

# What is Anxiety?

**Anxiety** is a mental and physical reaction to perceived threats. In small doses, anxiety is helpful. It protects us from danger, and focuses our attention on problems. But when anxiety is too severe, or occurs too frequently, it can become debilitating.

## ♥ Symptoms of Anxiety

- uncontrollable worry
- excessive nervousness
- sleep problems
- muscle tension
- poor concentration
- increased heart rate
- upset stomach
- avoidance of fear

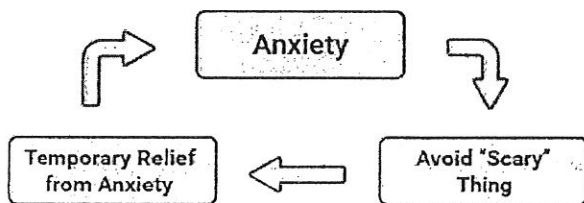
## ☰ Types of Anxiety

**Generalized Anxiety:** An excessive amount of anxiety or worry in several areas of life, such as job responsibilities, health, finances, or minor concerns (e.g. completing housework).

**Phobias:** A very intense fear of a specific situation or object, which is out of proportion to its actual threat. For example, a fear of giving speeches, or of spiders, could be considered a phobia.

**Panic:** An extreme anxious response where a person experiences a panic attack. During a panic attack, the individual experiences numerous physical symptoms, and is overwhelmed by a feeling of dread.

## 📈 How Does Anxiety Grow?



Anxiety drives people to avoid the things that scare them. When a "scary" thing is avoided, there is an immediate but short-lived sense of relief. However, the next time a similar threat arises, it feels even scarier. This creates a harmful cycle of avoidance, and worsening anxiety.

## + Anxiety Treatments



### Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

CBT is a very effective treatment for anxiety. During CBT, the unhealthy thinking patterns that create anxiety are identified, and challenged. Oftentimes, CBT will also include components of exposure therapy and relaxation skills.



### Exposure Therapy

During exposure therapy, the therapist and their client create a plan to gradually face anxiety-producing situations, thus breaking the cycle of avoidance. With enough exposure, the anxiety loses its power, and the symptoms diminish.



### Relaxation Skills

Various techniques—such as deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, and mindfulness—provide immediate relief from the symptoms of anxiety. With practice, relaxation skills will become a powerful way to manage anxiety in the moment.



### Medication

Medication can help control the uncomfortable symptoms of anxiety. However, because medication does not fix the underlying problems of anxiety, it is typically used in conjunction with therapy. The need for medication varies greatly, case-by-case.

# Exploring Social Anxiety

**Social anxiety** is a disorder characterized by overwhelming anxiety or self-consciousness in ordinary social situations. In milder cases, the symptoms of social anxiety only appear in specific situations, such as public speaking. On the more extreme end, any form of social interaction can act as a trigger.

Because everyone's thoughts, feelings, and reactions to social anxiety are different, it's valuable to spend some time thinking about your unique experience.

**Which social situations are you anxious about?**

Giving a speech.	Spending time alone with a friend.	Going on a date.	Attending a crowded event.
Going to the grocery store.	Making eye contact.	Being the center of attention.	Talking on the phone.
Meeting someone new.	Dealing with authority figures.	_____	_____

**What are you worried about during social situations?**

Embarrassing myself.	Looking stupid.	My physical appearance.	Being disliked.
Being rejected.	Not knowing what to talk about.	Being noticed.	_____

Oftentimes, social anxiety will lead a person to build their life in a "safe" way that shields them from their fears, rather than living how they truly want. This is a form of **avoidance**, which will actually make anxiety worse over time. Next, we'll explore how social anxiety and avoidance has impacted your life.

**List three ways in which social anxiety has impacted your life. For example, did anxiety affect your choice of career? Has it affected your relationships?**

1
2
3

**Imagine you wake up tomorrow, and your social anxiety is gone. How would your life be different? List three examples, being as specific as possible.**

1
2
3



# Coping Skills

## Anxiety

### Challenging Irrational Thoughts

Anxiety can be magnified by irrational thoughts. For example, the thoughts that "something bad will happen" or "I will make a mistake" might lack evidence, but still have an impact on how you feel. By examining the evidence and challenging these thoughts, you can reduce anxiety.

**Put thoughts on trial.** Choose a thought that has contributed to your anxiety. Gather evidence in support of your thought (*verifiable facts only*), and against your thought. Compare the evidence and determine whether your thought is accurate or not.

**Use Socratic questioning.** Question the thoughts that contribute to your anxiety. Ask yourself:

"Is my thought based on facts or feelings?"

"How would my best friend see this situation?"

"How likely is it that my fear will come true?"

"What's *most likely* to happen?"

"If my fear comes true, will it still matter in a week? A month? A year?"

### Imagery

Your thoughts have the power to change how you feel. If you think of something sad, it's likely you'll start to feel sad. The opposite is also true: When you think of something positive and calming, you feel relaxed. The imagery technique harnesses this power to reduce anxiety.

Think of a place that you find comforting. It could be a secluded beach, your bedroom, a quiet mountaintop, or even a loud concert. For 5 to 10 minutes, use all your senses to imagine this setting in great detail. Don't just think fleetingly about this place—really imagine it.



What do you see around you? What do you notice in the distance? Look all around to take in all your surroundings. Look for small details you would usually miss.



What sounds can you hear? Are they soft or loud? Listen closely to everything around you. Keep listening to see if you notice any distant sounds.



Are you eating or drinking something enjoyable? What is the flavor like? How does it taste? Savor all the tastes of the food or drink.



What can you feel? What is the temperature like? Think of how the air feels on your skin, and how your clothes feel on your body. Soak in all these sensations.



What scents are present? Are they strong or faint? What does the air smell like? Take some time to appreciate the scents.

# Coping Skills

## Anxiety

### Deep Breathing

Deep breathing is a simple technique that's excellent for managing emotions. Not only is deep breathing effective, it's also discreet and easy to use at any time or place.

Sit comfortably and place one hand on your abdomen. Breathe in through your nose, deeply enough that the hand on your abdomen rises. Hold the air in your lungs, and then exhale slowly through your mouth, with your lips puckered as if you are blowing through a straw. The secret is to go slow: Time the inhalation (4s), pause (4s), and exhalation (6s). Practice for 3 to 5 minutes.



### Progressive Muscle Relaxation

By tensing and relaxing the muscles throughout your body, you can achieve a powerful feeling of relaxation. Additionally, progressive muscle relaxation will help you spot anxiety by teaching you to recognize feelings of muscle tension.

Sit back or lie down in a comfortable position. For each area of the body listed below, you will tense your muscles tightly, but not to the point of strain. Hold the tension for 10 seconds, and pay close attention to how it feels. Then, release the tension, and notice how the feeling of relaxation differs from the feeling of tension.

<b>Feet</b>	Curl your toes tightly into your feet, then release them.
<b>Calves</b>	Point or flex your feet, then let them relax.
<b>Thighs</b>	Squeeze your thighs together tightly, then let them relax.
<b>Torso</b>	Suck in your abdomen, then release the tension and let it fall.
<b>Back</b>	Squeeze your shoulder blades together, then release them.
<b>Shoulders</b>	Lift and squeeze your shoulders toward your ears, then let them drop.
<b>Arms</b>	Make fists and squeeze them toward your shoulders, then let them drop.
<b>Hands</b>	Make a fist by curling your fingers into your palm, then relax your fingers.
<b>Face</b>	Scrunch your facial features to the center of your face, then relax.
<b>Full Body</b>	Squeeze all muscles together, then release all tension.

# Alphabet of Stress Management and Coping Skills

## A

Ask for help  
Aromatherapy  
Art  
Attend an event of interest  
Athletics  
Ask to talk to a friend  
Allow time to think  
Apologize  
Add numbers  
Aerobics  
Act out favorite actor/actress  
Artistically express feelings  
Act out feelings  
Address the real issue

## B

Bounce a stress ball  
Breathe slowly  
Baking  
Basketball  
Be attentive

## C

Count to ten  
Color a picture  
Catch a ball  
Call crisis line  
Call a friend  
Cookie decorating  
Collect thoughts  
Chat with friends  
Calming techniques

## D

Deep breathing  
Drawing emotions/feelings  
Dancing  
Do push ups  
Driving  
Drink water  
Dress up (play)  
Discuss feelings  
Demonstrate self-control

## E

Eat a snack  
Exercise  
Escape the situation

## F

Find a safe place  
Finish house work  
Fishing  
Free weight  
Find a book to read  
Filter emotions  
Find a puzzle to play  
Find a friend  
Free write feelings  
Following directions  
Fly a kite  
Focus attention elsewhere

## G

Go talk to an adult  
Go to happy place  
Golfing  
Games  
Going to a friends  
Get help from teacher  
Go outside  
Go running  
Go swimming  
Going to the gym  
Gather thoughts  
Go to a different place  
Grow a garden  
Get help from others

## H

Help someone else with a problem  
Hiking  
Have a party  
Hug a friend  
High jumps  
Hang out with friends  
Have someone listen to your problem

## I

"I" statements  
Identify triggers  
Instagram pictures  
Interact with friends  
Initiate conversation  
Imagine your safe place  
Invite someone to play  
Ignore people

## J

Logging in place  
Jot down good behaviors  
Jumping Jacks  
Jumping rope  
Journaling

## K

Kick a soccer ball  
Keep a journal  
Knitting  
Kickboxing  
Keep calm by thinking  
Kickball  
Keep hands to yourself

## L

Listen and discuss  
Laugh  
Long walks  
Listen to music  
Lay down  
Lift weights  
Letter writing  
Look outside  
Learn something new  
Lay head down on desk

## M

Make a plan  
Make silly faces  
Make food  
Make a craft  
Meditate  
Make a book  
Meet new people

## N

Napping  
Notes to self  
Never give up  
Name something positive

## O

Offer assistance  
Organize item of interest  
Obstacle course  
Open up  
Observe a movie  
Observe surroundings



## **P**

Play a game  
Paint a picture  
Play instrument  
Prepare healthy meal  
Play at the park  
Phone a friend  
Play music  
Practice sport  
Play with PlayDough  
Pretend you are in the other  
persons shoes

## **Q**

Quiet time  
Quilting  
Quickly remove stressor  
Quiet down  
Question feelings

## **R**

Read  
Run  
Ride a bike  
Relax  
Rest  
Request space

## **S**

Sing  
Sleep  
Swim  
Soak in tub  
Soccer  
Send a letter  
Stretch muscles  
Sit in a hammock  
Sun bathing  
Standing alone  
Stop and think about  
response  
Shoot baskets  
Separate self  
Speak up  
Stop and listen

## **T**

Talk to a friend  
Talk to an adult  
Take time by yourself  
Take a walk  
Take a hot shower/bath  
Take deep breaths  
Take a break  
Take a nap  
Talk it out

## **U**

Untie your shoes  
Use a work out video  
Undertake a project  
Unite with family  
Unwind  
Utilize support system  
Use a yoyo  
Use tools  
Utilize resources/coping skills

## **V**

View TV  
Visit a friend/family  
Volunteer  
Visualize calm space  
Verbalize emotions  
effectively  
Visit counselor  
Video games  
Vent feelings

## **W**

Watch a movie  
Write poetry  
Walking  
Write in journal  
Walk outside  
Workout  
Write feelings/thoughts  
Walk away from situation  
Write a letter

## **X**

Xylophone playing  
Xbox  
X-ray your feelings

## **Y**

Yell into a pillow  
Yoga  
Yodel  
Yoyo

## **Z**

Zigzag around room  
Zumba  
Zone out