



**Anxiety  
Symptom**



## FEELING MORE IRRITABLE (FEELING FRUSTRATED EASILY)

You **may** find it **hard to sit still**, **constantly fidgeting**, **tapping your fingers**, **or pacing without realizing it**. You **may also feel tense**, **as if something bad is about to happen**, and **struggle to relax even in calm situations**.

## MUSCLE TENSION (HAVING TIGHT MUSCLES WHICH ARE UNCOMFORTABLE)

You **may notice your shoulders and neck feel constantly tight and sore**, **even though they haven't done any heavy lifting or exercise**. They **might unconsciously clench their jaw or keep their fists balled**, **especially during stressful moments**.

## TROUBLE FALLING ASLEEP, STAYING ASLEEP, OR HAVING RESTLESS, UNSATISFYING SLEEP

You **may lay in bed for hours unable to fall asleep**, **your mind racing with thoughts about the day or worries about the future**. **When they finally doze off**, **they wake up frequently throughout the night**, **feeling uncomfortable or restless**.



## RESTLESSNESS OR FEELING KEYED UP OR ON EDGE

You **may find it hard to sit still, constantly fidgeting, tapping your fingers, or pacing without realizing it. You may also feel tense, as if something bad is about to happen, and struggle to relax even in calm situations.**

## BEING EASILY FATIGUED

You **may start feeling exhausted after simple tasks, like washing dishes. Activities that used to be effortless, such as running errands or socializing, now leave you drained.**

## DIFFICULTY CONCENTRATING OR MIND GOING BLANK

You **may struggle to focus on what's being said or read. Your mind keeps drifting, and even simple details slip away quickly.**

## FEELING NAUSEOUS/ HAVING UPSET STOMACH

You **may** experience **a queasy feeling in their stomach before a big presentation or exam. They might feel lightheaded, struggle to eat, or have an upset stomach.**

## FEELING TIGHTNESS IN YOUR CHEST AND/OR INCREASED HEART RATE

You **may** be sitting at your desk when you suddenly feel **a tight sensation in your chest and your heart starts racing. This happens during a stressful work meeting or while thinking about a difficult conversation you need to have.**



# **COPING STRATEGIES FOR ANXIETY**

# Grounding Techniques

After a trauma, it's normal to experience flashbacks, anxiety, and other uncomfortable symptoms. **Grounding techniques** help control these symptoms by turning attention away from thoughts, memories, or worries, and refocusing on the present moment.

## 5-4-3-2-1 Technique

Using the 5-4-3-2-1 technique, you will purposefully take in the details of your surroundings using each of your senses. Strive to notice small details that your mind would usually tune out, such as distant sounds, or the texture of an ordinary object.



**What are 5 things you can see?** Look for small details such as a pattern on the ceiling, the way light reflects off a surface, or an object you never noticed.



**What are 4 things you can feel?** Notice the sensation of clothing on your body, the sun on your skin, or the feeling of the chair you are sitting in. Pick up an object and examine its weight, texture, and other physical qualities.



**What are 3 things you can hear?** Pay special attention to the sounds your mind has tuned out, such as a ticking clock, distant traffic, or trees blowing in the wind.



**What are 2 things you can smell?** Try to notice smells in the air around you, like an air freshener or freshly mowed grass. You may also look around for something that has a scent, such as a flower or an unlit candle.



**What is 1 thing you can taste?** Carry gum, candy, or small snacks for this step. Pop one in your mouth and focus your attention closely on the flavors.

## Categories

Choose at least three of the categories below and name as many items as you can in each one. Spend a few minutes on each category to come up with as many items as possible.

Movies	Countries	Books	Cereals
Sports Teams	Colors	Cars	Fruits & Vegetables
Animals	Cities	TV Shows	Famous People

*For a variation on this activity, try naming items in a category alphabetically. For example, for the fruits & vegetables category, say "apple, banana, carrot," and so on.*

# Grounding Techniques

## Body Awareness

The body awareness technique will bring you into the here-and-now by directing your focus to sensations in the body. Pay special attention to the physical sensations created by each step.

1. Take 5 long, deep breaths through your nose, and exhale through puckered lips.
2. Place both feet flat on the floor. Wiggle your toes. Curl and uncurl your toes several times. Spend a moment noticing the sensations in your feet.
3. Stomp your feet on the ground several times. Pay attention to the sensations in your feet and legs as you make contact with the ground.
4. Clench your hands into fists, then release the tension. Repeat this 10 times.
5. Press your palms together. Press them harder and hold this pose for 15 seconds. Pay attention to the feeling of tension in your hands and arms.
6. Rub your palms together briskly. Notice and sound and the feeling of warmth.
7. Reach your hands over your head like you're trying to reach the sky. Stretch like this for 5 seconds. Bring your arms down and let them relax at your sides.
8. Take 5 more deep breaths and notice the feeling of calm in your body.

## Mental Exercises

Use mental exercises to take your mind off uncomfortable thoughts and feelings. They are discreet and easy to use at nearly any time or place. Experiment to see which work best for you.

- Name all the objects you see.
- Describe the steps in performing an activity you know how to do well. For example, how to shoot a basketball, prepare your favorite meal, or tie a knot.
- Count backwards from 100 by 7.
- Pick up an object and describe it in detail. Describe its color, texture, size, weight, scent, and any other qualities you notice.
- Spell your full name, and the names of three other people, backwards.
- Name all your family members, their ages, and one of their favorite activities.
- Read something backwards, letter-by-letter. Practice for at least a few minutes.
- Think of an object and "draw" it in your mind, or in the air with your finger. Try drawing your home, a vehicle, or an animal.

# Challenging Anxious Thoughts

Anxiety can be a healthy emotion—it forces us to focus on our problems, and work hard to solve them. But sometimes, anxiety grows out of control, and does just the opposite. It *cripples* our ability to solve problems. When this happens, **irrational thoughts** often play a role.

In this exercise, we will practice catching our irrational thoughts, and replacing them with rational alternatives. With enough practice, this will become a natural process that can help you manage anxiety.

## Describe a common situation that triggers your anxiety:

example: "giving a speech in front of a crowd" or "driving in rush hour traffic"

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Anxiety distorts our thinking by causing us to **overestimate the likelihood of something going wrong**, and **imagine the potential consequences as worse than they really are**. Sometimes, just taking a moment to think about these facts can help us recognize our irrational thoughts.

## Imagine you are faced with the anxiety-producing situation from above. Describe the...

Worst outcome:
Best outcome:
Likely outcome:

## Imagine the worst outcome comes true. Would it still matter...

1 week from now:
1 month from now:
1 year from now:

Usually, anxious thoughts focus on the worst possible outcomes, even when they aren't likely. For example, a person who is nervous about giving a speech might think: "*I am going to forget everything and embarrass myself, and I'll never live it down*".

As an outside observer, we know that an alternate, more rational thought might be: "*My speech might only be OK, but if I do mess up, everyone will forget about it soon enough*".

## Using your own "worst outcome" and "likely outcome" from above, describe your...

Irrational thought:
Rational thought:



# CBT For Anxiety

When learning to cope with anxiety it is important to know not only your warning signs and triggers, but also how to work through that anxiety to make it less intense. When learning how to cope with anxiety,

## 1. Identify the source of the anxiety.

use the following CBT steps to help you feel less anxious. **Why are you feeling anxious?**

## 2. Identify the negative beliefs you have about yourself and the situation.

about the scenario that is fueling the anxiety? **What about do you know**

## 3. Identify the negative thoughts that are strengthening the anxiety.

**What are the negative thoughts?**

## 4. Challenge the negative thoughts.

**What do you know about yourself and the situation that disproves the negative thoughts and beliefs? What can you remind yourself to make the feelings less intense?**

## 5. Breathe.

While you challenge the negative thoughts, remember to breathe. Take 10 second breath in through the nose, and out through the mouth.

**Anxiety is a feeling that fuels the thoughts and beliefs. Remind yourself it is just a feeling. It does not have control over you.**

**What is your balanced resolution that realistically reflects the situation?**

## 8. Results of the situation.

**Has your anxiety decreased? Has the situation turned out to be not as bad as feared? What helped the most in reducing the anxiety?**

# Cognitive Distortions

Cognitive distortions are irrational thoughts that can influence your emotions. Everyone experiences cognitive distortions to some degree, but in their more extreme forms they can be harmful.

**Magnification and Minimization:** Exaggerating or minimizing the importance of events. One might believe their own achievements are unimportant, or that their mistakes are excessively important.

**Catastrophizing:** Seeing only the worst possible outcomes of a situation.

**Overgeneralization:** Making broad interpretations from a single or few events. "I felt awkward during my job interview. I am *always* so awkward."

**Magical Thinking:** The belief that acts will influence unrelated situations. "I am a good person—bad things shouldn't happen to me."

**Personalization:** The belief that one is responsible for events outside of their own control. "My mom is always upset. She would be fine if I did more to help her."

**Jumping to Conclusions:** Interpreting the meaning of a situation with little or no evidence.

**Mind Reading:** Interpreting the thoughts and beliefs of others without adequate evidence. "She would not go on a date with me. She probably thinks I'm ugly."

**Fortune Telling:** The expectation that a situation will turn out badly without adequate evidence.

**Emotional Reasoning:** The assumption that emotions reflect the way things really are. "I feel like a bad friend, therefore I must be a bad friend."

**Disqualifying the Positive:** Recognizing only the negative aspects of a situation while ignoring the positive. One might receive many compliments on an evaluation, but focus on the single piece of negative feedback.

**"Should" Statements:** The belief that things should be a certain way. "I should always be friendly."

**All-or-Nothing Thinking:** Thinking in absolutes such as "always", "never", or "every". "I *never* do a good enough job on anything."