

## Insight into...



# Anxiety Management Strategies

Health &amp; Wellbeing Series: A3

May 2020



*"Smile, breathe, and go slowly." Thich Nhat Hanh*

This insight has been designed to be read alongside the other Anxiety Insights in this series. The previous insights help us understand that anxiety is normal and has a purpose in the body. Worry and anxiety are common feelings and they only get us into trouble when they do not allow our brain to think and calm ourselves down.

Hopefully you are now familiar with your own symptoms of anxiety and what to look out for in your body - once you recognise these signs you can try out any of the ideas in this insight and create a bank of strategies that work for you as an individual.

## Talking to someone

There are lots of things that can be done to reduce feelings of anxiety. The first step is to speak to someone:

Choose someone you trust for example a teacher, parent/carer, a relative or another adult in your life. Talking to someone will reduce the pressure of anxiety and stress, it may also help you to realise that you are not alone in how you are feeling.

- Tell them how you have been feeling and try to give them an example so that they understand clearly. If it's too difficult to talk, you could write a letter or draw a picture to help explain
- If you aren't able to open up to someone close to you, the [Samaritans](#) and [Anxiety UK](#) both run helplines.
- Remember: It is OK to be upset and it is OK to ask for help

## Controlling your body - relaxation

### Breathing

When you are anxious, your breathing becomes faster and shallower. Taking deep breaths, instead of shallow breaths, is one way to tell your body that you are in control. Start by breathing in for 3 seconds, hold for 3 and out for 3.

*"Breathe in like you are smelling a flower, breath out like you are blowing out birthday candles"*

Check out this video on [4 -7- 8 Breathing by GoZen](#), [audio examples](#) and exercises on the [NHS website](#).

### Progressive Muscle Relaxation

1)Tense a specific muscle group (e.g. arms and hands or neck and shoulders) and hold for five seconds

2) release the muscle group and notice how you feel.

Work head-to-toe to better understand all of the muscles affected by anxiety.

This leaflet is great for younger children and teaches you to [Relax Like a Cat](#). Older children may prefer a video or app to follow such as [Headspace](#).

### Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the art of focusing attention and awareness on the here and now.

An easy grounding exercise to do anywhere is to name:



5 things you can see  
4 things you can touch  
3 things you can hear  
2 things you can smell  
1 thing you can taste



This helps root you in things that are actually happening rather than in things that may or could happen that are causing worry.

Check out some mindfulness videos on the [cosmic kids website](#)

### Visualisation

Visualisations involve imagining something powerful in your head for a few minutes that can make you feel better afterwards. There are different types of visualisations that can help with anxiety:

- Relaxing places, which can help you feel calm and safe
- Confidence builders, which help you mentally rehearse a scary situation so you feel more brave

Many of these are available as [scripts](#), [videos](#), or [apps](#).

### Controlling your thoughts

We all have the power to talk back to our worries and doing this gives us control over the situation. Try to challenge negative thoughts and replace them with positive thoughts. The more you do this, the more likely positive thinking will come naturally to you—reward yourself with a trip to the cinema or choosing your favourite dessert each time you manage to stop being negative and use a new coping skill!



### Manage your worries

Setting aside a specific time to focus on your worries can stop anxious thoughts from taking over. Write down or draw your worries and keep them in a particular place—for example, you could write them in a notebook, or on pieces of paper you put in an envelope or jar. Limit the time spent doing this, around 10 to 15 minutes - some people even like ripping them up afterwards!

### Get to know your anxiety

It might help to make a note of what happens when you get anxious. This could help you spot patterns in what triggers these experiences for you, or notice early signs that they are beginning to happen. You could also make a note of what's going well. Living with anxiety can mean you think a lot about things that worry you or are hard to do. It is important to be kind to yourself and notice the good things too.

### Complementary and alternative therapies

Yoga, meditation, aromatherapy, massage, reflexology, herbal treatments and Bach flower remedies are all types of complementary therapy that you could try and see if they work for you.



### Controlling your feelings - Wellbeing box

This is a box you can make that contains things that ground you, make you feel more relaxed and reduce symptoms of panic, anxiety or low mood. You can also have a list of things that don't necessarily 'fit' in the box. Remember, some things may work one day and not the next, that's why it's important to have many tools to draw on. Here are some ideas to get you started:

**Touch** - good distraction for your hands and encourages your muscles to relax e.g. Playdough, fidget cube, stress balls.

**Memories** - photos of people or places that have positive memories attached to them.

**Smell** - personalised depending on what scents you prefer; peppermint for grounding, lavender or peppermint for relaxation and tranquillity.



**Music** - having a calming playlist on your phone is an easy way to find music that can have a positive affect on your emotional wellbeing.

**Cards** - postcard with breathing techniques or muscle relaxation exercises, positive quote cards from films, books, poems that inspire you.

**Activity** - Colouring book and pencils, write about how you feel, light book to read, word searches, games on your phone.

### A Note on General Health and Wellbeing...

- Try to eat healthily—there is a link between what we eat and how we feel.
- Exercise helps us physically and emotionally, it causes our brain to release chemicals that make us feel good.
- Try to get a regular sleep routine or use some of the relaxation strategies before bed.

### Further Information and Support

[Anxiety.org.uk](http://Anxiety.org.uk)

Helpline: 03444 775 774

[Youngminds.org.uk](http://Youngminds.org.uk)

Text support: text YM to 85258

[Mind.org.uk](http://Mind.org.uk)

Online help tool

[Childline.org.uk](http://Childline.org.uk)

Helpline: 0800 1111, 1-2-1 counsellor chat or online support tool

