



# Helping with anxiety



Anxiety is a feeling of unease, such as worry or fear, that can be mild or severe. Everyone has feelings of anxiety at some point in their life. For example, you may feel worried and anxious about sitting an exam, or having a medical test or job interview. During times like these, feeling anxious can be perfectly normal.

But some people find it hard to control their worries. Their feelings of anxiety are more constant and can often affect their daily lives.

### How anxiety affect us?

When the body perceives a 'threat', the body enters a state of 'fight or flight'. Cortisol and adrenaline (stress hormones) are released causing bodily changes such as increased heart rate, rapid breathing as well as other parts of the body to 'switch off'.

if the body is consistently exposed to this perceived threat, it can cause the body to break down leaving us vulnerable to illness and infection. The effects of a constant rapid heartbeat can lead to high blood pressure which may lead to issues such as heart attacks or strokes. Stress can even affect memory and mood regulation.

There are several ways you can respond to anxiety whilst in 'fight or flight':

- **Fight**- fighting back on the stimulus e.g. arguing.
- **Flight**- running away or avoiding something that makes you feel stress e.g. getting overwhelmed on the bus and having to get off.
- **Freeze**- 'freezing up' in a situation e.g. forgetting what to say when doing a presentation.
- **Fawn**- responding to others the way you think they want to be responded to but don't necessarily agree with. e.g. agreeing to something you don't want to do to avoid conflict.

Think of a situation that has made you feel anxious, what response did you have?.

Situation	Response

Anxiety can present to us in different ways. It is important that we are aware of how it can affect and present to us, to help us overcome these feelings. Developing an awareness can help us relieve the feeling in the long term through trying different types of intervention.

### Physiological

- Shaking/Trembling
- Headaches
- Increased heart rate
- Rapid breathing
- Nausea
- Abdominal distress
- Sweating

### Behavioural

- Finding it hard to fall asleep or stay asleep
- Becoming more aggressive/irritable towards others
- Avoiding things in order to reduce the feeling of anxiety
- Trouble concentrating or making decisions

### Psychological

- Sense of doom
- Feeling irritable
- Feeling restless
- Feeling tense
- Sense of impending danger

## Breathing techniques and why it helps

When we become anxious, our breathing can become more rapid. This is due to the “fight or flight” reaction. It makes our breathing shallow and rapid to increase oxygen, making our bodies ready for action, such as running away from a perceived danger. If we do not use this extra oxygen there is temporary an imbalance of the amount of oxygen and carbon dioxide in our blood. This causes many of the symptoms of anxiety.

Breathing techniques can help by slowing down our breathing, rebalancing the amount of oxygen and carbon dioxide, helping to reduce the feeling of panic.

**There are many different types of breathing techniques and places you can find them.**

#### Online:

- Youtube
- Spotify

#### Apps:

- Headspace
- Calm
- Portal- Escape into nature

#### Types of breathing

- Alternate nostril breathing
- Box breathing
- Tension releasing
- Anchor breathing
- 4-7-8 breathing
- Breath awareness meditation
- Five finger breathing

## Types of breathing

- **Abdominal (Diaphragmatic) breathing:** is a type of deep breathing. It engages your diaphragm and allows the lungs to expand fully. This allows a balance of the amount of oxygen and carbon dioxide to be created and released from the body.
- **Chest (Thoracic) breathing:** is a type of shallow breathing, it creates short rapid breaths meaning the lungs can not fully expand. When we are feeling anxious this is how we may breathe without even being aware of it.

The way to figure out which breathing pattern you are using is to place a hand on the middle of your chest and the other on your stomach close to your waist. If your stomach expands and contracts with each breath (or rises the highest) you are using helpful abdominal breathing.

It is important to be aware and check in on your breathing during times when you may feel more anxious or stressed as this is when you are more likely to be using unhelpful chest breathing.

## Alternate nostril breathing

Involves blocking off one nostril at a time as you breathe through the other, alternating between nostrils in a regular pattern. This type of anxiety breathing, is often improved if carried out in a seated position to maintain posture.

### How to do:

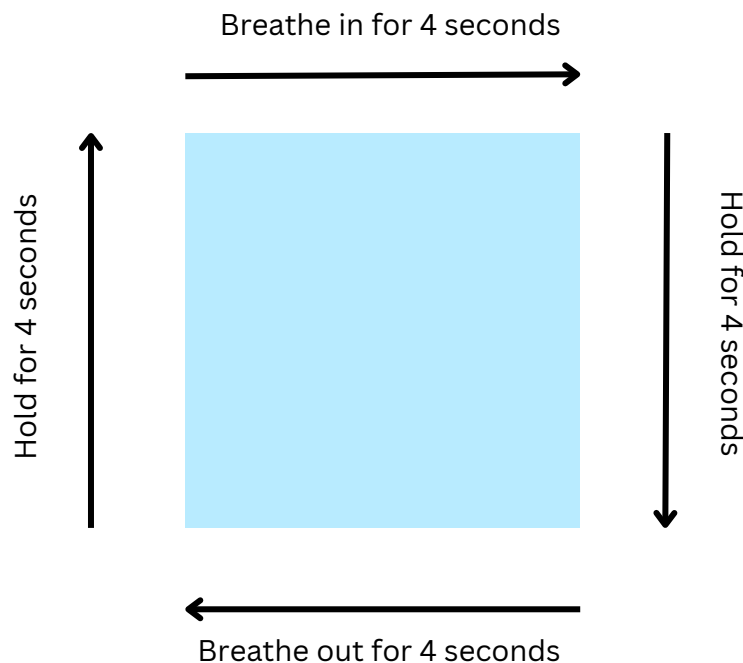
- Using one hand, let the thumb to gently rest on one nostril and the index finger on the other. Make sure your hand is bridged above the nose and not in front of it. Place the other hand on your stomach to ensure you are fully breathing in.
- Gently press and close off your right nostril with your thumb.
- Open and exhale through your left nostril.
- Inhale through your left nostril.
- Close off your left nostril with your finger.
- Open and exhale through your right nostril.
- Inhale through your right nostril.
- Close off your right nostril with your thumb.
- Continue alternating this breathing for about 10 breaths. If you begin to feel lightheaded, take a break by releasing both nostrils and breathing normally.

## Box breathing

Box breathing focuses on the breath and touch. Box breathing can be done discreetly. Use your finger to trace round the square three times while following the instructions allow any thoughts to come and go without giving them too much time and allow yourself to focus on the present moment.

### Things you can focus on:

- How the paper feels
- Movement in the body
- Air as it passes through the lips



## Tension releasing breathing

This breathing exercise is best done sitting crossed legged or laying down on your back

- Place one hand on your upper chest and the other hand on your belly, below the ribcage.
- Allow your belly to relax, without forcing it inward.
- Breathe in slowly through your nose. The air should move into your nose and downward so that you feel your stomach rise with your other hand and fall inward (toward your spine).
- As you breath in, lightly tense your muscles in your legs, back and arms
- Exhale slowly through slightly pursed lips. Take note of the hand on your chest, which should remain relatively still. Release the tensed muscles slowly and take a moment to take in how the body feels.

## Trying out different techniques

Different breathing techniques will work well for some people but not for others. It is important to try out different types of breathing to see what works for you. Not every technique will work for you the first time so it is also important to give them a few tries before you move on to the next.

Below there is a table to help you keep track of what type of breathing technique you have tried and how it has made you feel. Take some time to have a go of the ones that have been suggested to you but also have a look for your own.

Type of breathing	How felt before (1-10)	How felt after (1-10)	Comments