

# MANAGE MY ANXIETY NOW GUIDE

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## Step 1: Understand It

First, it helps to understand what anxiety is. Some of it is normal. We all have anxiety from time to time, especially when it relates to new things (like a job interview, or first date). This is our body trying to warn us or prepare us for the unknown.

However, if we have symptoms from past trauma, PTSD, or a related issue, our warning system can become over-activated. You may have heard this called the fight-flight-freeze response, or something similar.

Sometimes, we have anxiety because we are avoiding other feelings that seem more uncomfortable, like hurt, sadness, or anger.

With time, as your underlying symptoms are treated, anxiety will get better as your other symptoms subside. However, you can begin to get a handle on it now, even before you take those other healing steps.

## Step 2: Figure Out When It's Happening

If you can, it helps to figure out when you are most commonly having overactive anxiety symptoms, or when they're the worst. For some people it's in crowds, when they encounter someone or something that reminds them of a bad memory, or any situation that just feels out of control. Common ones I hear about are at stores (especiall malls or Wal-Mart), in crowded or claustrophobic places, or when talking on the phone.

If you already know your triggers, list them here or write them down somewhere else..

### My Anxiety Triggers:

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## Step 3: Use The List to Find What Works for You

The next page has 10 of the most common and effective methods for calming anxiety in the moment. Try at least three to see which work best for you. Keep trying ideas until you find something that does. If you've literally tried all 10 of these and none of them are helping at least somewhat, send me an e-mail and I'll help you brainstorm some more! I'm at [jennie@thecounselingpalette.com](mailto:jennie@thecounselingpalette.com)

Once you've found three strategies that are helping lower your anxiety symptoms overall or in the moment, write them here. Start practicing them when you notice you are feeling anxious. Over time, it will be easier to remember and to use them.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

## Step 4: Gradually Stop Avoiding

Avoiding things (including feelings) that trigger our anxiety is normal. Sometimes we might not avoid entirely, but we power through the situation, so we're still emotionally avoiding it. This is called white-knuckling. If you know a situation or trigger is physically safe, but you continue to avoid it, you may making the cycle worse rather than better. Avoiding, or white knuckling, teaches your body that something is dangerous, and it believes you. Try to "lean in" to situations rather than avoiding them entirely. Other ways we can avoid is through use of alcohol, substances, benzos (even if prescribed) and anything else that's compulsive or helping you dull emotions. Cut back if you can, and/or get help with these struggles if you can't stop on your own. You can also start slowly, just taking breaks from the things you use to avoid.

## Step 5: Address Other Underlying Symptoms

Using the anxiety management tools and this guide can help you get a better handle on high anxiety and control it. However, you probably don't want to just control it forever. You'll want to start to address what's causing anxiety in the first place. You may need to find a qualified counselor, and you can keep using the self-help tools at The Counseling Palette to learn more about healing trauma and PTSD. Visit [www.thecounselingpalette.com](http://www.thecounselingpalette.com) to learn more.



## For Step 3, Try These Tools

Below are 10 ways that have helped many others manage day-to-day anxiety symptoms while they continue to heal their underlying conditions. Use this list to complete Step #3 on the previous page. If you've tried all 10 and none work, we will find something that does! E-mail me at [jennie@thecounselingpalette.com](mailto:jennie@thecounselingpalette.com)

*\*If any of these are not appropriate for your body or medical condition, just skip it and go to the next item.*

- 1. The deep, slow breath.** This is sometimes called diaphragmatic breathing. Take a very deep, slow breath in (count slowly to 10 or more in your head). Hold the breath for several seconds. Then, through pursed lips, so air can barely get out, breathe it out very slowly. Breathing slowly is just as important as deeply. A few of these breaths chill out a good majority of people.
- 2. Ground yourself.** I generally teach the concept of grounding with grounding stones. The short version of this activity is to simply hold an object (like a rock or keyring) and notice what it feels like. Be aware of the textures, temperature, and shape. Continue holding the object and also notice the sounds where you are -- both close and far away. Focusing on your senses, here and now, can help lower anxiety and take you out of a panic attack. Being in the moment counters panic and anxiety. You can also simply feel your feet in your shoes or on the floor. Notice the sensations.
- 3. Worst-case scenario method.** Sometimes we are anxious and freaked out but not really thinking through the situation. Think of the worst likely case scenario. For example, if you're worried about giving a presentation, think of what would happen if it goes horribly and you pass out. Do you think you could survive that? Life would probably go on, right? Decent people would be concerned about you, not judging. Now, counter that with what could go well and imagine how you'd feel in that case.
- 4. Comfort items.** Make a kit or have a few items that are physically or mentally soothing for you. This might be lotion, soft blankets or fabrics, your favorite soothing playlist, fidget toys, etc. Find what works for your own nervous system and have these items handy when you're feeling overwhelmed.
- 5. Talk to a calming friend.** Do you know someone who seems to always make you feel better when you talk to him or her? Contact that person and see what they think about this situation. If they are having an off day and aren't helpful, try someone else.
- 6. Extreme mindfulness.** For some people, grounding sort of works, but they get distracted easily. For you, I suggest what I call extreme mindfulness. This includes things like sour candy, spicy gum, or splashing your face with icy water. It's hard to focus on anything but this when you are shocking your senses (don't go overboard and hurt yourself, of course).
- 7. Try some easy, controlled art.** This includes things like adult coloring books and paint-by-number kits for adults. You get the satisfaction of a beautiful finished pieces without having to come up with your own ideas, which has its own rewards but can be stressful for some. (If you enjoy the creativity aspect, go all out with a bigger art project!
- 8. Get physical.** For some, movement and exercise is the most helpful for high anxiety. Go for a walk, run, or hit the punching bag at the gym. Or get back into an old sport you used to enjoy.
- 9. Sometimes distraction is okay.** If you have cyclical, ruminating thoughts, where you think about the same things over and over but they don't go anywhere, then it's best to get yourself out of this thinking. In most cases, it's good to let yourself think about things and process them (in fact, it's sort of the treatment for PTSD), but if you're stuck in an obsessive cycle of thinking and it's not going anywhere, it can become a kind of nervous habit. If this sounds like you, for now, just interrupt the cycle. As soon as you notice it, do one of the distracting things above to simply get yourself out of it. Try the extreme mindfulness, or think about something that makes you excited and happy (puppies and unicorns, maybe)? The game Tetris works too!
- 10. Try the Leaves on a Stream meditation,** borrowed from ACT Therapy. This is a mindfulness activity where you imagine you are sitting at a beautiful stream. You noticed leaves are flowing gently down the stream. Now, imagine putting each thought you have on a leaf, and watching it float further and further down the stream until it gets so far away you can't see it. When you have another thought, put that on a leaf too, and watch it float away. You can look up more detailed instructions online and find various videos of this meditation.

***Pick three tools here or elsewhere that work for you and put them on your Step #3.***

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