

Anxiety & Panic Attack Toolkit

UNDERSTANDING ANXIETY:

There is such a stigma attached to anxiety and panic attacks, which causes one to not want to discuss and seek help as we feel it is seen as a weakness — which it is absolutely not! This is just your body's way of protecting itself. When the body and mind feel in danger, it goes into FIGHT OR FLIGHT mode, which lifts your heart rate, cortisol levels, and breathing. For many people, this places you in a state of panic or triggers an anxiety attack. Being in a constant state of anxiety or experiencing a full-force panic attack is both BRUTAL. The severe fear experienced and feeling of losing control or nearing death is one of the worst feelings ever.

IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER: It is a normal medical condition —like someone with high blood pressure or sugar. Whether these conditions are medicated or managed by lifestyle and self-help, they are all the same.

IT IS NOT ALL IN YOUR MIND AND YOU ARE NOT GOING CRAZY

Too many times we hear “just snap out of it” or “I know what it feels like, I also get stressed.” It is the same as telling someone with a broken foot to just “walk it off.” It is important to understand that these people do not necessarily mean harm — they are just unaware of what real anxiety is and that it cannot be compared to normal stress. Therefore, it is important to speak up. Talk to your nearest and dearest about it. Explain what it feels like to you and how they can help when it happens.

Here are a few steps YOU can follow when you experience anxiety or have a full-on panic attack:

1. BREATHING

It is important to focus on your breathing first and foremost. Short, shallow breaths can cause a lack in oxygen, which can make you hyper ventilate, causing you to feel faint, go numb, shake etc.

There are many breathing techniques, which you can research and familiarise yourself with. However, here are 2 very effective ones to follow. REMEMBER, the goal is to get your breathing back to normal to slow down your heart rate.

THE 4-7-8 BREATHING TECHNIQUE

- Breathe in silently through your nose for a count of 4.
- After breathing in, hold your breath for a count of 7.
- Breathe out forcefully through your mouth for a count of 8, making a 'whoosh' sound as you let the air out.

🧘 Try: Trace the shape of a square with your finger as you breathe.



The Butterfly Hug / Breathing:

- Find a comfortable space (if possible) and sit up tall with your back straight
- If it feels safe, close or lower your eyes and start with some deep breathing
- Take space to notice any emotions or distress that may come up, continue to breathe through it
- Next cross your hands and place them on your chest so each middle finger rests right below the opposite collarbone. Fan your fingers, resting them on your chest
- Your thumbs will point towards your chin, and you can interlock your thumbs so it looks like a butterfly's body and the hands are its wings
- Now, alternate tapping your hands on your chest, slowly and rhythmically (left, right, left, right, etc.) for at least 8 rounds. Don't forget your deep breathing while you're fluttering your butterfly wings!
- Stop and check your level of distress. If your distress has not increased, try a couple more sets of 8. Stop after each set to check your level of distress, continuing if you are starting to feel less distress or more relaxed.



2. GROUNDING TECHNIQUES (5-4-3-2-1 METHOD)

Engage your senses to return to the present. Look around and name and describe the following:

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can touch
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste

🧠 Why it works: Redirects your mind from spiralling thoughts and grounds you in the present moment.

3. SAFE WORD OR PHRASE

Create a calming affirmation

Examples:

- "I am safe."
- "This feeling will pass."
- "I've survived this before, I will again."
- "It is only a panic attack. I am NOT dying"

🔊 Repeat it gently out loud or in your mind.

4. HUMAN INTERACTION

- If you are with someone, ask them to tell you something, anything. Preferable something to make you laugh.
- Try to make EYE CONTACT to connect to their state of being and breathing. Eye contact also makes one feel safe.
- If you are alone or driving, phone a loved one and ask them to just talk until you are at a place of safety or feel better.



5. CALMING OBJECT OR TEXTURE

Keep something small and soothing with you:

- Smooth stone
- Stress ball
- Soft fabric
- Fidget ring or spinner
- Worry bead
- Scented tissue (lavender, peppermint)

👉 Use touch to self-soothe and feel secure.

6. MUSIC OR SOUND

- Create a short playlist of calming music or nature sounds:
- Gentle piano, ocean waves, rain, singing bowls
- Use noise-cancelling headphones if in a noisy place
- SINGING. If you are alone, force yourself to slowly sing a simple song or your favourite song. Singing leads to oxytocin and endorphin release, all of which will work to lessen panic symptoms.

🎧 Try listening mindfully — focus only on the sound.



7. MOVEMENT

- Release built-up adrenaline with short movement:
- Shake your arms and hands out
- STRETCH – touch your toes and hold. Remember to focus on your breathing while doing so
- If you are driving, you can hold your hand out the window against the wind or against the air conditioner.
- You can also relax your muscles, by lying down with your arms at your sides, flex every muscle in your body and hold this position for 7 seconds. Slowly start relaxing your muscles, starting from your head down to your toes.
- You can also put pressure on the pressure points pointed out in the image. 👉

🚶 Movement helps discharge anxious energy.



8. SELF-SOOTHING KIT (PORTABLE)

Make a small pouch with:

- Calming essential oil (lavender, citrus)
- Chewing gum or mint
- Fidget tool or stress ball
- Tissues
- Medication, if applicable
- You can even make up a little card with your name, emergency contact number and an explanation that you are experiencing a panic attack. Add to this what you would like someone to do. This will come in handy if you are in strange surroundings, in a store etc and cannot explain for yourself. You can add your sentences of affirmation (I am Ok, it will pass, it is just a panic attack etc) to the back of this card. Keep it somewhere you can access easily.

👜 Keep it in your bag for public situations.



9. AFTERCARE

Once the panic passes:

- Drink a glass of water
- Rest if possible
- Talk to someone if needed
- Be gentle with yourself

♥ Your body did its best to protect you. You're okay.

TURNING THAT MONSTER INTO YOUR FRIEND...

Finding What Works for You

Everyone experiences anxiety differently, so it's important to find what works best for *you*. While the basics of managing anxiety are the same, what helps one person might not help another.

- For example:
 - A warm shower might feel soothing to some
 - Others may find it overwhelming or even scary
 - Some might feel claustrophobic or faint in the shower

Accept and Understand Anxiety

Anxiety is a normal reaction—not a sign that you've done something wrong or that you're weak. Accepting this is the first step toward healing.

- Talk about your feelings with someone you trust.
- Hearing your own words can help you see things more clearly.
- Remember: anxiety can lie to you, making you overthink and doubt yourself.
- When you feel calm again, remember that feeling and use it as an anchor during anxious moments.

ASK FOR HELP!

Whether it's a friend, family member, or a medical professional, reaching out for support is essential.

- You wouldn't ignore an aching tooth—treat your mental health with the same urgency.
- Asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness.

You Are in the Driver's Seat

Living with anxiety is a journey, and you're in control of the steering wheel.

- Yes, it can be uncomfortable and scary.
- No, it's not your fault or something you chose.
- But you *can* learn to navigate your mind and body through it, 100%.



To further assist you overcome these challenges, here are a few links you can access: and practise on a daily basis:

Relaxing / meditation music to assist with anxiety and sleep:

“Weighless Part 1 Marconi Union”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xViiwgE7Lbw>

Breathing exercises:

“60 Second breathing exercise for anxiety”
<https://youtu.be/Dx112W4i5l0?si=Z9larCqmf9aJ05gm>

“Personalised 4-7-8 Calm Breathing exercise”
<https://youtube.com/shorts/fqr8XNubEI?si=hikuC6xz0sVDZM9f>

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT):

“5 CBT exercises for anxiety” – Dr. Barbara Heffernan
<https://youtu.be/RFuYcly6Vxc?si=VNj08Dy7944JvQle>

Stretches for anxiety and stress:

“10 minute DEEP STRETCH Yoga for stress, anxiety and trauma”
<https://youtu.be/ylcjAEs18TQ?si=pveJyRdMehB0Tael>

I hope this manual will bring you some peace and calm as you navigate through these difficult waters. Be kind to yourself, acknowledge your pain and know that there is ALWAYS help at hand.

