



GENERAL STRATEGIES FOR ANXIETY PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT FOR ALL AGES

The Bottom Line

Feelings of anxiety are completely normal. Many techniques exist to balance feelings of anxiety, as well as to bring the self back to a neutral state from a state of heightened emotions. The strategies below can be used by adults, and children and youth alike.

Strategies to Support the Prevention of Anxiety

- **Acknowledge feelings:** There is nothing abnormal or weak about having feelings of stress and anxiety during times of uncertainty, such as COVID-19. It is important to acknowledge and voice what you are feeling. You can do this through writing in a journal, expressing emotion through creativity, or talking to someone you trust.
- **STOP:** Stop, Take a breath, Observe, and Proceed. Taking time to check in with yourself can help keep emotions and thoughts balanced throughout the day.
- **Self-care:** Take the time to care for yourself. Activities of self-care can include things you enjoy as well as things that will make you feel better once completed. Examples include exercising, making healthy eating choices, having a bath, taking a nap, cleaning, reading, watching a movie, and more.
- **Set social media limits:** Verify all information sources and filter out incorrect or frightening news. It is necessary to remain informed about what is going on in the world, but it can be counterproductive to overwhelm yourself with constant social media. Monitor media intake and take breaks. Try not looking at your phone first thing in the morning.
- **Stay connected:** There are many ways to stay connected to one another. Technology opens many doors for voice and video interactions with loved ones and the community.
- **Stick to a routine:** Set a regular routine. Create a sleep, meal, and social media schedule that you can stick to. Regulate activities like getting dressed in the mornings and making your bed. This will help keep your mind busy, reduce feelings of grief and anxiety, and increase feelings of normalcy.

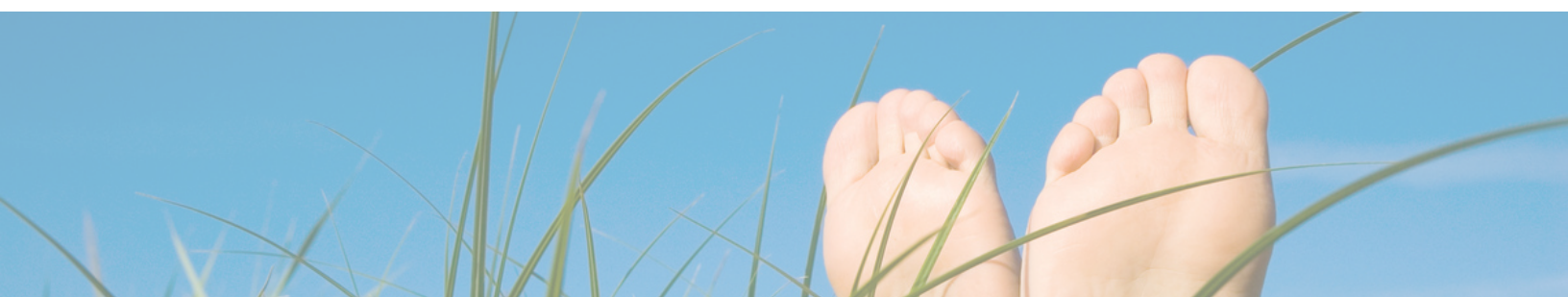
Strategies to Support Anxiety Management

Mindfulness is a technique that allows you to distract your mind and stay in the present, rather than worrying about the future or past. It can be done many ways, and involves being 'in the moment' focusing on what you are seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling, and tasting.

Grounding is a technique used to alleviate excessive energy in the body, such as nervousness and stress, allowing clean energy to come through and calm down high emotions. It involves connecting with the Earth skin to ground and absorbing the energy that it provides, and can be accomplished through yoga for example.

There are many ways to practice mindfulness and grounding. Breathing deeply, for example, has natural calming effects for the body that can help neutralize negative emotions. The following is a non-exhaustive list of methods to try when experiencing overwhelming emotions such as anxiety, stress, or nervousness.

- Guided meditation: There are many guided meditation videos on YouTube to help become familiar with meditation. These videos involve a person with a soothing voice guiding you through the technique, helping you to relax and be present.
- Calm place exercise: If the current environment is partially responsible for the anxiety being experienced, try going to your calm place. This place can be anywhere that brings feelings of comfort, tranquility, and safety. Picture yourself there, and be mindful of what you would be seeing, hearing, smelling, feeling, and even tasting.
- Butterfly hug exercise: Tapping can be soothing and distracting if done in appropriate ways. Place your hands out so your palms are visible, cross your wrists one over the other, and hook your thumbs together so your hands are shaped like a butterfly. Place your butterfly hands on your chest, and alternate taps with each hand. Experiment with the speed and pressure of the taps until it feels right.
- Hand tracing: Touch can be very physiologically soothing. Take a pen or your finger and run it along the edges of the fingers on the other hand. Go into the webbing of each finger and all the way back around. Continue to do this and focus on the feeling.



Strategies to Support Anxiety Management (Continued)

- The container exercise: Isolation may mean being alone with thoughts, which are not always positive. Limitations with accessing supportive services and other connections may mean that confronting these thoughts feels unsafe to do right now. This exercise involves picturing any type of container that is big enough and strong enough to hold an object, such as a chest or vault. Picture an object that represents what is being remembered or felt right now. Place this object into the container and ensure it is locked tight, until you feel safe and ready to deal with the thought or memory.
- Square breathing: This technique allows for focus only on breathing, distracting from any overwhelming emotion. Breathe in slowly for 4 seconds, hold for 4 seconds, breathe out for 4 seconds, and hold it once again for 4 seconds. Picture inhaling up the side of a square, holding while going across the top of the square, exhaling down the other side of the square, and holding once again across the bottom of the square. Repeat.
- Balloon breathing: Anxiety may cause quick shallow breathing. Empty your lungs, and inhale slowly and deeply, feeling air up to your diaphragm. Hold only for a natural period of time, exhale slowly, and repeat. Picture your lungs like a big balloon being filled with air while practicing this technique.
- Yawning exercise: This is designed to activate the parasympathetic nervous system through deep breathing, which can help calm emotions and relax muscles in the face, neck, and shoulders. Fix your jaw into a fake yawning position and place your fingers on the space where your upper jaw and lower jaw meet and gently massage those muscles. This will activate a real yawn. Hold this yawning position for a period of time. This will activate more than one yawn back to back, each holding a deeper breath than the one before.



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