, many people are panic free within just 5 to 8 treatment sessions.

### **The Fight-or-Flight Response**

The fight-or-flight response has evolved over millions of years to enable us to confront or escape danger. This response includes:

- breathing more quickly to get more oxygen to the muscles
- increased heart rate to increase blood flow to the muscles
- increased muscle tension to be able to react quickly
- digestion slows down
- saliva production decreases, causing a dry mouth
- a release of adrenaline, which can cause trembling
- sweating to cool the body down in anticipation of physical exertion
- the mind becomes focused on the threat or scans our environment for further threat

When the danger has passed, the body returns to a less anxious state.

## **When anxiety becomes a problem**

As previously discussed, anxiety is normal, but sometimes it can become a problem. Our thoughts about a situation appear to contribute to anxiety becoming a problem. For example, we may think a situation is more dangerous than it actually is, or we may think a situation is dangerous, when in fact, there is no danger. Our thinking can trigger the fight-or-flight response, which can result in us feeling even more anxious. Anxiety can affect our behavior. For example, if we feel anxious in a situation we may want to avoid it. The problem with avoidance is that it does not enable us to find out if there was any real threat or danger. If we keep avoiding situations we will start to limit what we do in our daily lives.



## **Treatment**

As each anxiety disorder has a different set of symptoms, the types of treatment that a mental health professional may suggest also can vary. But there are common types of treatment that are used:

- Psychotherapy, including cognitive behavioral therapy
- Medications, including antianxiety medications and antidepressants
- Complementary health approaches, including stress and relaxation techniques

## **Medication**

Medication does not cure anxiety disorders but often relieves symptoms. Medications are sometimes used as the initial treatment of an anxiety disorder, or are used only if there is insufficient response to a course of psychotherapy. It is common for patients treated with a combination of psychotherapy and medication to have better outcomes than those treated with only one or the other.

## Managing the symptoms of anxiety

Stress management techniques and meditation can help people with anxiety disorders calm themselves and may enhance the effects of therapy. Caffeine, certain illicit drugs, and even some over-the-counter cold medications can aggravate the symptoms of anxiety disorders, avoiding them should be considered. Check with your physician or pharmacist before taking any additional medications.

The family can be important in the recovery of a person with an anxiety disorder. Ideally, the family should be supportive but not help perpetuate their loved one's symptoms.

### HERE ARE SEVERAL WAYS TO MANAGE SYMPTOMS OF ANXIETY:

- Controlled breathing
- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Reducing caffeine intake
- Thought stopping
- Exercise
- Peaceful movements
- Progressive relaxation
- Centering yourself
- Mindfulness
- Follow your breath
- Deep breathing
- Meditation
- A Higher Power / Faith
- Keeping your life in balance
- Staying organized
- Managing your time



## Thought Stopping

Thought stopping is a technique that can help you let go of thoughts that cause you to feel anxious and change them to thoughts that help you feel peaceful.

### Five Steps for Thought Stopping

1. Notice that you are having a thought that causes anxiety
2. Choose a way to immediately and forcefully tell yourself to STOP this thought. Some ideas include saying "Stop!" out loud or in your mind; picturing a bright red stop sign; picturing yourself pushing your arm out in front of you with your hand in a "halt" position; keeping a light rubber band around your wrist and snapping it gently; giving your head a quick shake as if you were physically shaking off the thought.
3. Consciously exchange the anxious thought for a peaceful thought. You can plan your peaceful thought ahead of time so it's ready immediately.
4. Say your peaceful thought out loud or in your mind.
5. Keep your mind focused on your peaceful thought until the anxious one is completely gone.

### EXERCISE 3

Circle any of the things below that might bring up anxious thoughts for you:

- |                               |                                |                     |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| a test                        | talking with other people      | your body           |
| performing in front of others | violence or war                | your sexuality      |
| meeting new people            | your marriage                  | your safety         |
| asking someone for a date     | money                          | class presentations |
| talking with your parents     | what you look like             | homework            |
| a particular class            | whether or not people like you | religion            |
| what your future holds        | siblings                       | illness             |
| your athletic skills          | your family                    |                     |

Write a list of other anxious thoughts that you have had or that you struggle with frequently.

---

---

---

### EXERCISE 4

Circle any of the sentences or ideas below that you might use as a peaceful thought to exchange for an anxious thought:

- |                               |                              |                             |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| “I am confident.”             | watching waves on a lake     | being with my best friend   |
| “I am lying on the beach.”    | running                      | vacationing                 |
| “I am calm and relaxed.”      | reading                      | sleeping late               |
| “I am filled with peace.”     | watching floating white      | playing music               |
| “I am laughing with friends.” | clouds                       | camping                     |
| seeing sunsets                | looking up on a starry night | fishing                     |
| petting my cat                | working out                  | being with my               |
| napping                       | hiking                       | boyfriend/girlfriend/spouse |
| listening to music            | watching a movie             |                             |

Write a list of any other thoughts that could make you feel peaceful. Your ideas of peace may be different from someone else’s, so think about what really makes you feel relaxed.

---

---

---



## Exercise

Participating in almost any kind of physical exercise can help lower your anxiety level. Exercising on a regular basis can prevent anxiety. Exercising at the time you feel anxious can release tension right at that moment.

### EXERCISE 5

A wide variety of physical activities are listed below. Put a star next to any activity that you know you really enjoy. Put a "T" next to any activity you have never done but would really like to try.



- |               |            |              |                 |
|---------------|------------|--------------|-----------------|
| baseball      | karate     | dance        | bocce ball      |
| basketball    | running    | race walking | lifting weights |
| skiing        | bowling    | volleyball   | aerobic dance   |
| swimming      | gymnastics | badminton    | kickboxing      |
| hiking        | wrestling  | judo         | racquetball     |
| tennis        | archery    | waterskiing  | diving          |
| biking        | golf       | tubing       | rappelling      |
| snow boarding | paintball  | lacrosse     | surfing         |
| football      | laser tag  | soccer       | wind surfing    |

Write down any other exercises you enjoy doing: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Looking at the activities you starred, write down those that would be easiest for you to do on a regular basis. What time of day and where would be most realistic for you to do these?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Which exercises from the list might you be able to do right at the moment you are feeling anxious?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Peaceful movements

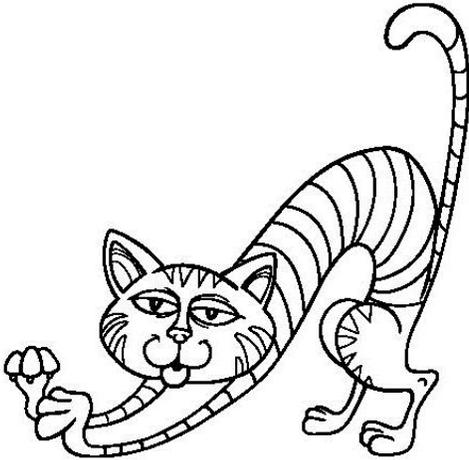
Certain types of physical movement can help people relieve anxiety and feel more peaceful. When you practice these movements on a regular basis, you can keep anxiety at a lower level.

*Here are three common types of peaceful movement.*

### Relaxed Stretching

Stretching is simply the gentle, sustained movement of elongating your muscles. When you stretch your muscles, you help to dissipate the stress chemicals that have collected in them and you increase the

blood circulation in your body, both of which help relieve anxiety. If you breathe peacefully and deeply while you stretch, you help bring oxygen to all of your muscle groups, also relieving anxiety.



Stretching is one of the easiest anxiety-reducing techniques you can use because you can stretch almost any muscle group at any time, almost anywhere you are. You don't need special equipment or a large block of time. You don't need any particular athletic skill or ability.

It is important to stretch slowly and gently so that you don't overextend your muscles. If you stretch a little every day on a regular basis, you will help keep your anxiety level low. If you take a stretching break when you are feeling particularly tense about something, it will help you release and manage feelings of anxiety. Stretching all of your muscles will help keep them relaxed and flexible. Stretching the particular muscles where you hold most of your tension will help to bring relief in that particular area.

### Yoga

Yoga is a science of life that originated in India thousands of years ago. Its philosophy strives to unify body, mind, and spirit through exercise, breathing, and meditation in order to maintain balance and health in life.

The physical exercises, or postures, learned in yoga are designed to increase the health of the glandular system in your body. The stretching involved tones your muscles and joints as well as your entire skeletal system. Breathing exercises help to increase and maintain your health through breath control, bringing energy to your body and developing peacefulness. Meditation develops a quiet mind and releases anxiety as well as increasing your mental power and concentration.



The goal of yoga is to develop a state of inner peace. Practice does not involve any special equipment or clothing, but some beginning instruction is necessary to learn the postures and the correct positioning of your body.

## T'ai Chi

T'ai Chi is a practice of movement stemming from Chinese culture. While historically it was considered a martial art and a form of nonviolent self-defense, it is widely practiced in Western cultures today as a form of "moving meditation." Movements in T'ai Chi are performed softly and gracefully with smooth, even transitions between them.

Along with stimulating the flow of "chi," or energy, throughout the body and increasing health and vitality, T'ai Chi movements foster a calm and tranquil mind, help you to relax and relieve tension, and reverse the effects of stress on your body and mind. The slow, meditative movements of T'ai Chi make it a helpful practice for relaxation, balance, and physical and emotional health.

As with yoga, T'ai Chi requires instruction to help you begin, but once you have learned a number of movements, you can continue to practice alone, for either prevention or management of anxiety. Even just a few minutes of peaceful movement when you wake up in the morning can set a peaceful tone for your whole day. The same activity at midday can help you re-center yourself and come back to a place of balance. Done right before you go to sleep at night, peaceful movement can help you sleep more deeply and restfully.



## Progressive relaxation

When you feel anxious, your muscles are likely to be tense. Consciously releasing your muscle tension will help you relieve anxiety. Progressive relaxation is an exercise that can help. You can use progressive relaxation for anxiety prevention by practicing it on a regular basis. That will help keep your daily anxiety level lower. You can also use progressive relaxation as intervention on a day when your anxiety level is higher than usual.



Ideally, you will have a quiet place and fifteen or twenty minutes each time you practice progressive relaxation. If you have a busy schedule and find it hard to make that happen, you can do a brief variation of this exercise, just about any place at any time. When you are sitting in class, in the bleachers, in the passenger seat of the car, in a restaurant, or in the library, you can take a few minutes to focus on consciously relaxing your muscles. Any effort you make can help you release and relieve anxiety.

## EXERCISE 6

Read this exercise all the way through carefully before you try it. If possible, find a quiet place without distractions to practice. You might want to have someone help you with this exercise the first few times you try it. Simply ask the person to slowly read the directions as you sit with your eyes closed, following them.

## Progressive Relaxation

*Sit in a comfortable position and loosen any tight clothing so that you don't feel cramped or constrained and can breathe easily. You may lie down if you wish, as long as you know you won't fall asleep. Before you start, rate your anxiety level on a scale from 0 to 10 (0 being completely peaceful and 10 being highly anxious). Write your number down, tell it to another person, or remember it so you can use it later.*

*Close your eyes and for a few minutes put your attention on your breath. You don't have to try to change your breathing at all—simply notice it. Instead of trying to direct your breath, just follow it. All you have to do is notice where it is at any moment and where it goes at the next moment. As you inhale and exhale, your breath may move in and out of your mouth or nostrils; it may move into your throat, neck, or lungs or even down into your diaphragm. Your breath may make your shoulders rise and fall or your chest move up and down. It may cause a tickle or a light sensation in your body at any point. There is no right or wrong way to experience your breath; just notice where it goes and continue to follow it.*

*When your breath becomes rhythmic and even, move your attention to the top of your head. Notice if you are holding any tension around your facial area or the muscles surrounding your skull. Imagine all of this tension leaving your head and being pulled out into the air around you. After it leaves your head, it simply floats away off into space. You notice that your forehead, your cheeks, your chin, and your jaw are all completely free of tension and relaxed. Your face and jaw are so relaxed that your mouth may drop open a little.*

*Now move your attention to your neck. Picture any tension that you may be holding in the back or front of your neck as leaving your body and floating off into space. Consciously release the muscles in your neck and let go of any tension in this area.*

*Next, pay attention to your shoulders and upper back. Notice if you are holding any tension here. Many people hold anxiety in these areas. Consciously release any tension you are holding here. Feel the release and relief as you let the tension go. Feel your shoulders drop a little as the tension leaves your body.*

*Move your attention now to your chest and lungs. Know that you are releasing any and all tension from this area of your body. Your lungs are contracting and expanding freely. Your chest is rising and falling peacefully and rhythmically as you breathe. Any tension that was in your chest or lungs has now left. Your muscles here are completely relaxed.*

*Next, focus on your upper arms. Picture the muscles in your arms relaxing. These muscles work hard each day, helping you lift and carry. Right now they don't have to do anything, so let them relax. Release any tension that you might be holding in your upper arms and then in your lower arms and your hands and fingers. Concentrate on releasing any tightness you may be carrying anywhere along your arms. Picture the tension simply flowing down your arms and out the ends of your fingertips. Your arms are now completely relaxed.*

*Move your focus to your stomach. It is common for people to feel tightness or "knots" in their stomach when they are anxious. Pay attention to your stomach muscles and consciously relax them. Each time you exhale, let them become more and more limp, until you feel your stomach "sinking" comfortably into your body. Know that any tension in your stomach is now gone, and your stomach is completely relaxed.*

*Now place your attention on your lower back and hips. Release any tension you may be feeling in these areas. Let your hips feel warm and heavy, and feel them sinking, comfortably into the chair beneath you. Let the muscles in your lower back and hips relax completely and notice how good this feels.*

*Next, move your attention to your upper legs. There are large muscles in your thighs that carry you from place to place every day. They don't need to do any work right now, so you can let them relax completely. Let your upper legs feel warm and heavy. Let them sink into the chair beneath you as you release all the tension from this area of your body. Notice how relaxed your thighs are now.*

*Move down your legs to your knees and calves, your feet and toes. These body parts also work hard to hold you up every day. They can be completely relaxed now. Consciously let any tension go from these muscle groups and joints. Picture the tension flowing easily out of your legs and your feet and out the tips of your toes. Let all of this tension disappear into the air around you.*

*Now sit quietly for a few minutes and enjoy the relaxation you have allowed in your body. Notice what it's like to be this relaxed. Rate your anxiety level once again, as you did before you started this exercise. Notice if your number has gone up, down, or stayed the same. When you are ready, bring your attention back to the room you are in, and open your eyes.*

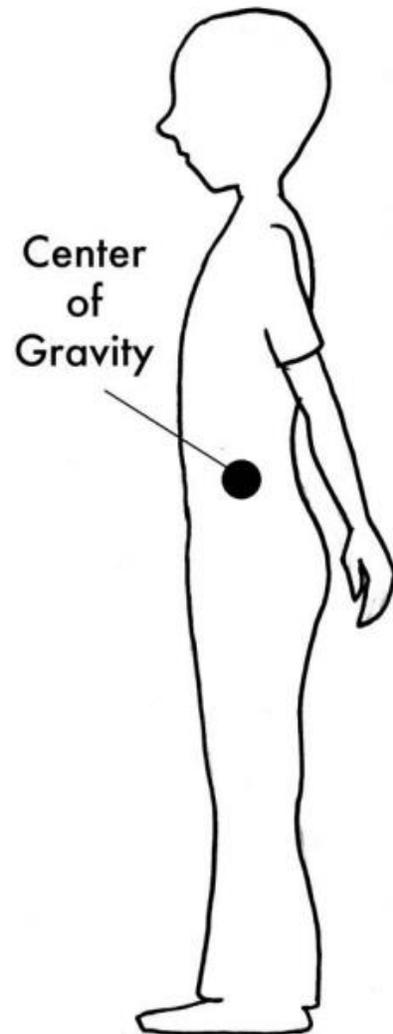
## Centering yourself

When you focus your attention and energy on the physical center of your body, you can help yourself manage anxiety by gaining balance and stability.

### EXERCISE 7

To find your center, or the geographic middle of your physical body, look at the picture below and then try this activity. You may want to have someone read it to you as you stand with your eyes closed.

*Stand straight with both feet flat and solidly on the floor, shoulder-width apart. Close your eyes. Adjust yourself so that you feel balanced. Place your attention on your physical body. Without moving or touching your right hand, put your attention on it. Now without moving or touching your left knee, put your attention on it. Next, without moving or touching your navel, put your attention on it. Now be aware of a spot an inch or two behind and two or three inches below your navel, in the back center of your abdomen. With your eyes closed, try to get a sense of this inner spot that is the center of gravity of your body. Keep your attention focused on this point. Imagine yourself drawing in all your scattered energy and concentrating it here. Continue to focus your energy here for a few minutes until you feel stable and balanced.*



## Mindfulness

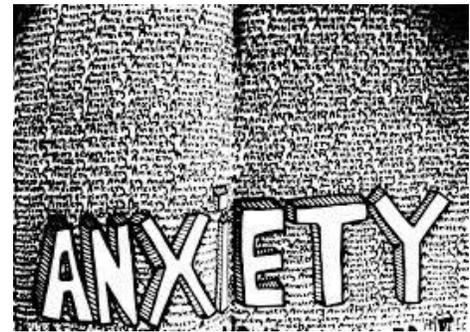
Mindfulness is the act of keeping your focus on the present moment. When you practice mindfulness on a regular basis, it can help to keep your anxiety at a lower level. Practicing mindfulness at the time you feel high anxiety can help you to manage it and bring yourself back to a peaceful state.

Being mindful means that you are paying attention to, and therefore living in, the present moment. Most of the time, our minds are reaching forward to the future, and we often start to worry about things that are unknown. That raises our anxiety level. Or our minds are reaching back into the past, and we may feel guilt or regret about something we have done or said. That raises our anxiety level, too.

Being mindful means being accepting and nonjudgmental about whatever is happening in the present moment. It is often our nature to be critical of ourselves, others, and our environment. This kind of judging rarely changes anyone or anything, but it does raise our anxiety level.

Focusing on the present moment can help you let go of anxiety. For example, if you are playing basketball, just focus on playing basketball. Watch your hands and the ball soaring through the air and feel the sweat on your forehead. You can't worry about your final exams or your recital or your job if you are just thinking about the ball. You can't stew about whether you should have said something else in a conversation yesterday if you are just paying attention to dribbling down the court.

Practicing mindfulness can decrease your anxiety as well as enrich your life experiences because you are more fully present in everything that you do.



## **EXERCISE 8**

Try each of the following exercises at least once.

### **Activity 1**

Choose a simple activity that you can do in the next few hours to practice mindfulness. It could be anything from eating a bag of chips to getting dressed to lying on your bed listening to music. Make a conscious effort to perform this activity with mindfulness.

As you perform the actions, try to keep your attention focused only on what you are doing right at that moment. Use all your five senses to experience the activity. Pay close attention to exactly what you are seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling, and tasting as you do this.

### **Activity 2**

Since we are not used to focusing on the present, it can be hard to keep our minds from wandering. One way to help yourself stay focused is to talk to yourself silently as you perform each activity, simply reminding yourself of what you are doing at the time. For example, as you are eating chips, think to yourself, "Eating, I am eating." As you are getting dressed, think to yourself, "Dressing, I am dressing." It will probably seem a little strange at first, but it will help keep your mind focused on the present and off anxious thoughts.

### **Activity 3**

As you go through the day, whenever you notice yourself feeling anxious because you have moved your thinking into the future or the past, simply remind yourself, "Come back to the present." Then move your mind away from wherever it has wandered to and bring it back to what you are doing right now.

## **Follow your breath**

Breathing is a natural and effective tool for cultivating peace and decreasing anxiety within you. One way to use your breathing for this purpose is simply to be aware of it.

Our thoughts are the main cause of our anxiety. When our minds are racing from thought to thought, commitment to commitment, fear to fear, they signal our bodies to become tense. Keeping our minds focused on stressful thoughts, or just on too many thoughts at once, can keep our anxiety level high.

Focusing your thoughts on something simple and peaceful will have the opposite effect, and your breath is an ideal point of focus. Left to its natural rhythm, your breath will settle into a very peaceful cadence. It will be balanced and regular, slow and deep—much like it is when you are in a peaceful sleep.

Focusing on your breath is a simple way to bring yourself out of an anxious state and back to peace. It is a tool you always carry with you, so it can be used in any situation, at any time of night or day, wherever you are, whoever you are with, whatever you are doing. You can stop and focus on your breath when you feel yourself getting anxious because you are having an argument with your friend, having a hard time understanding a math problem, getting ready for a job interview, talking with someone you are attracted to, or at any other time.

Putting your attention on your breath for just a minute or two during a time of high anxiety can help you to lower the anxiety and bring yourself back to a peaceful state. Focusing on your breath takes your mind off anxious thoughts and causes your breath to slow and deepen, bringing more oxygen to your body and relaxing it, bringing more oxygen to your mind and clearing it.

## **EXERCISE 9**

*Try this exercise to learn how to focus on your breath.*



- Sit comfortably and close your eyes.
- Then simply put your attention on your breath. Notice where you feel it.
- Can you feel air moving in and out of your nostrils?
- Do you notice it raising and lowering your chest?
- Does your breath move all the way down into your abdomen when you inhale, or does it move only into your mouth or throat?

You don't have to try to change your breathing or make your breath do anything special: your goal is just to find it and follow it and see how it moves as it flows in and out of your body. Continue to follow it for a couple of minutes or for as long as you are comfortable.

Since we are not usually used to paying attention to our breath, this exercise may not come easily at first. Some people say they cannot even locate their breath. If that happens to you, try holding your breath for a few seconds and then releasing it. Stopping breathing and then starting again can make the presence of your breath more obvious to you.

You may have to practice this exercise a few times until it becomes easy to find and follow your breath. Once you can do it more easily, you will not have to close your eyes anymore. You will be able to focus on your breath while you are in class, at a party, in the shower, or eating dinner with your family. If you feel anxious, simply remembering to find your breath and put your attention on it will cause you to slow down and breathe more deeply and will lower your anxiety.

## Deep Breathing

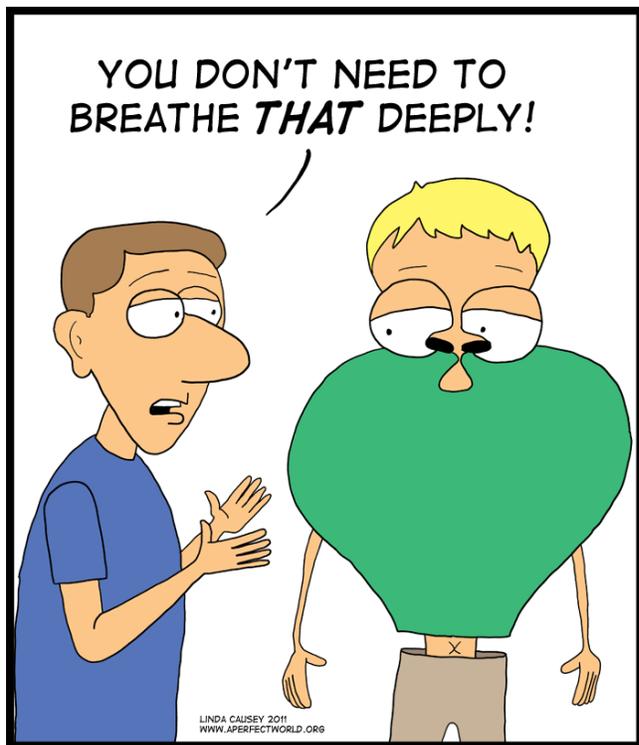
When people are anxious, their breath tends to be shallow and rapid. Making a conscious attempt to breathe more deeply can help you relieve anxiety.

If you watch newborn babies breathe, you will notice that their stomachs rise and fall with each breath. That is because they are naturally breathing deeply and carrying their breath all the way down into their diaphragms. Babies have not yet learned to be stressed. As adults, we tend to inhale our breath into our nostrils, our throats, and sometimes down into our lungs. But rarely do we breathe so deeply that our abdomens move in and out. Most often, our anxious thoughts and hurried activities cause us to breathe using only the upper parts of our respiratory systems. Sometimes, when we are very stressed or in a rush, we may even hold our breath intermittently without realizing it.

Deeper breathing helps relieve anxiety by slowing down our heart rates, relaxing our muscles, and bringing more oxygen deep into our bodies and brains, nourishing our cells more completely and helping us think more clearly. When we are breathing deeply, we are physically less tense. We are also better able to remind ourselves to use positive and rational thinking skills instead of anxiety-producing self-messages and distorted thinking.

### EXERCISE 10

*Sit or lie down comfortably. Close your eyes so that you can better concentrate and block out distractions. Place your hand gently over your abdomen. Pretend that there is a round balloon in your abdomen, with the opening at the top, or closest to your lungs. Now inhale, and think about pulling your breath all the way down through your body, through the balloon opening and to the bottom of the balloon. As you inhale, let your abdomen rise to make room for your breath. Think about using this breath to fill your body with fresh air, filling the bottom of the balloon first, then the top, then completely filling your lungs from the bottom up.*



*When you are ready to exhale, gently press down on the bottom of your “balloon” and push the air out of your body from the bottom up, emptying the balloon first, then your lungs and chest.*

*Repeat this pattern slowly for several minutes, or until it starts to feel comfortable.*

Breathing in this way may seem awkward at first. Some people even become anxious because they feel they cannot do it “right.” Understand that it is normal to start out feeling this way. It is something new that your body and mind aren’t used to. The more you do it, however, the more familiar it will become and the more you will be able to relax. Try to take your time and know that eventually you will get the hang of it. Don’t set yourself up for feeling anxious by trying to do it perfectly.

## Meditation

Meditation is an exercise that helps you train your brain to let go of anxiety and come back to a peaceful state. When you practice meditation regularly as a prevention exercise, you will find that you are better able to stay calm in situations that used to make you anxious. You will also have a lower level of anxiety in general.

### EXERCISE 1 1

To practice meditation, you will need to focus on something peaceful. You can choose a word or a mental picture; you can focus on your breath as it moves in and out of your body; or you can try to simply clear your mind of any thoughts at all and focus on the “blackness” behind your eyes.

To help yourself choose a peaceful word or image, circle any of the words below that bring up a feeling of relaxation within you. Use the blank lines to add your own.

sunset	God	love	sail	_____
water	Smile	flow	summer	_____
nature	relax	sky	sleep	_____
clouds	free	float	quiet	_____
peace	one	calm	rest	_____

Choose one of the words you circled to focus on during your first try at meditation, or decide to focus on your breath or the darkness. Then follow the steps below:

- Find a quiet place where you will not be disturbed.
- Sit in a position that is comfortable for you.
- Set a timer for one minute.
- Close your eyes.
- Focus your attention on your chosen object of peace.



As you try to focus, it is normal for your mind to wander. When that happens, simply notice it without judgment, and then bring your focus back to your peaceful object again. Know that it is completely normal for your mind to wander again and again and again. Continue refocusing until the time is up.



The goal for meditation practice is to work up to twenty minutes a day, nearly every day. It will not be possible at first. Let yourself start by doing thirty seconds or one minute every few days. As you become comfortable, build up to five minutes, adding thirty seconds or one minute at a time. Add time and days to your practice as you are able. You may add time easily and quickly, or it may take you a year or more to build up to the goal. It doesn't matter how long it takes you. The benefit is in the continued practice of moving your mind away from anxiety and back to peace.

Many people say that they are too busy to meditate. However, when you take time to meditate, you actually end up having more time in your day; regular meditation helps you stay peaceful, so you waste less time being anxious. It helps to you focus, so you complete tasks in less time. You make fewer mistakes, so you spend less time doing things over again. Meditation helps you let go of irritation, so you spend less time in petty arguments. When you compare the amount of time it takes to meditate with the amount of time you waste on these anxious activities, you realize that when you meditate you come out ahead.

Think about realistic times when you could fit meditation into your day. Morning or evening? Right after school or every night before you start your homework? Right after you brush your teeth? As you practice meditating, experiment with different times and different peaceful words or images. Find the way to meditate that works best for you.

## A Higher Power / Faith

The idea of a higher power is usually connected to the concept of spirituality. Spirit is a nonmaterial part of life that has been described as a life-giving force, consciousness, inner being, or soul. You do not need to belong to a particular religion or belief system to have spiritual beliefs, although religious groups are often where people first learn about spiritual ideas.



Having spiritual beliefs can help people manage anxiety in some of the following ways:

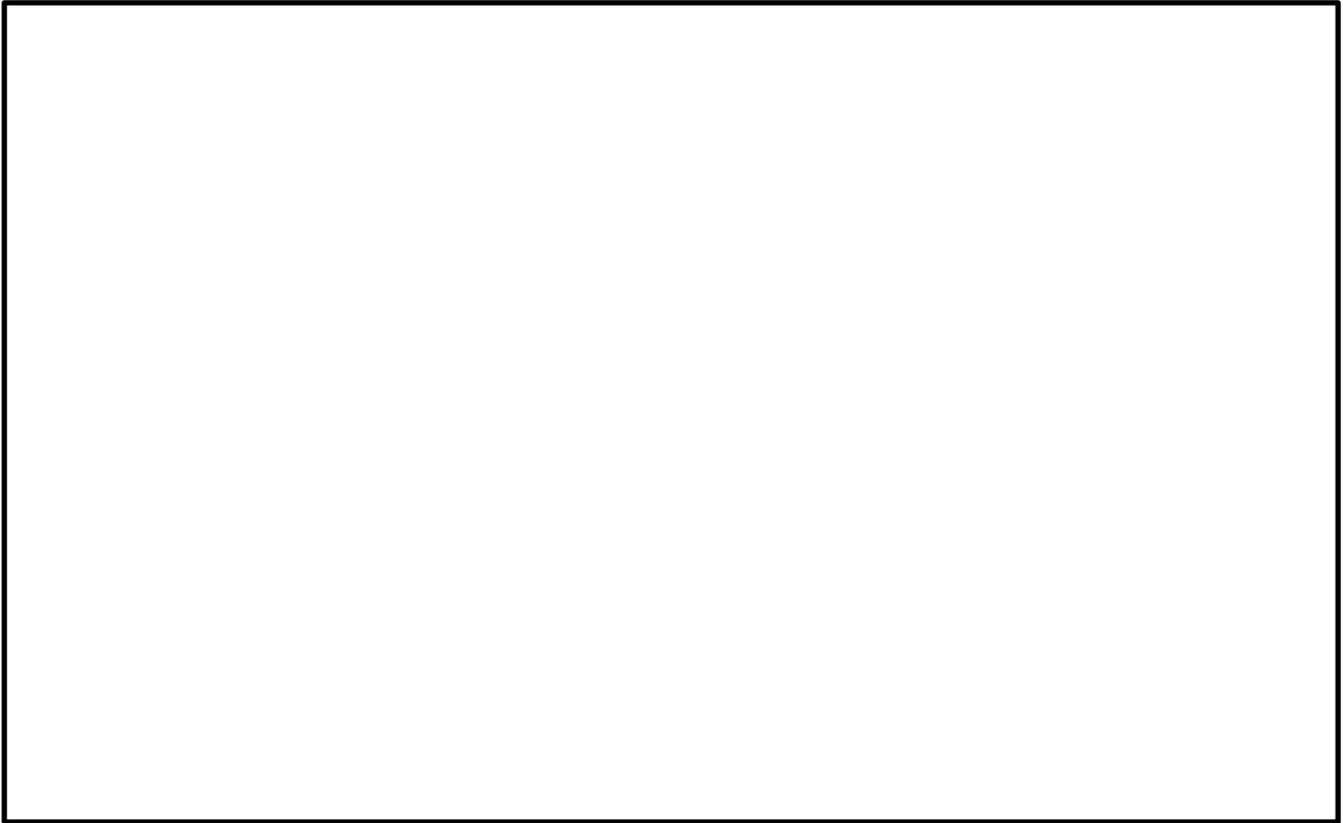
- ❖ Lisette believed that she was protected at all times by a power greater than herself. Reminding herself of that helped her feel less anxious.
- ❖ Dominic believed that a higher power had a plan for his life, so there was a reason for everything that happened—even if he didn't understand it at the time. This belief reduced his anxiety when something happened that was unplanned or that he didn't like.
- ❖ Taylor believed that if she prayed, or communicated with a higher power, she could have an effect on the outcome of a situation that made her anxious.
- ❖ For Kurt, just the quiet act of praying lowered his heart rate, released the tension in his muscles, and helped him feel more peaceful.

## EXERCISE 12

Circle any of the words below that sound like they are related to your personal spiritual beliefs or ideas about a higher power:

God	Divine	Kindness	Forgiveness
Lord	Purpose	Universe	Eternity
Spirit	Love	Heaven	_____
Soul	Hope	Peace	_____
Gratitude	Miracles	Worship	_____
Heart	Connectedness	Nature	_____
Beauty	Faith	Holy	_____

In the space below, draw a picture, write a poem, or tell about your personal spiritual beliefs or your personal ideas about a higher power. Sometimes people don't know exactly what they believe, and that's okay. If that is the case for you, just express your guesses.



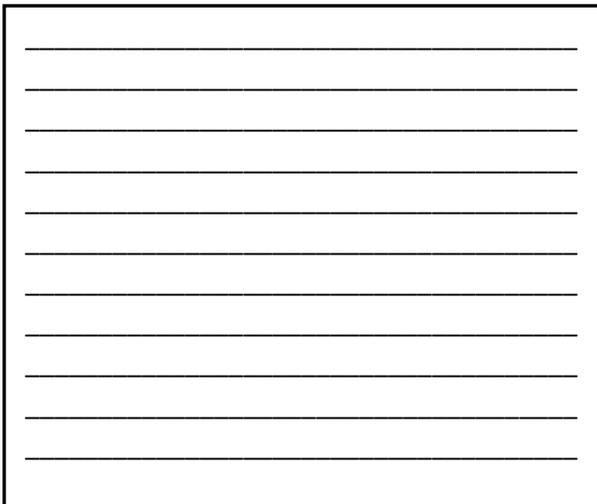
### **Keeping your life in balance**

When people keep their lives in balance, their anxiety level tends to be lower. Staying in balance means that the way you choose to spend your time and energy is a healthy mix of leisure and responsibilities.

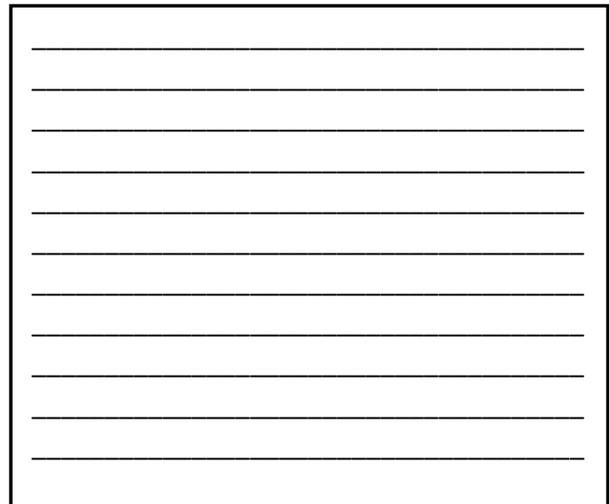
### **EXERCISE 13**

List your responsibilities and your leisure activities...

List your responsibilities



List your leisure activities



Look back at your responsibilities and leisure activities above, how do they compare? Does one have more items listed than the other? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Describe how you think the balance of your activities affects your anxiety level: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Tell what you could realistically change in the way you spend your time and energy to balance your life: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **Staying organized**

Keeping your environment in order can help you to find things that you need more easily and quickly. That can help to keep your anxiety level lower.

### **EXERCISE 14**

Describe a time when being unorganized caused you to feel anxious.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What changes could you make so that wouldn't happen again?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

In your room, which categories are the most important for you to keep organized, and why?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Describe other places that you need to be organized, and tell why.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Managing your time

Not having enough time to do things and always being late are habits that can raise your anxiety level. When you can learn to manage your time appropriately, it is easier to stay peaceful.

*The following four steps can help with time management:*

**Step 1: Scheduling** Before you make plans or take on another activity or responsibility, check your schedule. See what else you are doing that day. Do you have time to do another activity? Commit to only as much as you have time for.

**Step 2: Recording** Choose a scheduling tool in which you will record everything that you have to do. Some scheduling tools include calendars, electronic organizers, day planner books, or assignment books. Always check your schedule before you make a plan, and as soon as you schedule something, record it.



**Step 3: Checking every morning** when you first get up, check your schedule to see what you have to do that day. If you need extra help remembering, write yourself reminder notes and leave them where you will see them. Every time you think about making a commitment to do something, check your schedule to see if you have enough time. Check your schedule throughout the day to make sure you are remembering your commitments.

**Step 4: Planning Ahead** Think ahead. Don't wait until the last minute to do things. Make sure you allow yourself enough time for each task or commitment

Get yourself a day planner, or pocket schedule to help you organize your time. Schedule all your appointment, meetings, anything that takes up your time. Don't forget to schedule time for yourself as well. In this day of high tech devices, most everyone carries a cell phone with them which has a calendar app on it. You can use the calendar app to schedule your day, but it will sink in more if you write it down.

## References

- Schab, Lisa M., LCSW, (2008), *The anxiety workbook for teens*, Retrieved from URL  
[http://www.ycentral.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Anxiety\\_Wkbk\\_for\\_Teens\\_1.pdf](http://www.ycentral.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Anxiety_Wkbk_for_Teens_1.pdf)
- Anxiety BC, ( 2016, Nov.), *Self-help strategies for social anxiety*, Retrieved from URL  
[https://www.anxietybc.com/sites/default/files/adult\\_hmsocial.pdf](https://www.anxietybc.com/sites/default/files/adult_hmsocial.pdf)
- Moodjuice, (2004), *Anxiety, Moodjuice self-help guide.*, Retrieved from URL  
<http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/Anxiety.asp>
- Brosan, Lee, Et Al. (2004, Nov), *Coping with Anxiety*, Retrieved from URL  
<http://www.cpft.nhs.uk/Downloads/Martin/Coping%20with%20Anxiety.pdf>
- Ramsay, Angela, (2003), *Help for anxious people*, Retrieved from URL [http://portal.unesco.org/en/files/25197/11080250281Workbook2003\\_Anxiety.pdf/Workbook2003\\_Anxiety.pdf](http://portal.unesco.org/en/files/25197/11080250281Workbook2003_Anxiety.pdf/Workbook2003_Anxiety.pdf)
- Staff Writer, (2016, Nov.), *Anxiety Disorders and Anxiety Attacks*, Retrieved from URL  
<http://www.helpguide.org/articles/anxiety/anxiety-attacks-and-anxiety-disorders.htm>
- Staff Writer, (2014, May), *Understanding the facts of Anxiety disorders and depression is the first step*, Retrieved from URL <https://www.adaa.org/understanding-anxiety>
- NAMI, (2016), *Anxiety Disorders*, Retrieved from URL <https://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Conditions/Anxiety-Disorders>
- National Institute of Mental Health, (2016, March), *Anxiety Disorders*, Retrieved from URL  
<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/anxiety-disorders/index.shtml>