

Tips for When You Are Feeling Anxious

The following are all short-term actions to move the brain's activity from one part of the brain to other areas. Anxiety results in the elevation of the amygdala's fight/flight/flee response, which disengages the pre-frontal cortex, the area of the brain that problem-solves and basically thinks rationally. Handling that anxiety means moving from the amygdala towards any other areas of your brain that process sensory stimuli or engage a thinking process.

Here are some ideas to try:

- Slow your breath. Breathe deeply and concentrate on simply the feeling of the air flow and the action of the lungs for 2 minutes or more.
- Focus your attention on the quiet of the room for 2 minutes or more. Just listen and refocus your thoughts on listening as much as you can.
- Focus your vision on something close, noticing everything about that object. Then focus on something far away, really paying attention to the visual stimuli. Keep switching from near to far and back.
- Hold an ice cube or something cold or warm for just long enough to get that sensory stimuli without harming your skin.
- Progressive muscle relaxation. Alternate tensing for 10 seconds and relaxing for 10 seconds distinct muscle groups as you move from one end of the body to the next. Lots of examples online.
- Listen to a mindfulness meditation or do another form of meditation.
- Imagine yourself somewhere else and focus on all the details of the scenario. Pick a memory or imagine something new.
- Physical distraction: snap your fingers, do stretches, jumping jacks, take a walk, dance crazy, get a fidget tool, go get a hug, sing.
- Mental distraction: favorite video, read something online, search memes. Just don't let the screen be your only strategy, as it can sometimes be less effective than the more physically-based strategies.
- Journal or draw the moment or another moment of your day to engage those other parts of your brain.

- Talk to your family, message a friend, call someone to talk. Texting and talking are language based, which moves the brain and gives the emotions the needed feeling of connection.
- Write or mentally remind yourself that anxiety passes. The spike in anxiety will come down, just keep moving through your strategies and don't give up.

One more note, if you are feeling a spike of anxiety while you are driving (which can happen if you are mentally going through all the things you have to do when you get home, for instance), pull over! Take care of yourself before trying to get back into traffic. That 5 minutes of self-care will make a big difference in safety!

Finally, remember that people care about you. Come talk to counselors to figure out what might best work for you!