

Exercises to Relieve Anxiety and Stress

Belly Breathing

Belly breathing is an easy, effective way to relax or relieve anxiety and stress.

- Sit or lie flat in a comfortable position.
- Put one hand on your belly (just below your ribs). The other hand should go on your chest.
- Breathe in deeply through your nose, letting your belly push out your hand. (Your chest should not move.)
- Breathe out through pursed lips, almost as if you were trying to whistle. You should feel the hand on your belly moving in.
- Do this breathing technique 5 to 10 times. Don't rush each breath.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Tensing and releasing the muscles in your body is an easy way to achieve a feeling of relaxation. Additionally, progressive muscle relaxation helps you identify anxiety by teaching you to recognize tension in your muscles.

- Sit or lie in a comfortable position.
- For each body area listed below, tense your muscles tightly, but not to the point of strain or pain.
 - FEET:* Curl your toes tightly into your feet, then release them.
 - CALVES:* Point or flex your feet, then let them relax.
 - THIGHS:* Squeeze your thighs together tightly, then let them relax.
 - TORSO:* Suck in your abdomen, then release the tension and let it fall.
 - BACK:* Squeeze your shoulder blades together, then release.
 - SHOULDERS:* Lift and squeeze your shoulders toward your ears, then let them drop.
 - ARMS:* Make fists and squeeze them toward your shoulders, then let them drop.
 - HANDS:* Make a fist by curling your fingers into your palm, then relax your fingers.
 - FACE:* Scrunch your facial features to the center of your face, then relax.
 - WHOLE BODY:* Squeeze all muscles together, then release all tension.
- Hold the tension for 10 seconds in each area, paying close attention to how it feels. After 10 seconds, release the tension, noting how relaxation differs from the feeling of tension.

Equal Time Breathing In and Breathing Out

In this exercise, you'll match how long you breathe in with how long you breathe out. With practice, you will be able to increase how long you're able to breathe in and out each time.

- Sit in a comfortable position.
- Breathe in through your nose as you slowly count to five.
- Breathe out through your nose as you slowly count to five again.
- Repeat breathing in and out several times.
- Once you feel comfortable with breaths that last five counts, increase how long you breathe in and breathe out.

Imagery

Did you know your thoughts have the power to change how you feel? If you think about something upsetting, you can easily make yourself upset. On the other hand, if you think about something calming and/or positive, you can begin to relax. Using imagery techniques, such as this one that engages the five senses, is a great way to harness the power of thought to reduce anxiety and stress.

SEE: What do you see around you? What can you see in the distance? Look all around and take in your surroundings. Try to identify small details that you would normally overlook or miss.

HEAR: What sounds can you hear? Are you in a quiet or loud environment. Listen closely to the noise around you and try to pick out individual sounds. Also, try to identify sounds in the distance.

TASTE: Are you eating or drinking something? Are you enjoying its flavor? Why or why not? Slow down and enjoy every note of the food or drink.

TOUCH: What can you feel? What is the temperature in your environment? How does the air feel on your skin? Think about how your clothes feel on your body. Are there any other touch sensations you are experiencing?

SMELL: What scents are present in your environment? Are they strong or faint? Are they from nature or manmade? Close your eyes and focus on the scents around you.

Resources

Therapist Aid, LLC. (2018). Coping skills: Anxiety. Retrieved from <https://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/coping-skills-anxiety.pdf>

Web. M. D. (n.d.) Breathing techniques for stress relief. Retrieved from <https://www.webmd.com/balance/stress-management/stress-relief-breathing-techniques#1>