



## 5 Things To Keep Anxiety At Bay

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If you've ever experienced anxiety, and I'm guessing 100% of you have, then you'll know it's a really uncomfortable feeling. You may have experienced anxiety when you were doing something for the first time (first day at a new job, skydiving, or going on a first date), you may have felt anxiety when experiencing the same thing multiple times (public speaking, going to a gathering where you don't know anyone, or even something like spiders), or you may have experienced anxiety on more of a constant basis for what seems like no good reason at all!

What most people experience when they're anxious is anxious thoughts ("What if ...", "Something bad will happen", "I'll die", "People will think I'm silly", "People will laugh at me"), anxious feelings (worry and being unable to stop worrying, irritability, restlessness, edginess, or even feeling detached from yourself and your surroundings), anxious sensations (hot and cold flushes, sweaty palms, a racing heart, a tightening in your chest, muscle pain or headaches, dizziness, shortness of breath, nauseous, numbness, or disturbances in your appetite and sleep), and anxious behaviours (avoiding people or situations, not engaging in enjoyable activities, finding it difficult to concentrate, or doing the same activity repeatedly/precisely/the same to avoid something bad happening or to feel less anxious).

So if any of these thoughts, feelings, sensations or behaviours sound like what you experience, then read on for 5 tips to keep your anxiety at bay.

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### 1. Get moving, eat well and get good sleep

These may sound like simple things to do; however when we're restless or agitated they are the things that we tend to neglect first. Research demonstrates that **exercising regularly** is beneficial for our mental health – it can be a great stress reliever, it can help us distract away from our painful emotions, and it releases our 'feel good' hormones. Like exercise, **feeding our body** with the 'good' stuff helps us to think better, feel better and cope better. So rather than reaching for comfort food, try reaching for wholefoods – with the occasionally yummy treat, of course. And getting the best **sleep** we can helps regulate our emotions, it helps us to cope better, and it's actually great for our body too.

### 2. Breathe and become present

When we get stressed and anxious we take shorter shallower breaths, and we get stuck in "What if ..." thinking patterns. So next time you're anxious, consciously notice your breath, slow down your breathing, and breathe more deeply. You can do this by imagining a square in your mind ... and as you follow one of the sides of the square – breathe in slowly for a count of four ... then as you follow the next side of the square – hold your breath for a count of four ... then the next side – breathe out slowly for a count of four ... and finally for the last side – hold your breath for a count of four. Do this 'square breathing' for at least 5 minutes. Another technique to try is to become present where you are – rather than being caught up in "What if ..." thoughts that haven't even happened yet. To do this, notice and name 5 things that you can see, 5 things that you can hear, 5 things that you can smell, 5 things that you can taste, and touch 5 things around you (probably not the stranger next to you though!). This helps your mind to ground you in the here and now (and the great thing about this is that you can do it almost anywhere and anytime).

### 3. Write your worries down

When our thoughts and feelings busily rush around in our head and bodies, often we can get 'caught up' in these thoughts and feelings. And sometimes we tend to believe all these thoughts and feelings are true

("What if everybody laughs at me?" "What if I can't do it?" "What if I go red in the face?" "What if my mind goes blank?"). By writing down everything that's been troubling you (regardless of how big or small you think these things are), you can then get your mind to **take a step back** from them, which in turn, will help you with the next two steps.

### 4. Make an action plan

Look at everything you have written down (all the things that have been troubling you). Now go through this list one-by-one, and decide whether you can do anything about them. If you can – **put it on a separate page** titled 'Action Plan'. If you can't – see if you can either let that thought or feeling go (you could try watching the thought or feeling and be uninterested with it, you could try manipulating that thought by seeing it backwards or twisting it in your mind, you could try breathing in to the sensations in your body and gently accepting those sensations rather than fighting them).

### 5. Take action

With everything that you put on your 'Action Plan' page, write down 1, 2 or 3 things that you can do to **take action**. And make sure these are **specific actions** that you can **achieve**. If you just write down 'Stop being anxious when I give a talk' I can guarantee that that won't work. If you feel anxious when you give a talk in public then maybe your action plan could include 'Do breathing exercises before talk', 'Have my talk written down in case I forget my words', 'Rehearse my speech at least 3 times before I present it in public – at least once in front of the mirror'. And you guessed it, the last step it to **take action!**

To experience occasional stress or anxiety in our everyday life is normal. And generally it often goes away by itself. However, if your anxiety is having a negative impact on your life, seeking professional assistance could be useful.

If you would like help in managing your thoughts, feelings or behaviours, please feel free to contact us on 0488 954 195, [amanda@awakenpsychology.com.au](mailto:amanda@awakenpsychology.com.au) or [click here](#)

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