

# Anxiety Toolbox

## Self-Care



**(434) 582-2651**  
**Green Hall 1830**  
**[www.liberty.edu](http://www.liberty.edu)**

Revised January 2021

## **Breathing Exercises**

### **Belly (or Diaphragmatic) Breathing**

You can do this exercise in any position, but it is helpful to do this exercise while lying down when first learning belly breathing.

1. Lie comfortably on your back, with a pillow under your head, your knees bent and your back flat. You can stretch your legs out if that's more comfortable.
2. Place one hand on your belly and one hand on your upper chest.
3. Inhale slowly and expand your belly as you breathe so that your lower hand moves with your belly. The hand on your chest should remain as still as possible.
4. Slowly exhale, focusing on the movement of your belly and lower hand as it returns to its original position.
5. Repeat steps 3 & 4 for several minutes, always focusing on the movement of the belly as you breathe. If your mind wanders, gently bring your attention back to your breathing.

### **Breath-Counting Exercise**

This exercise focuses on the use of counting with the rhythm of the breath. Start with a short period of time and gradually increase the time. Set a timer so that you do not have to worry about when to stop.

1. Find a comfortable position. Take several deep breaths and settle into yourself. You may either close your eyes or keep them open, depending on your own comfort. If you keep them open, fix them on an object or a spot on the floor about four feet in front of you. Your eyes may be either focused or unfocused.
2. Take deep, comfortable breaths. Notice your inhalation. The pause between inhaling and exhaling, your exhalation, and the pause before starting again.
3. As you inhale, count, "one..." As you exhale, count, "two..." Inhale, "three..." Exhale, "four..." Continue until you reach 10 then start over.
4. If you lose count, simply begin with "one" on your next inhalation.
5. If you notice your mind has wandered, gently notice this, and return your focus back to counting your breath.
6. If you notice any body sensations catching your attention, focus on that sensation until it fades. Then return your attention back to counting your breaths.

## Sleep Hygiene

**What is Sleep Hygiene?** 'Sleep hygiene' is the term used to describe good sleep habits. Considerable research has gone into developing a set of guidelines and tips which are designed to enhance good sleeping, and there is much evidence to suggest that these strategies can provide long-term solutions to sleep difficulties.

---

1. **Get regular.** Go to bed and get up at more or less the same time every day, even on weekends and days off!



2. **Get up & try again.** Go to sleep only when tired. If you haven't been able to fall asleep after 30 minutes, get up and do something calming (not stimulating) until you feel sleepy, then return to bed and try again.

3. **Avoid caffeine & nicotine.** Avoid consuming any caffeine (coffee, tea, soda, chocolate) or nicotine (cigarettes) for at least 4-6 hours before going to bed. These act as stimulants and interfere with falling asleep



4. **Avoid alcohol.** Avoid alcohol for at least 4-6 hours before bed because it interrupts the quality of sleep.
5. **Bed is for sleeping.** Do not use your bed for anything other than sleeping so that your body comes to associate bed with sleep.

6. **Electronics Curfew.** Don't use back-lit electronics 60 minutes prior to bed, as the artificial light prevents hormones and neurons that promote sleep.



7. **The right space.** Make your bed and bedroom quiet and comfortable for sleeping. An eye mask and earplugs may help block out light and noise.

8. **No naps.** Avoid taking naps during the day. If you can't make it through the day without a nap, make sure it is for less than an hour and before 3pm.

9. **Sleep rituals.** Develop rituals to remind your body that it is time to sleep, like relaxing stretches or breathing exercises for 15 minutes before bed.



10. **No clock-watching.** Checking the clock during the night can wake you up and reinforces negative thoughts such as "Oh no, look how late it is, I'll never get to sleep."

11. **Keep daytime routine the same.** Even if you have a bad night sleep it is important that you try to keep your daytime activities the same as you had planned. That is, don't avoid activities because you feel tired. This can reinforce the insomnia.

Adapted from <http://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au>

## Grounding Exercises

When people become overwhelmed with distressing thoughts or feelings, including intense anxiety, activities that keep your mind and body connected (called “grounding”) can be helpful in regaining a sense of stability and mental focus. The following are a number of grounding exercises to choose from to help firmly anchor you in the present moment and provide you with space to choose where to focus your energy. **You may need to try multiple different exercises to find one or two that work best for you.**

1. Remind yourself of who you are now. State your name, age and where you are right now.
2. Take ten slow deep breaths. Focus your attention on each breath on the way in and on the way out. Say the number of the breath to yourself as you exhale.
3. Splash water on your face or place a cool wet cloth on your face.
4. Pay purposeful attention as you hold a cold (non-alcoholic) beverage in your hands. Feel the coldness, and the wetness on the outside. Note the taste as you drink. You can also do this exercise with a warm beverage.
5. Find a “grounding object” to hold, look at, listen to, and/or smell. This could be a soft object such as a pillow or stuffed animal, a smooth stone you found on the beach, a picture of a beautiful scene or loved one, and/or any other object that represents safety or comfort.
6. Listen to music. Pay close attention and listen for something new or different.
7. If you wake up suddenly during the night and feel disoriented or distressed, remind yourself who you are and where you are. Look around the room and notice familiar objects and name them. Feel the bed you are lying on, the softness of the sheets or blankets, the warmth or coldness of the air, and notice any sounds you hear. Remind yourself that you are safe.
8. Feel the clothes on your body, whether your arms and legs are covered or not, and the sensation of your clothes as you move in them.
9. While sitting, feel the chair under you and the weight of your body and legs pressing down on it.
10. If you are lying down, feel the contact between your head, your body and your legs, as they touch the surface you are lying on. Starting from your head, notice how each part feels, all the way down to your feet, on the soft or hard surface.
11. Stop, look, and listen. Notice and name what you can see and hear nearby and in the distance.
12. Look around you, notice what is front of you and to each side, name first large objects and then smaller ones.
13. Get up, walk around, take your time to notice each step as you take one then another.
14. If you can, step outside, notice the temperature, the sounds around you, the ground under your feet, the smell in the air, etc.

15. "54321" Grounding Exercise:
- Name 5 things you can see in the room with you.
  - Name 4 things you can feel (tactile; e.g. "chair on my back" or "feet on floor")
  - Name 3 things you can hear right now
  - Name 2 things you can smell right now
  - Name 1 good thing about yourself
16. Write and/or say grounding statements
- This situation won't last forever
  - This too shall pass.
  - I can ride this out and not let it get me down.
  - My anxiety/fear/sadness won't kill me; it just doesn't feel good right now.
  - These are just my feelings and eventually they'll go away.

Adapted from: <http://www.livingwell.org.au/well-being/grounding-exercises/>

## Pleasant Activities

|                                     |                          |   |                                   |                                     |                                |                             |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Acting                              | Amusing people           | Attending a concert                       | Beachcombing                      | Being alone                         | Being with animals             | Being at the beach          |
| Being complimented                  | Being coached            | Being counseled                           | Being in the country              | Being at a family get-together      | Being with friends             | Being with happy people     |
| Being in the mountains              | Being with my roommate   | Being with someone I love                 | Being told I am loved             | Being with my parents               | Bird-watching                  | Boating/canoeing            |
| Budgeting my time                   | Buying things for myself | Buying something for someone I care about | Camping                           | Caring for plants                   | Canning/making preserves       | Cheering for something      |
| Collecting things                   | Combing/brushing my hair | Completing a difficult task               | Complimenting or praising someone | Cooking                             | Counseling someone             | Dancing                     |
| Dating someone I like               | Designing/drafting       | Discussing my favorite hobby              | Doing art work                    | Doing experiments                   | Doing favors for people I like | Doing housework             |
| Dreaming at night                   | Drinking something warm  | Driving long distances                    | Eating good meals                 | Exploring/Hiking                    | Expressing love to someone     | Feeling the presence of God |
| Fishing                             | Fixing machines          | Gardening/doing yardwork                  | Gathering natural objects         | Giving gifts                        | Giving a party for someone     | Getting up early            |
| Getting massages                    | Giving massages          | Going to an amusement park/zoo            | Going to a barber/beautician      | Going to a concert                  | Going to lectures              | Going to a luncheon/potluck |
| Going to a health club/sauna/spa    | Going to the movies      | Going to a museum                         | Going on nature walks/field trips | Going to a play                     | Going to a restaurant          | Going to a reunion          |
| Going to a spiritual/peaceful place | Going to a sports event  | Having coffee/tea with friends            | Having daydreams                  | Having friends over to visit        | Having a lively talk           | Having lunch with friends   |
| Having an original idea             | Having spare time        | Hearing jokes                             | Helping someone                   | Hiking                              | Horseback riding               | Improving my health         |
| Kicking sand/pebbles/leaves         | Knitting/crocheting      | Laughing                                  | Learning something new            | Listening to the radio              | Listening to music             | Looking at the stars/moon   |
| Making charitable donations         | Making food to give away | Making a new friend                       | Meditating/Doing yoga             | Planning or organizing something    | Playing sports                 | Playing cards               |
| Playing music                       | Playing with a pet       | Playing in nature                         | Playing a board game/chess        | Photography                         | Praying                        | Repairing things            |
| Reading                             | Reminiscing              | Riding in an airplane                     | Running/jogging                   | Seeing beautiful scenery            | Seeing old friends             | Sewing                      |
| Shaving                             | Singing                  | Sleeping late                             | Smelling a flower or plant        | Seeing good things happen to people | Solving a puzzle/crossword     | Speaking a foreign language |
| Staying up late                     | Smiling at people        | Snuggling under a blanket                 | Taking a bath                     | Using my strengths                  | Watching TV                    | Writing in a journal        |