

Breathing & Relaxation

A brief guide

Distraction Techniques

If you're feeling panicked, try to remember

5, 4, 3, 2, 1:

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can hear
- 3 things you can touch
- 2 things you can smell
- Take 1 long, deep breath.

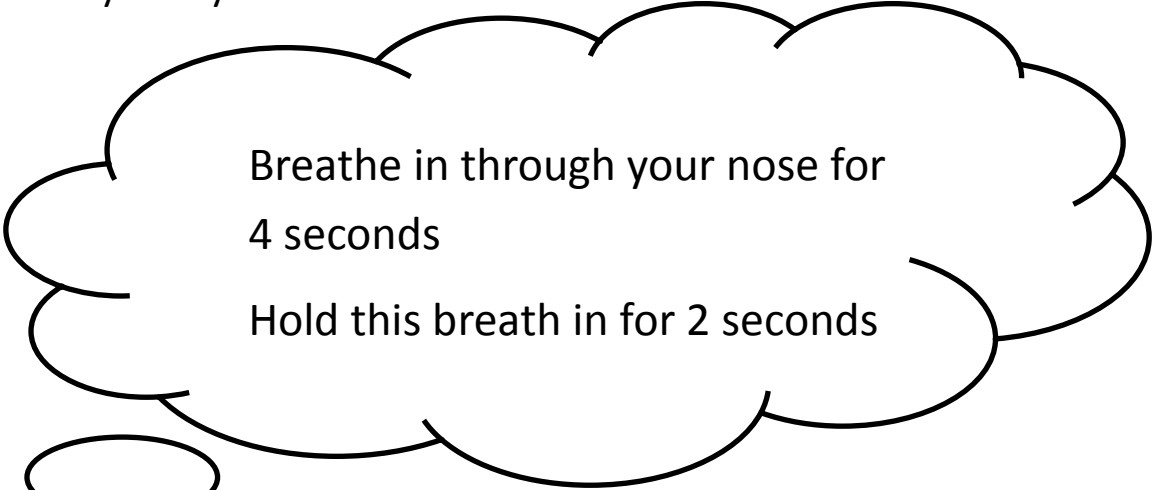
Count Your Environment

Focussing on the world around you can help distract you from anxious thoughts. Examples of counting can be:

- Counting the number of bricks in a wall, or number of ceiling tiles above you.
- Name as many words as possible beginning with the starting letter of your name.
- Count passing cars or people.
- Count backwards from 100.

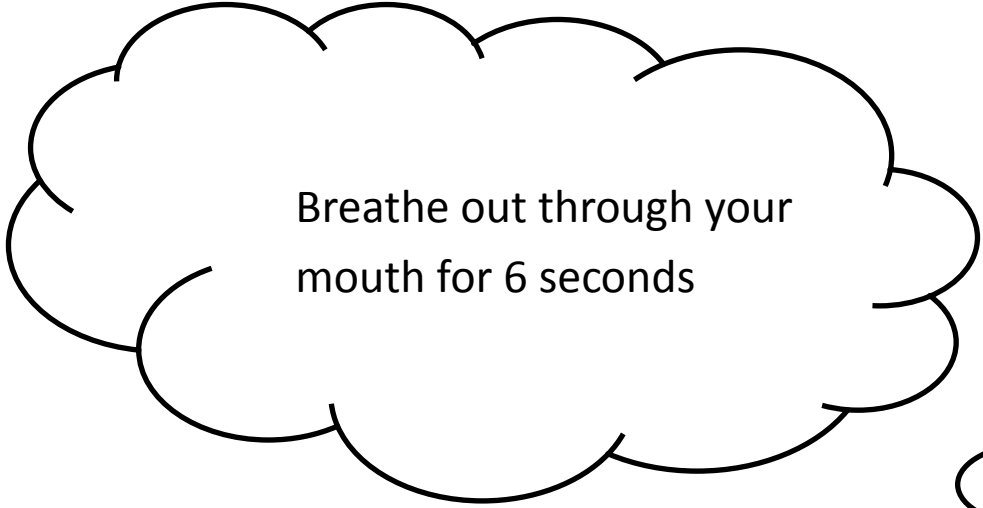
A Simple Breathing Exercise

Find a quiet environment and sit comfortably with your eyes closed.



Breathe in through your nose for
4 seconds
Hold this breath in for 2 seconds

Focus on your chest expanding
as you breathe in



Breathe out through your
mouth for 6 seconds

Focus on your body softening as
your breath leaves your body

Repeat this routine as and when you are feeling anxious. Try to get into the habit of practicing five minutes of breathing daily, perhaps in the morning as you get ready for the day.

Tense & Relax

When you are anxious you carry a lot of stress in your body. Using muscle relaxation techniques can lower your stress levels and help you to relax when you are feeling anxious.

Start with your feet and work upwards through your body. Tense and relax each area of your body five times. Pay attention to the feeling of the tension and stress collecting in your muscles and then evaporating as you relax.

Don't rush this exercise—it should take around 10 to 15 minutes.

Feet - Scrunch up your toes.

Legs - Tighten your calf muscles by stretching your toes upwards. Squeeze your thigh muscles.

Bum - clench your buttocks together!

Hands - Clench your fists.

Arms - Keep your hand in a fist and tense your arm muscles as if you showing off your muscles.

Stomach - Pull your tummy in as tight as comfortably possible.

Chest - Take a long, breath.

Shoulders - Raise your shoulders up in a big shrug.

Mouth - Open your mouth wide and stretch out your jaw.

Head - Close your eyes tightly and raise your eyebrows as far as you can.

Positive Affirmations

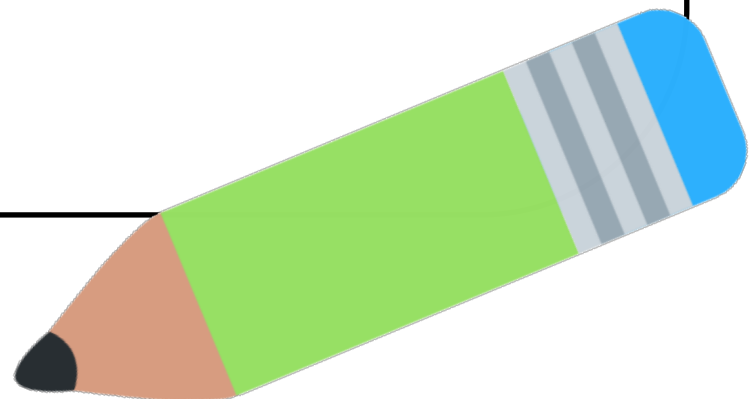
As well as seeking reassurance from others, it is useful to learn how to reassure yourself in times of anxiety. It can be tempting to surrender to these feelings to despair, but adopting and repeating positive mantras will help you reframe the way you see things.

Examples of positive affirmations:

- This is just anxiety, nothing more.
- This feeling will pass.
- I am safe.
- I am becoming calmer with each breath
- I am in control

Remember: be kind to yourself. Anxiety and panic attacks can be extremely unpleasant, but they *will* pass and you *will* get through it.

*Write down some of your own
Positive Affirmations to use
when you are feeling anxious...*



Visualisation

As well as breathing exercises, you can use visual imagery to relax yourself and unwind. It can be difficult to turn off our anxious thoughts, and having something to focus on instead can help draw you out of that cycle of worry.

To practise visualisation, find a quiet and comfortable place to begin. Start by either sitting or lying down. Close your eyes.

Breathe slowly and deeply. Feel the tension leave your body with each breath.

Begin by imagining you're lying in a field of grass. The sky is a bright, clear blue above you and the sun warms your face. You can hear the distant sound of birds and crickets chirping all around you. A breeze ripples through the grass. You feel calm and relaxed.

Feel the weight of your body as it lies in the grass. Your legs are heavy. Your arms are warm in the sunshine. Let the tension pour out of you through your fingertips. Let your face relax, feeling all the tension leave your forehead, eyes, neck, shoulders. Listen to the rhythmic sound of the wind, and slowly breathe alongside it. You are safe here.

Once you feel relaxed, imagine that you are slowly getting to your feet. You walk through the field as the sun shines down on you. You can come back here whenever you like.

Slowly, open your eyes.



You can also make your own visualisation scenes. Maybe you'd like to relax on a beach instead, or visit a mountain getaway. It may feel a little silly at first, but relaxation techniques like these are most effective when practised



Write It Down

Writing can be an excellent tool for processing what you're feeling, channelling your emotions onto paper and reading it back at a later time.

Meditate

Downloading an app like Headspace can help you train your mind to relax and refocus during a particularly anxious time. You can try the trial version of the app, and members of Anxiety UK are entitled to a year's free subscription with their membership (normally priced at £72).

Find Time For Hobbies

Spending time on activities you enjoy is an essential part of self care and ensuring you are prioritising your needs. Repetitive activities like knitting and drawing are great to do alongside watching television to keep you distracted when at home.

Exercise

A good physical workout has been shown to raise your energy levels, help you sleep better and generally improve your mood.