

# Control your anxiety

When you notice yourself becoming anxious do something to make yourself feel better.

Keep an open mind and try some of these ideas to find out what works for you.

## Relaxation exercises

Many famous celebrities, athletes and musicians use relaxation exercises to help them prepare for challenges. Relaxation involves tensing each of the major muscle groups in your body and then releasing the tension. Tensing the muscles helps them to relax.

There are several audio guides that will take you through the process of tensing and relaxing your muscles. If you don't have one you can follow the instructions below.

- Choose a time when you won't be interrupted. Find a quiet, warm place and turn your phone off. Lie down or sit comfortably. You may want to shut your eyes but if you want to keep them open that's fine.
- Tense each muscle group twice. Tense it enough so that it feels tight but don't hurt yourself.
- Start by taking 5 deep breaths. Slowly breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth
- Now turn your attention to your feet and curl up your toes. Scrunch them up, count to 5 and release them. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. Tense them again
- Move your attention to your legs and tense your calves by pointing your toes towards your knees. Count to 5, release the tension and notice the difference between tension and relaxation.
- Tense your thighs by pushing the back of your legs against the chair or bed.
- Move to your stomach and tense this by sucking in your stomach and pushing your belly button towards your spine.
- Focus on your arms and hands and tense them by making a tight fist and curling your arms up towards your shoulders.
- Now tense your back by arching your spine and pushing your shoulder blades together. Count to 5, relax and notice the difference between tension and relaxation.
- Focus on your neck and shoulders and push your shoulders up towards your ears.
- Shift your attention to your face and tense your chin and jaw by clenching your teeth and pushing your chin down towards your chest
- Finally, tense the rest of the muscles in your face by closing your eyes and pressing your lips together tightly and screw up your face
- As you release each muscle notice the tension fade away

- Return your attention to your breathing and enjoy this relaxed feeling for a few minutes.

## Quick Relaxation

There may be times when you don't have time to tense and relax each of your muscles. A quicker way of doing this is to tense each of the major muscle groups together.

Tense your muscles, hold them for 5 seconds and as you breathe out let them go and notice the tension fade away. Repeat this and enjoy that nice calm feeling for a couple of minutes.

- Arms and hands: Clench your fists and push your arms towards your shoulders
- Legs and feet: Push your toes towards your knees, gently raise your legs and stretch them out in front of you
- Stomach: Suck your tummy in
- Shoulders and neck: Push your shoulders up towards your ears and pull your shoulder blades together
- Face: Screw up your face, squeeze your eyes and jaw tightly, and push your lips together.
- The more you practice the easier you will find this.

## Physical activity

A natural way of tensing and relaxing your muscles is through physical activity. Activity can also improve your mood. When you exercise, your brain produces chemicals which make you feel good.

You can do as little or as much physical activity as you want. The idea is to do enough to release the tension in your body. Think about the exercise you enjoy. It could be anything like



## 4-5-6 breathing

When people become anxious, they often notice that their breathing changes. They start to breathe in short, shallow, fast breaths. This is part of a normal reaction designed to keep you safe called the “fight or flight response”. When this happens, you breathe in more oxygen to give your body the fuel

it needs to deal with the threat that is making you anxious – run-away or fight it off. Controlling your breathing can help you relax and regain control.

This is a quick way to regain control of your breathing and to calm down. It is very simple and can be used anywhere. People will probably not even notice what you are doing.

- Breathe in slowly through your mouth to the count of 4
- Hold the breath to the count of 5
- Slowly breathe out through your mouth to the count of 6
- Repeat 3 times.

## Calming images

We can use our imagination to create a special calming place which can help us to feel relaxed, peaceful and happy.

You need to practice creating an image of your special place. When you feel stressed you can go there in your mind to relax and unwind.

Your calming place should be somewhere that feels very special to you. It could be somewhere that you have been which has good memories or an imaginary place like floating in space.

To help you create a good image find a photograph or draw a picture of your calming place.

Practice creating this image in your mind and try to make it as real as possible by describing:

- **What you see** - the colours of the sky and sand and the shapes of the rocks
- **What you hear** - the sound of waves crashing on the beach and the noise of seagulls shrieking
- **What you feel** - the wind blowing through your hair and the sun warming your face
- **What you smell** - the smell of sunscreen and the smoky BBQ
- **What you taste** - the salty water in your mouth
- **Practice imaging** your calming place. If you notice yourself feeling anxious or stressed, then create your calming image and imagine you are there.

## Change the feeling

Often, we notice how we feel but don't do anything to make ourselves feel better. It seems as if our feelings are in charge and control us. This isn't the case. There are many things we can do to help ourselves feel better.

If you notice an unpleasant feeling don't just live with it, change it. You can do this by doing something that makes you feel good.

If you are feeling tense, try and do something that helps you relax. It could be having a long bath, drawing, having a massage, listening to your favourite music or reading a book.

If you are feeling unhappy try and do something that helps you feel good. It could be watching your favourite comedy, painting your nails, baking a cake or playing with a pet.

If you are feeling angry try and do something that helps you calm down. It could be going on the internet, hitting a cushion or punch bag, watching TV, popping bubble wrap or going for a walk.

## Soothe yourself

Sometimes we might blame ourselves or feel guilty about things and think that we deserve to feel bad. No one deserves to feel bad so you need to be kinder to yourself. Look after yourself and find ways to soothe and comfort yourself.

One way you can soothe yourself is by stimulating your senses with things you find pleasurable. Really concentrate on what you are doing and don't let your mind wander. Pretend it is the first time you have ever smelt, touched, tasted, seen or heard these things

Find what works for you and what stimulates your senses.

- **Smell:** Your favourite perfume, soap, fresh coffee, scented candle
- **Touch:** A smooth stone, soft toy, silky fabric, warm bath
- **Taste:** A chewy sweet, soft marshmallow, strong mint, refreshing apple, tangy orange
- **Sight:** Pictures or quotes that make you smile, watching a fish tank, clouds in the sky
- **Hearing:** Your favourite music, birds singing, sound of the trees blowing in the wind

## Talk to someone

Whilst other people can often be the cause of our distress and unhappiness, they can also help us to feel better.

If you are feeling down or anxious don't sit on your own. If you do you will probably find yourself rehearsing what has happened or worrying about what will happen. Instead of this decide:

- Who could you talk with? Who makes you feel good?
- What do you want to tell them? Do you want to share how you are feeling or to talk about other things?
- What do you want them to do? Do you need someone to listen to you, give you a hug, or help to sort out a problem? You need to tell them what you want.
- How will you contact them? You can arrange to meet them, telephone, text, email or use social media.
- When will you contact them? As soon as possible so that you can start to feel better.