

Relieving Anxiety

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One of the first skills to learn in managing anxiety is how to relieve stress with healthy coping strategies. Many of these coping strategies can be done with little or no instruction. No one coping strategy is preferable; you need to find the one that works the best for you. Using them regularly is the key. They include:

- **Physical activity:** Physical activity can reduce stress and anxiety. Aerobic exercise—the kind that increases your heart rate, such as walking, running, bicycling, or swimming—is especially useful for counteracting the harmful effects of stress. Stretching is also a good way to relieve muscle tension. Regular, moderate physical activity may be the single best approach to managing stress. For more information about becoming more active, see the topic Fitness.
- **Writing:** There is increased evidence that writing about stressful events and circumstances can help relieve stress and anxiety and improve diseases that anxiety may affect. Write for 10 to 15 minutes a day about stressful events and how you felt.
- **Talking about your feelings:** By expressing your feelings to others (in a positive, respectful way), you will be able to understand and cope with them better.
- **Laughing and crying:** Laughing and crying are natural ways to relieve anxiety and release tension. They are both part of your emotional healing process.
- **Finding an activity that you enjoy:** A meaningful activity helps relieve tension. This can be a hobby, such as gardening, or a creative activity, such as writing, crafts, or art. Playing with and caring for pets also can help you relax.
- **Breathing exercises:** Many people with anxiety disorders breathe shallowly which may lead to increased anxiety and even panic. This technique will help you learn the right way to breathe:

1. Begin by lying flat on your back or standing up straight. You may also sit up straight in a chair, if that is more comfortable.
2. Place your hand on your stomach area.
3. Breathe as you normally would and notice whether your hand rises or your chest rises.
4. To breathe properly, your stomach area must rise as your diaphragm expands.
5. To learn to breathe correctly, begin by slowly breathing in through your nose on the count of 5 while gently pushing your hand up with your stomach.
6. Hold the breath for a count of 5.
7. Slowly exhale through your mouth for a count of five while gently pushing down on your stomach.
8. Repeat this process for 5 minutes.
9. If the process causes you to begin panicking, only do it for as long as you are able.
10. Increase the length of time each day until you can do the exercise for at least 5 minutes twice per day.
11. If you continue to practice breathing this way, you will soon be doing it naturally throughout the day.
12. An additional benefit will be that once you are familiar with the exercise, you can do it while experiencing anxiety or the beginning of a panic attack, and you will feel relief.

Tips:

- Do not be angry with yourself or give up if you cannot do this exercise correctly right away. It takes practice. Give yourself time.
- Do not be afraid of the exercise causing panic. Remember: you are in control and can stop at any time. Take it as slowly as needed.

Prevention

You can help prevent anxiety attacks.

- Avoid caffeine, such as coffee, tea, Mountain Dew, colas, and chocolate. Caffeine can keep you in a tense, aroused condition.
- Do not smoke or use smokeless (spit) tobacco products. Nicotine stimulates many physical and psychological processes, causes your blood vessels to constrict, and makes your heart work harder.
- Exercise during the day. Even a brisk walk around the block may help you stay calm.
- Monitor your eating habits:
 - Do not eat too fast or eat on the run.
 - Try to chew your food at least 15 to 20 times per mouthful.
 - Do not drink too much fluid with your meal. One glass of fluids is enough.
 - Eliminate as much sugar from your diet as you can. Do not snack on candy, ice cream, or soft drinks. Substitute fruit when you feel like having something sweet.