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Grounding Techniques for Anxiety

Anxiety is an innate response to perceived danger. Adrenaline is pumped through our veins in an attempt to get us to run away from danger, to fight it, or to “play dead”.

Anxiety can keep us safe, but sometimes anxiety goes into overdrive. As modern life is very different to the world in which anxiety used to save us from being eaten, the signals are a bit faulty, and haven't caught up with us.

Anxiety can be very convincing, telling us that:

Something bad is going to happen

Something bad has already happened and there are consequences we can't deal with

Everything is out of control and really really bad.

Anxiety lies, but as most of the things it is telling us are tinged with a bit of truth, but is magnified and exaggerated, it seems like it must be real.

It is easy to get in to an anxiety spiral, as our brains look for the danger, and start to “pluck” ideas out of the air. We are convinced by anxiety that these ideas are dangerous, and very possible.

We can feel physical effects of anxiety that include*:

Sweaty palms

Tingling limbs

Blurred vision

Nausea

Chest pains

Headaches

Sense of impending doom

We can use “grounding techniques” to reverse the effect of anxiety and adrenaline on our bodies, that then calms our minds, and allows us to think more in the moment. This stops anxiety taking control of your body and mind.

Gain back some control by trying the following exercises, and noticing how you feel. Find your favourites.

**(If any of these effects are prolonged or extreme seek advice from a medical professional)*



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Deep Breathing

Breathing seems like such a simple thing but it is so powerful against anxiety. Breathe in slowly and deeply from your core, and breathe out slowly, imagining all of your worry and anxiety leaving your body as you exhale.

Try breathing in for the count of 4 through your nose

1 2 3 4

Holding your breath for the count of 5

1 2 3 4 5

Breathing out through your mouth to the count of 6

1 2 3 4 5 6

Now repeat at least 10 times, or until your anxiety starts to reduce.

Jelly Body

Sit or lay in a comfortable position with your arms by your sides. Breathe deeply.

Imagine that your neck and shoulders are made of jelly. They can barely hold up your head. Feel your head flop from side to side.

Now imagine your arms and hands are made of jelly. They just flop by your sides, and you can't lift them. Wiggle your jelly fingers.

If someone asked you to hold something right now you couldn't, it would just fall through your hands.

Your arms and hands are sinking in to whatever they are resting on, as they are made of jelly.

Now your legs are made of jelly, and your toes. Wiggle your jelly toes. Your legs and feet slowly sink in to whatever they are resting on, as they are made of jelly.

Keep breathing deeply, and imagining how your jelly body feels, sinking slowly in to your seat or bed.



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5-4-3-2-1 method:

Find five things that you can see and say them out loud.

Next find four things you can feel, such as the warmth from your socks or coat or the softness of your pillow.

Then find three things that you can hear and say them out loud. If you are in a quiet room, you might have trouble finding things you can hear, but it can be even the sound of your tummy rumbling.

Next, find two things that you can smell. Again, you may not be able to smell much of anything depending on your surroundings. If you can't identify two smells, think of your favourite smells and say them out loud.

Finally, identify one thing that you can taste. It can be the toothpaste from brushing your teeth or the lingering taste of the soda you are drinking.

By the time you have followed through all five of the senses, your mind should be away from whatever was making you anxious, and you should be mindfully in the present.

Mindfully Hold Something

Hold or touch something while focusing only on the sensations you have while doing it.

Ask yourself the following questions (where relevant):

What temperature is it?

What is the texture like?

What does it smell like?

What is its shape?

How does it feel in your hand?

Describe its colour

Draw Around Your Foot In Your Mind

Place your feet on the ground and in your imagination pick your favourite colour to draw an outline around each foot. Start at the heel and using your imaginary pencil slowly go up the side of your foot to your pinky toe and then make sure you draw around each toe and then go back towards the heel. Repeat on the other foot.



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Another quick way to focus on your feet when you are in a stressful situation is just wiggle your toes inside your shoe. Pay attention to the sensation as you move each separate toe. Do some move independently of the others? Tense up your whole foot then stretch it out. Now do the other foot.

Pat Your Arms One By One

Cross your arms in front of you as if you were going to hug yourself. Firmly but gently pat the top of your left arm with your right hand 5 times. Now pat the top of your right arm with your left hand 5 times. Don't pat so hard that it hurts. Repeat 4 times.

Imagine a Comfortable Place

Imagine yourself in a safe and comfortable place. Feel the safety of it. Put yourself there and know it completely. It can be a place you know, or a place you wish you were. Imagine a comfortable cosy place you will be able to be after the anxiety goes away. Perhaps tucked up in bed having a nice dream, or having a lovely walk in nature.

Laugh

Laugh, even if it's hard to do. Force the laugh. Laughing can break the feeling that you are spinning out of control. Force big grin too. This sends signals to your brain that everything is ok.

Remember Wellness

Think back throughout the last week, and remember a time you did not feel anxious. What did that feel like? What can you change to make yourself feel that way again?

Notes (e.g how these make you feel, or other techniques you find helpful)
