

Reducing Anxiety

How To PIVOT Away From Anxiety

- **Breathe:** As soon as you notice feelings of anxiety, start deep breathing. This will help activate your Parasympathetic Nervous System and send a message to the body to relax and calm down (known as the Relaxation Response). Focus your awareness on evenly inhaling and exhaling, making your breath slower and deeper which will slow your heart rate, allowing you to feel more peaceful. You can also research specific types of deep breathing exercises such as: diaphragmatic breathing, abdominal breathing, belly breathing and paced respiration.
- **Stand up Straight:** Our emotions are often linked to our physiology. If you're anxious, the natural reaction may be that you're hunching over to protect your heart and lungs. Change your physiology. Pull your shoulders back, stand or sit with your feet apart, and open your chest. This helps your whole being start to sense that you're back in control.
- **Stay in the present:** Anxiety is a future-oriented state of mind. When you're starting to worry about the future, reel yourself back to now by asking yourself: "What's happening right now? Am I safe? Do I need to do something right now to be safe?" If not, tell that part of you that's worrying that you will keep checking in to make sure that you continue to be safe.
- **Follow the 3-3-3 rule:** If you are in a state of anxiety, look around you and: Name three things you see. Then name three sounds you hear. Then move three parts of your body (i.e. your ankle, fingers, and head). Whenever you feel your brain going 100 miles per hour, this mental trick can help center your mind, bringing you back to the present moment.
- **STOP:** If you realize that your mind is stagnating in fear, anger or worry.....**STOP**. Do something different to **STOP** the pattern of negative thinking. Just do something! Stand up, take a walk, stretch, do something...anything, any action that interrupts your train of anxious thinking and helps you get back into the present moment.
- **Fact check your thinking:** If you're feeling anxiety, you're probably often fixating on worst-case scenarios. Stop and think about how realistic they actually are. If you get into a pattern of stopping and re-thinking your fears, it will help train your brain to come up with more rational thinking.
- **Journal your thoughts and feelings:** If you're feeling anxiety, it may help to grab paper and pen and start writing. Journaling may help you figure out what exactly is making you feel anxious or afraid. When you just start writing and letting the words come, your written thoughts may give you information you don't yet know or acknowledged to yourself. Writing can sometimes help you tap into creative solutions.

- **Vent:** Some people may feel the need to vent. *If that is a positive coping mechanism for you*, find a friend who won't judge you and someone who won't fuel your anxiety and vent. Choose someone who can understand you but won't perpetuate the negative feelings you're having. Limit the amount of venting you do. (Ask them first if they are willing to listen to your fears and anxiety. They may be having a hard time coping themselves.)
- **Use Your Past Coping Skills:** Think about what has worked in the past to manage negative emotions. Hone the coping skills you've used before.
- **Increase the Dose of your Coping Skills:** If exercise helps you cope and you usually exercise three times per week, perhaps you can add an extra day to help you better cope with anxiety. If you normally practice meditation in the morning, maybe you can add deep breathing exercises to your evening routine.
- **Avoid worry:** Does worrying about what *might* happen help? Someone once told me: "Worrying is like praying...for what you don't want." Let it go.
- **Or.....Set aside time to worry:** Set a timer for 3 minutes and start writing about all your worries. Just let the words flow. You'll probably run out of worries before the timer is up! Throwing the paper out or burning it can be cathartic and make you feel like you're emptying your mind of worries.
- **Accept:** Realize that it's ok not to be ok. Give yourself a break. We're in the midst of a global crisis. It's ok to be vulnerable.
- **Anxiety is different for everyone:** Realize that we are all unique and in different situations. Allow others to feel their feelings and help them find their own ways of coping, and realize that their ways may be different than yours.
- **Laugh:** Watch a funny movie or your favorite comedian. Research has shown that laughter has tons of benefit for mental health and for our whole well-being. A study found that humor could help lower anxiety as much exercise can!
- **Meditation:** Practice meditation daily or when you feel an anxiety attack coming on, to decrease your overall anxiety. Be very familiar with these techniques so you can calm yourself when your heart starts to race or when you feel you are not in control of your thoughts.
- **Ask for help:** Check out my website: inneraccess.org. You can read testimonials from other people who have benefitted from working with me as I've used NLP (Neuro Linguistic Programming) to help them deal with Stress, Anxiety, Trauma and PTSD. I offer a **30-minute FREE consultation** to talk about your situation.
- **Take advantage of my special:** I'm offering my sessions now during the coronavirus at a **sliding scale** so that anyone who would like to work with me is able to have sessions.

How to PROMOTE Positive Thoughts

- **Seek inspiration:** Who are your heroes? Likely they are those who rise above and become better as a result of their challenges. Watch a movie or read a book about someone you admire. Seek the company of those who are inspiring to you.
- **Reflect:** Take time to reflect and think about what lessons you are learning. How can you take what you learned and make your life better?
- **Savor the small moments:** Even during lockdown there are still have many moments to savor. The smell of coffee, the sounds of Spring, the feel of warm water on your back in the shower, the taste of every bite of food, etc. When you savor these sensory moments, you help your brain process the pleasure, which boosts your serotonin – the feel good neurotransmitter that helps elevate your mood and make you feel calm.
- **Enjoy slowing down:** Instead of letting your life rush by on auto-pilot, slow down and enjoy. One client told me that when the lockdown happened, she realized that her prayers were being answered. She was praying for more time with her kids, more of a connection with her husband and time to clarify the direction of her career. (She just didn't think it would happen like this!)
- **Really connect:** Now is an opportunity for quality time with loved ones. Hug your kids or partner, look them in the eyes, have deeper conversations with them. This promotes closeness which will boost oxytocin, a hormone that bonds people and has a calming effect on your body. When your oxytocin levels spike they tell your body to switch off cortisol, the stress hormone.
- **Look for the good:** Times of crises can bring out both the worst and the best in human beings. I like to think that the best in human nature is rising to the coronavirus challenge. Seek and spread the stories of generosity and heroism. Friends from across the globe are reaching out to each other, posting positive message on social media. Look for the ways in which we are united in hope.
- **Focus on the good for 10-20 seconds:** One study showed positive results from a strategy to focus on the good for 10–20 seconds, really absorbing and storing the experience in our long-term memory.
- **Be positive:** By tuning into positive thinking, you can change your brain chemistry and build up your energy. Positive emotions help:
 - **Increase your resilience:** Research has shown that when we experience positive emotions during a stressful event, our heart rate lowers, our blood pressure stabilizes and we bounce back more quickly.

- [Increase your immunity](#): A study where people were deliberately infected with the influenza virus found that those people who had more positive emotions were more likely to fight off the symptoms. People low on positive emotions were 2.9 times more likely to contract a respiratory illness in this study.
- [Make you think more clearly](#): Positive emotions boost our problem-solving abilities, our judgment, decision-making, cognitive flexibility and creativity. Staying positive will help you and your kids to be better at solving all the little problems that are being thrown our way right now, such as figuring out new technology platforms for working (and schooling) from home.
- **Find the silver lining**: Every dark cloud has a silver lining and this is your chance to thicken that lining and take charge of your mental health so that you come out of this experience stronger.

How To MINIMIZE Anxiety By Being Conscious of Your Lifestyle

- **Self-Care**: The single most important thing you can do to minimize anxiety is to practice Self-Care.... not only things like washing hands and social distancing, but actually taking care of yourself emotionally and mentally.
- **Relax and Unwind**:. Take time for yourself. We may be staying closer to home for a while, so discover activities you can enjoy...hobbies, music, crafts, games, movies, books, etc. Plan time for enjoyment. (If there is a hobby you can do at home, make sure you have the supplies and tools you'll need in advance so you don't get frustrated by not being prepared).
- **Create a schedule**: If your mind is racing, it's a message that you need more structure right now.
- **Use the buddy system**: Whether it is a spouse or best friend, have someone to whom you can honestly express your emotions. If you're living alone, find someone who would also like to have support and check-ins. Find someone you can trust to talk through any anxiety which might surface
- **Be a friend**: Social isolation can add to feelings of loneliness and anxiety, especially for children and the elderly. Call or use video-calling to check on others' emotional and physical well-being. If you reach out to others, they will probably reach out to you.
- **Keep your mind occupied**: Find ways to consciously think and feel positive. Staying positive is a core ingredient in the recipe of successful coping in a crisis.
- **Maintain your health**: Get fresh air, drink plenty of water, eat a well-balanced diet, limiting alcohol and caffeine.

- **Exercise:** Just 30 minutes a day of moderate exercise can help boost your mood and limit the effects of stress on your body. If you can be outdoors in the sunshine, you may feel even better and get some necessary Vitamin D.
- **Limit your news-intake:** Nonstop news will add to your stress. Watching the news before you go to bed at night may play a part in causing insomnia.
- **Avoid Sugar:** Sweets are so tempting when you're stressed, but can do more harm than good. Too much sugar can make anxiety worse. Drink a glass of water or eat protein which will give your body slow energy which will better serve it.
- **Learn about anxiety:** Even just understanding how anxiety works and what causes it can help you feel more in control of it.
- **Avoid sources of anxiety you can't control:** There is so much we can't control during this pandemic and social distancing. Notice if you may be able to change anything about the situation to make it feel less stressful to you. (i.e. Turn off the news, your phone, take time for yourself away from your family by going outside, etc.)
- **Try Visualization:** Clearing your mind of anxiety-inducing thoughts and images and replacing them with peaceful thought and pictures. You can use guided imagery to picture a place where you can feel relaxed and safe. As you picture the scene, focus on the details so that your mind is fully immersed in the place of your imagination.
- **Practice meditation:** Relaxation and meditation routines are very effective at lowering anxiety levels. There are many different types of meditation. You can find someone who teaches meditation, buy a meditation CD or watch a meditation video on YouTube. Experiment with a few different methods and choose the one that makes you feel the most comfortable and relaxed.
- **Practice Being Grateful and Positive:** In his book, *Hardwiring Happiness*, neuropsychologist Dr. Rick Hanson explains that our brains are wired toward the negative. Our brains are not designed to make us happy. From an evolutionary perspective, our brains are supposed to focus on things which could harm us...as part of our built-in Fight or Flight Response. Our brain wants to protect us by looking for potential threats.
So if we have ten experiences during the day, five neutral everyday experiences, four positive experiences, and one negative experience, we are probably going to think about that one negative experience before going to bed that night. It's how we are wired. Knowing this tendency, how can we change our brains to focus on the good experiences? One strategy is to begin each day thinking of all the things in life you are grateful for and end each day reflecting all the positive things which have happened this day.

Whatever you practice, you'll get good at (tennis, piano, golf, etc.)

Practice worrying and feeling stressed and you'll get really good at anxiety.

Practice being grateful and positive and you'll get really good at feeling optimistic and empowered!

