

# Coping with Anxiety

Focusing on how much you want your anxiety to be gone can make it BIGGER. Instead, when anxiety feels overwhelming, try some techniques from this list. Once you've found techniques that help, circle or highlight them and put this list on your wall or carry it in your pocket.

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## Grounding/Physical

### (Being present in your body in the Here and Now)

- Breathe slowly and steadily from your diaphragm, so your stomach moves in and out with each breath. Imagine letting fear and worry go, evaporating along with each breath.
- Wiggle your fingers, tap your feet. Pay attention to the movement: You are in control of what your body is doing, right here and now.
- Do some gentle stretches for five minutes. Breathe slowly and smoothly.
- Do a body scan, or have a loved one lead you through one. Some examples are available here: [www.mindful.org/the-body-scan-practice](http://www.mindful.org/the-body-scan-practice)
- Eat or drink something. Is it hot, or cold? Sweet, or sour?
- Use your voice. Say your name or pick up a book and read the first paragraph you find out loud.
- Look at yourself in the mirror. Smile, even if that's the last thing you feel like! How does it feel? What can you see? (If negative thoughts come to mind, write them down to look at later but let them go for now.)
- Laugh. Even if it's hard. Just the act of laughing about something, anything, can break that spinning out of control feeling.
- Take a shower/bath. Notice the sensations of the water.
- Exercise. Jump up and down on the spot. Try some gentle yoga, go for a walk, or ride a bike.
- Hold onto something comforting. Maybe a blanket or an old stuffed toy.

## Imagery/Meditation

- Imagine yourself in a familiar, comfortable place. Imagine the colors, textures, smells. Feel the safety. Know it.
- Pick a mantra. ("Relax." "You're going to be ok." "You can do this.") Whisper it, say it out loud, or say it in your head. For two full minutes.
- Listen to a guided meditation. The internet is full of them. A few to try are: [www.sonima.com/meditation/guided-meditations-meditation/](http://www.sonima.com/meditation/guided-meditations-meditation/), [marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=22](http://marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=22), or [www.chopra.com/ccl/guided-meditations](http://www.chopra.com/ccl/guided-meditations).

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## Social

- Go out and be among people, whether or not you actually interact with them. Try a coffee shop, book store, or other low pressure place. See that life is carrying on as normal.
- Write somebody you care about an email.
- Call a friend and have a chat.

## Writing

- Write out what's going on. Keep writing until you start to notice it makes a difference, lets some of the things you're anxious about out.
- When you're not too stressed, make a list of the things that provoke your anxiety. Take it to your therapist and ask them to help you find ways to desensitize you to some of those things.
- List 5 really positive things in your life. Put the list where you'll see it and remember that there's more to the world than just panic and fear.

## Creative

- Go on a photo walk. Take pictures of anything that looks interesting to you. Pause to notice what you hear; maybe even name the sounds. Notice what you smell and even reach out to feel the textures around you. Bring your awareness to all the colors you see. Take photos. Breathe. Be present to your surroundings.
- Write and/or draw in a paper (not computer) journal. Just whatever comes to mind. Even if you write "I can't think of what to say" over and over or make a list, you are engaging both sides of your brain in something other than your anxiety.
- Play with watercolors. Don't worry about the finished product, just let your inner child out to play.
- Color in a coloring book. There are plenty available for adults now too. You'll feel relaxed and engaged at the same time.

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## References

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