

This is a really nice exercise for calming yourself when you are anxious:

Sit back, take a few 'low, slow' diaphragmatic / tummy breaths, and then establish an easy regular breathing pattern (still breathing down into your tummy).

To begin, take another 'low, slow' breath and as you exhale, touch your thumb to your index finger. Recall a time when your body felt a healthy fatigue, like how you might feel after exercising, or just stepping out of a spa or sauna. Take a few moments to really imagine and feel that healthy fatigued feeling.

Next, take another 'low, slow' breath, and as you exhale, touch your thumb to your middle finger and go back in your mind to a time when you had a loving experience, a time when you felt a strong sense of closeness or connection. This could be a spiritual experience while you were alone, or feelings of love toward another person. Take a moment to feel that feeling as vividly as you can.

Now, take another 'low, slow' breath, and as you exhale, touch your thumb to your ring finger and recall a time when you performed very well, when you mastered something and received recognition for your work. Take that sense of accomplishment and satisfaction in – feel it fully and know that you deserve it.

Now, take another 'low, slow' breath and as you exhale, touch your thumb to your little finger and as you do, recall the most beautiful place you have ever been ... imagine how such a place would look and feel, as if you were there right now ... Take a moment to absorb the full feeling of this place.

Lastly, take another 'low, slow' breath and open your hand out, bringing to mind a time in the past when you approached your study feeling enthusiastic, interested, energetic and motivated. Remember this feeling – feel it throughout your body, letting that feeling energise you anew.

And when you're ready, bringing with you the feelings you would like to feel for the rest of the day / this period of study. Come back in your own time, coming back now, alert and energised, ready for your next task.

Sourced from 'Nurses' Notes' column by Kate McCallum (Nurse Specialist at The Auckland Regional Pain Service'). Nga Mamae (Journal of the New Zealand Pain Society).

STUDENT COUNSELLING SERVICES
SKILLS – INSIGHT - SUPPORT

WHERE DO I GO FROM HERE?

If you would like to make an appointment to see a counsellor to learn more about this topic, please contact the counselling service on your campus.

Distance students can contact any one of the campuses. Please tell the receptionist if you need an urgent appointment.

CONTACT DETAILS

ALBANY

Health and Counselling

Hours 8.30am - 5.00pm

Monday - Friday

Phone (09) 443 9783

Email: Studenthealth@massey.ac.nz

MANAWATŪ

Student Counselling Service

Turitea Campus, Palmerston North

Hours 8.30am - 5.00pm

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Phone (06) 350 5533

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WELLINGTON

Student Counselling Service

Hours 8.30am - 4.30pm

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Phone (04) 801 2542

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WHAT IS ANXIETY AND HOW CAN I MANAGE IT?

STUDENT COUNSELLING



WHAT IS ANXIETY?

Anxiety affects our whole being. It affects how we feel, how we behave, and has very real physical symptoms. It feels a bit like fear, but whereas we know what we are frightened of, we often don't know what we are anxious about. Mild anxiety is vague and unsettling - severe anxiety can be extremely debilitating.

WHAT CAUSES ANXIETY?

Anxiety is often triggered by stress in our lives. Some of us are more vulnerable to anxiety than others, but even those who become anxious easily can learn to manage it well. Understanding where anxiety comes from can be the first step in regaining some sense of control.

FIGHT—FLIGHT RESPONSE

When our minds perceive that there is a threat it triggers a set of physiological reactions in the body. We experience a burst of adrenalin, an increase in heart rate which pumps more blood around the body, preparing us to fight or run away. It also pumps blood into the legs and arms and away from the stomach—hence our experience of butterflies in the stomach or nausea, which is often associated with anxiety.

If the threat is physical, we will use this physiological response to get to safety, but if the perceived threat is more psychological, like looming exams, a relationship going wrong, or simply being overcommitted and fearing we can't cope, then the flood of physiological symptoms are less likely to prompt us to run away or fight—and are more likely to be interpreted as something being wrong with us.

If we could get used to responding to anxious feelings differently we may find the anxiety can calm. If we can see anxiety as a 'Red Flag' rather than as a problem in itself, we can look for responses to what the anxiety is trying to flag to us

STRESSORS

Anxiety is often related to an overload of stressors in our life. Stressors are things that produce stress. There is an optimum amount of stress that helps us to perform well, but too much stress causes us to feel overloaded and in danger. Our bodies will respond to the perceived danger, and our minds and emotions will feel anxious.

WHAT IF I JUST AVOID THE THINGS THAT MAKE ME ANXIOUS?

Avoiding situations that make you anxious might help you feel better in the short term. The trouble is the anxiety keeps returning, and has a habit of spreading to other situations. This can lead to you avoiding things like shops, crowded places, lectures or tutorials. So although avoidance makes you feel better –

- Relief is only temporary – you may worry about what will happen next time.
- Every time you avoid something it is harder next time you try to face it.
- Gradually you want to avoid more and more

FEELING ANXIOUS ABOUT FEELING ANXIOUS

The real trouble with anxiety is that often once we are feeling anxious, we get panicked about what is wrong with us, and before long we are feeling anxious about the anxiety. We worry about when the anxiety will come, and if we will be able to cope. We worry about 'losing it' in public. This can cause us to start limiting what we do and who we see.

Knowing that anxious feelings are a normal response to any perceived threat can help you to break out of this pattern.



SO WHAT CAN I DO?

1. Look at your Stressors. Anxiety is letting us know that our mind is perceiving some kind of threat. This might be linked to what kind of stress we are under. Imagine an old pair of weighing scales, the kind used to weigh gold. On one side are the stresses in your life. On the other are things you do to care for yourself. Keeping our scales in balance is one way of managing stress and lowering our chances of feeling too much anxiety. Ask yourself if you can remove any of the stressors. If you can, you might choose to do so. If you can't remove the stresses, you can still rebalance the Scales by adding more onto the self care side. This might include getting some sunshine every day, exercising, spending.
2. Keep yourself healthy. Attend to the basics of eating well, avoiding stimulants like caffeine, and depressants like alcohol. Drink plenty of plain water (avoid energy drinks, they will heighten anxiety). Get some exercise every day, get outside, do little things that bring you pleasure.
3. Practice deep abdominal breathing. This consists of breathing in deeply and slowly through your nose, taking the air right down to your abdomen. You should see and feel your abdomen expand. Visualise the air travelling right down to your abdomen and think the word "calm" to yourself as you breathe in. Then breathe out slowly and gently through your mouth. As you breathe out visualise the stress and tension leaving your body with your breath and think the word "relax." Deliberately let your muscles go floppy as you breathe out. Take three deep breaths at a time. If you breathe deeply for too long you may feel dizzy from the extra oxygen. You can repeat the three breaths after a short time of breathing normally.
4. Use your senses to bring you back to the present moment. If you feel anxiety beginning to rise, then stop and do the following: sit down, plant your feet on the ground and push firmly into your legs. Do this as long as you can, then relax. Once you have done this look around and notice 3 things you can see. Listen for 3 things you can hear. Notice what you can feel (the air around you, the chair, your clothes). Take a deep breath.

Anxiety can be exhausting and debilitating. Don't suffer alone for too long. It often helps to talk to a Counsellor or Psychologist, who can help you find ways to deal with stress in your life and teach you skills to manage anxiety.

Check out our brochure on Managing Stress for more on how stress affects us and how we can manage it.