

# Anxiety Management, Week #2

## *Calming Your Body*

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There are many necessary skills in managing anxiety. No one skill is sufficient by itself, but combined, they can make your anxiety quite manageable and increase your quality of life.

Your mind and body are intricately connected. Your physical state impacts your thoughts and your thoughts impact your body. Negative thoughts, fears, and worries cause you to tense up physically. Your breathing, heart rate, muscle tension, and digestive system all shift when you are physically stressed. This fight vs. flight response causes your mind to activate your fears. The “thinking” part of your brain shuts down and the emotional center takes over. It is essential to find a way to physically relax – to bring the calming and logical part of your brain back into control. This is one of those *necessary components* of managing anxiety. You need to interrupt that automatic central nervous system anxiety response, which is a skill that can be learned. You cannot always stop the original worry from starting, but you can learn to control your response to it. Through faithful practice of relaxation skills and a new cognitive response to worries (come back next week!), you will eventually find the anxious thoughts don’t come quite as often.

**You cannot be simultaneously relaxed *and* anxious!** Today we will focus on skills to calm yourself when physically stressed. They can be summarized into breathing, relaxing your muscles, moving your body, and shifting your focus.

*Tension is who you think you should be. Relaxation is who you are.* ~ Chinese Proverb

### **Review: How do you assess your level of anxiety? Catch. It. Early.**



What are your early warning signs of physical anxiety? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

On average, what was your level of anxiety this past week? \_\_\_\_\_

What helped lower your anxiety this past week? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What did you do differently this past week? And what were the results? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What did you notice about times when you were *not* anxious? \_\_\_\_\_

What challenges to reducing anxiety did you encounter this week? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Stress is an ignorant state. It believes that everything is an emergency. ~ Natalie Goldberg*

**What do you do now to physically relax?**      **What can you start to do to physically relax?**

\_\_\_\_\_ Exercise \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Abdominal Breathing \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Muscle scan and/or progressive relaxation \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Sensory awareness or grounding \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Scale your anxiety and watch it drop \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Walking Meditation \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Stretches or Yoga \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Imagery \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Distraction \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Meditation \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Mindfulness \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

In examining this list, you will notice the possibilities revolve around either breathing, relaxing your muscles, moving your body, or shifting your focus. The more of these areas you can combine, the more effective physically relaxing your body will be. What will work best for you? Experiment. Choose one for a week and practice it. Then choose one for the next week and once again, practice.

### **Setting Goals:**

For the next week, I will continue to \_\_\_\_\_

For the next week, I will start to \_\_\_\_\_

I will assure I practice this by \_\_\_\_\_

Another strategy I plan to try later is \_\_\_\_\_

Keep picturing yourself in the future with less anxiety. What are you *doing* differently? How are you *thinking* differently? \_\_\_\_\_

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At the end of each day, identify what lowered your anxiety during the day.

At the end of each day, remember the times you were *not* anxious that day.

*Slow breathing is like an anchor in the midst of an emotional storm: the anchor won't make the storm go away, but it will hold you steady until it passes. ~ Russ Harris*

### **Apps and Podcasts to download:**

<https://itunes.apple.com/itunes-u/relaxation-audio-sessions/id431727868>

<http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/help-information/podcasts/>

<http://marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=22>

<http://www.freemindfulness.org/download>

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/relax-rest-guided-meditations/id354176883?mt=8>

<https://www.dartmouth.edu/~healthed/relax/downloads.html>

Please join us for another class!

Week #1: Understanding Anxiety: A Self-Assessment

**Week #2: Calming Your Body**

Week #3: Calming Your Mind

Week #4: Creating a Lifestyle for Managing Stress

Central ideas from Wehrenberg, M. (2008). *The 10 Best-Ever Anxiety Management Techniques*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

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# CALMING BREATH

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This technique is one of the most important skills in managing anxiety. Learning to use your breath to calm yourself and shift your focus is a necessary component to anxiety management. Here is one way to learn it.

Five minutes of focused breathing in the morning can set the tone for the entire day. Some people call it meditation, others prayer or centering or simply deep breathing. It doesn't matter what it is called, but it can be powerful. Early in the day before you rush off to class or work, take two to five minutes for yourself. Secure your privacy and turn off all distractions. Get physically comfortable and close your eyes. Be intentional about this time and space.

Deep breathing begins with taking a long, deep and slow breath in through your nose. Feel your lower abdomen rise as you breathe as deeply as you can. Exhale slowly and completely through your mouth. Rest at this end of the breath for as long as comfortable and then take in another long, slow breath. As you breathe, feel your abdomen rise when you inhale and fall when you exhale – your chest will barely move. Imagine you are breathing from your belly. After several rounds of slow deep breathing, picture pulling relaxation and peacefulness into your being as you inhale and letting the fears and stress float away as you exhale. Note where you might be holding tension in your body and consciously relax those muscles. Now find an intention/affirmation that fits (see below or choose one of your own) and repeat as you continue to breathe slowly and deeply. If you lower and slow your breath, your brain will respond by lowering blood pressure, slowing your heart rate, and ultimately reducing anxiety. Focusing on your breath also prevents your mind from chasing after all the concerns of the day.

Two to five minutes of the same toward the end of the day pulls your day together and calms emotions before trying to sleep. Couple this with identifying the things from the day which lowered your anxiety.

By “practicing” this daily, it will become easier to use as needed throughout the day. It is an excellent tool when attention is needed on the task at hand. When you feel physical stress or experience overwhelming emotions, focus on your breath for a few moments. This will bring you back to the present and prevent spinning-out over regrets for past actions or fears of the future.

## POSSIBLE INTENTIONS/AFFIRMATIONS

I will stay in the present moment.

I will remember to stop and breathe.

Breathe.

Relax.

I am centered.

Things will get done.

I can handle what comes my way today.

I am learning to be calm.