

Attacking Anxiety and Stress

- Do you worry so much that it is hard for you to concentrate?
- Are you easily discouraged about grades?
- Do you have anxiety when taking tests?
- Do you have anxiety due to familial pressures to “do well” in college?
- Are you tense or anxious when approaching an academic task, or negative about your abilities?

Answering yes to any of these questions suggests you the need to develop techniques for coping positively with anxiety. You can reduce your worry by learning to focus on the task, not the anxiety.

Anxiety Defined

Anxiety is fear. It is normal. It can show up as a variety of body signals and it can also show up as difficulty sleeping, difficulty concentrating, and jumbled thoughts. When Anxiety gets overwhelming it can actually decrease performance. Anxiety occurs in almost any situation where "public demands" are put on you. People who are less likely to be affected or overwhelmed by anxiety are those people who have learned strategies for reacting to, and controlling normal anxiety when it arises.

Positive Ways to Deal with Anxiety

- **Accept** anxiety as normal. Being human means you will have anxiety. You will never be completely free of anxiety so your goal needs to be learning how to manage your anxiety so that it doesn't run your life.
- **Learn** and practice preventative strategies: get enough sleep, eat healthy food, reduce caffeine intake, exercise, or meditate. All of these reduce your susceptibility to being overwhelmed by anxiety.
- **Over prepare**. When facing new or threatening situations, PREPARE, PREPARE, PREPARE! The more preparation you have done, the less anxious you will be and the better you will perform.
- **Learn** ways to reduce your anxiety when it does arise: take a few deep breaths, visualize success or a relaxing place, learn to relax your muscles, and learn to think positively instead of negatively.
 - **Breathing**: 2-Step breath - Fill the bottom of your lungs first, then add the top as you breathe through your nose. Breathe out slowly. Feel the tension flowing out.
 - **Body Scan**: With your mind, briefly scan every muscle in your body from the tips of your toes to the top of your head. If you sense a tight muscle, just let it become limp and relaxed.

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- **Thought Stopping:** Change your thoughts to change your feelings. In order to stop thoughts your first task is to become aware of them. Slow down and begin to pay attention to your drift into anxiety. Then implement thought stopping and/or alternate thoughts.
 - **Do not** waste time wondering why you think negatively.
 - **Develop** some simple words, phrases or actions that help change the direction of your thoughts.
 - **Words and Phrases:** “Stop!”; “I can cope”; “I am okay”; “I have done it before, I can do it again”; “Okay, just slow down”; “You will be alright”; “You are going to be okay”; “This will pass - give it time”; “Just relax”; “I can accept this - it is unpleasant, not dangerous”.
 - **Actions:** Talk to someone; Breathe deeply and slowly; Carry a lucky charm - touch it; Visualize a peaceful scene; Focus on external happenings - the wind, the sun, birds, and noises; Sit down; Touch the earth; Touch a tree; Look at the ants working; Turn up the radio; Sing out loud; Hum a tune; Perform physical work.
 - **Keep Practicing.** Don't wait for a major crisis to occur before you start to practice.
- **Diaphragmatic Breathing.** Relaxed breathing occurs as a result of the diaphragm expanding, as opposed to stressful breathing that is a function of the chest expanding. Lie on your back and place your hands on your abdomen. As you breathe you should feel your abdomen rise and your chest remain fairly stable.
- **Quieting Reflex.** With practice, this technique is said to relax a person in just six seconds. The Quieting Reflex is done as follows:
 - Think about something that makes you afraid or anxious.
 - Smile inside. This breaks up the anxious facial muscle tension.
 - Tell yourself, “I can keep a calm body in an alert mind.”
 - Let your jaw go loose as you exhale, keeping your lower and upper teeth slightly apart.
 - Imagine heaviness and warmth moving throughout your body, from head to toe.
- **Acknowledge Reality.** Face your causes of stress head-on. Don't try to deny it or wish that it hadn't happened. Think: “This is real. I can handle it. I'm finding the best possible way to cope right now.”
- **Reassert Control.** Instead of fretting about how the stressor had robbed you of control, focus on what you can control and take appropriate action. Think clear-headed, honest thoughts instead of distorted ones.
- **Work at building your self-esteem or self-confidence.** As your self-esteem grows, your anxiety will reduce. Remember is the more frazzled or unhappy you are feeling with your life the more likely you are to be overwhelmed by anxiety.

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- **Acknowledge the advantages and disadvantages of your anxiety.** Make a list of these. Prioritize your efforts. Discriminate between what is really important and what is not. Decide what a reasonable effort is for whatever task you take on and set this as your goal.
- **Practice detachment** from the results of your efforts. Judge yourself according to your efforts and not their anticipated results.
- **Plan for and schedule** "off duty", relaxation time as well as "on duty", work focused time. Don't let other commitments encroach on your "off duty" time.
- **Try lowering your expectations.** Value your strengths and view your flaws and limitations as part of being human. Challenge any catastrophic, negative thinking you have about your performance and achievements. The world is not going to end if you make a mistake.
- **Stop comparing** or benchmarking yourself with your peers. Value your own contributions and efforts regardless of what others do.
- **Practice** staying in the "here and now". Don't obsess about past behavior. Avoid looking into and predicting the future.
- **Appreciate** the present moment.
- **Learn** to believe things will work out. Believe in yourself and in others. It has been said: "being general manager of the universe is hard and exhausting work!" You simply cannot control everything. All you can do is the best you can do.

Prevention is Better than Cure

- Exercise - Yoga, Aerobics, Walking
- Gardening
- Bushwalking
- Spending time alone
- Developing positive social time
- Caring for pets
- Volunteering in an aid work
- Finding a hobby
- Eating right
- Sleeping well
- Learning to say no
- Managing your time better - getting organized
- Planning ahead

Maintenance is essential. Remember change doesn't happen until something happens.