



Ways to ease anxiety and panic

In-the-moment coping strategies can often help you manage anxious thoughts and feelings. Here are a few methods to try so you can learn what works best for you.



Journalling

Getting your emotions out can be a very helpful way to process what you're going through and find calm. You can do this in whatever way works best for you – whether it be with pen and paper, typing an email to yourself, recording a voice memo for your ears only or another method. Having this record to look back on can help you assess your experiences and reactions and identify potential triggers.



Breathing exercises

Breathing exercises can help you calm down in the moment and relax when you're ready to sleep or just need a break. While there are many different types of breathing exercises, each one generally guides you to inhale, hold your breath and exhale in a specific count pattern.

You can find 2 how-to breathing exercise videos in this month's toolkit:

- The 4-7-8 breathing technique guides you to slowly inhale through your nose for a count of 4, hold your breath for a count of 7 and exhale for a count of 8.
- The box breathing technique guides you through a 4-count deep breathing exercise that comes from yoga practices. For 4 counts each, you'll inhale, hold your breath in, exhale and hold your breath out.

Both techniques are widely used for coping in the moment and nurturing overall calm. They activate your parasympathetic nervous system which helps decrease your heart rate and blood pressure. It also helps promote digestion and other important life-sustaining functions. It can help you build resiliency and overall wellbeing in the long term.



Reframing unhelpful thoughts

When you're already feeling upset or worried, negative thoughts can make you feel even worse. So, in difficult situations, it can be helpful to consider other possibilities and perspectives, including more positive ones. A good way to practise reframing is to ask yourself questions, such as:

- Why am I so worried about this?
- If someone I cared about were in this situation, what would I tell them?
- What evidence challenges these unhelpful thoughts?

Going through a reframing process can also help you feel calmer, since it distracts you in the moment and helps shift your focus to self-assessment and problem-solving. This in turn can help you feel more in control and empowered, and more optimistic.

With practice, thinking more positively can become part of your life and help improve your overall mental and emotional health and wellbeing. Here's a step-by-step guide to reframing unhelpful thoughts. Ask yourself:

1. Why am I stressed and/or having anxious thoughts? What happened?

2. What unhelpful thoughts am I having?

3. How do these thoughts make me feel?

4. What evidence supports these unhelpful thoughts?

5. What evidence challenges these unhelpful thoughts?

6. Based on the evidence, what would be a more helpful, realistic and/or balanced way to think about this?

Then, take a deep breath, let the other perspectives sink in and allow yourself to reset.



Moving your body

Being physically active is a generally helpful way to reduce stress, increase relaxation, and promote long-term health and wellbeing. Because everyone's fitness levels, physical capabilities and interests vary, it's important to find what works best for you.

Moving your body can also help you release tension and be present to calm anxious thoughts and feelings in the moment, including if you're experiencing a panic attack.



When to seek help

If you're concerned that your anxious thoughts and feelings are getting harder to manage or getting in the way of your day-to-day life, consult with a medical or mental health professional for help. They can help figure out what's causing your anxiety and help you take steps to manage it.

Sources

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