

Self-Help Exercises

We put together some exercises that might help with your on-going symptoms. There are five different categories and each has various exercises that you can do. The categories are as follows:

1. Guided Breathing
2. Grounding
3. Expressive writing
4. Mindfulness
5. Management of emotions

There is no specific order to the categories or exercises; and you can do as many as you want. Choose the one that pleases you and practice it.

Section one ***Guided Breathing Exercises***

What are guided breathing exercises?

Our breath is a powerful tool to relieve stress and help us feel less anxious. It allows us to regain control and regulate our body. By practicing some breathing techniques, these techniques might come to surface when in need of reducing our anxiety.

Exercise 1: Deep Breathing

This exercise is a powerful tool focusing and teaches how to take deep breaths.

How to practice it:

1. Sit or lie down somewhere comfortable.
2. Put one hand on your belly and the other on your chest.
3. Take a deep breath through your nose and out through your mouth. Let your belly push your hand out. Try not to move your chest.
4. Take a deep breath from your belly, and silently count to 4 as you breathe in.
5. Hold your breath and count to 7.
6. Breathe out as you count to 8. Empty your lungs completely.
7. Repeat 3 to 7 times or until you feel calm.
8. Notice how you feel.

Exercise 2: Breath Focus

The breath focus technique involves the same type of exercise as the deep breathing, but while using a picture in your mind, and a word or phrase to help you feel more relaxed.

How to practice it:

1. Close your eyes and take a few big, deep breaths.
2. Breathe in. As you do that, imagine that the air is filled with a sense of calm and peace. Try to feel the peaceful air throughout your body. Use a word or phrase with your breath. As you breathe in, say in your mind, "I breathe in peace and calm."
3. Then breathe out. While you're doing it, imagine that the air leaves with your stress and tension. Use a word or phrase with your breath. As you breathe out, say in your mind, "I breathe out stress and tension."
4. Continue this exercise for 10 to 20 minutes.

Exercise 3: Equal Time for Breathing in and Breathing Out

This exercise focuses on matching the time you breathe in with the time you breathe out. Over time, you'll increase how long you're able to breathe in and out at a time. Making you more aware of your breathing, which will come in handy for when you need to regulate your anxiety.

How to practice it:

1. Be comfortable. Sit on a chair or lie down on the floor.
2. Breathe in through your nose. As you do it, count to five.
3. Breathe out through your nose to the count of five as well.
4. Repeat this process several times
5. Once you feel comfortable with breaths that last five counts, increase how long you breathe in and breathe out. You can work up to breaths that last up to 10 counts, depending on how much you feel comfortable and relaxed.

Exercise 4: Progressive Muscle Relaxation

This exercise helps you focus on slowly tensing and then relaxing each muscle group. You can become more aware of physical sensations, and it allows you to focus on the difference between muscle tension and relaxation.

How to practice it:

1. Lie comfortably and take a few deep breaths to relax.
2. Start by breathing in (inhaling) while tensing the muscles of your feet for 5 to 10 seconds.
3. Then breathe out (exhale) and release the tension in your feet.
4. Relax for 10 to 20 seconds, then move on to the next muscle group (for example your calf muscles, your buttocks, your upper thighs etc..)
5. While releasing the tension, try to focus on the changes you feel when the muscle group is relaxed. Try imagining that stressful feelings are flowing out of your body as you relax each muscle group.
6. Gradually work your way up the body contracting or tensing and then relaxing muscle groups. This includes your legs, belly, chest, fingers, arms, shoulders, neck, and face.

Tip: Breathing exercises are a skill. The more you practice the better you get.

Section two

Grounding Exercise

What are grounding techniques?

Grounding techniques help the individual connect with the present, as well as with the environment around them. Those exercises often involve the use of the five senses, i.e., touch, smell, sight, taste and sound. While trying to stay connected to the present moment, grounding exercises reduce the likelihood that you will experience flashbacks or episodes of dissociation. They can be very personal, depending on what helps you and the coping mechanisms you've developed to reduce anxiety.

Exercise 1: The 5-4-3-2-1 Technique

This technique involves purposely taking in the details of your environment by using each of your 5 senses. The purpose of this grounding exercise is to notice the small things around you that your mind usually tunes out, while helping you stay grounded to the present as well as your surroundings.

How to practice it:

Take deep breaths, relax your shoulders, put your feet on the floor and ask yourself the following questions. Answer out loud as it helps you increase your awareness and stay focused.

1. What are the 5 things that you can see?

Look for small details such as a pattern on the ceiling, the wall, the way light reflects off a surface, or an object you never noticed.

2. What are the 4 things that you can feel?

Notice the sensation of clothing on your body, the sun on your skin, your feet on the ground, or the feeling of the chair you are sitting in. Pick up an object around you and examine its texture, weight and other physical qualities.

3. What are the 3 things that you can hear?

Pay attention to the sounds your mind has tuned out, such as a ticking clock, distant traffic, or trees blowing in the wind. Try to concentrate on those sounds only.

4. What are the 2 things that you can smell?

Notice the smells in the air around you, like freshly mowed grass, an air freshener, or look around for something that has a scent such as flowers or unlit candles that you can smell.

5. What is one thing that you can taste?

Carry gum, candy, or small snacks. Pop one in your mouth and focus your attention closely on the flavors and the sensation of the food's taste.

Exercise 2: Body Awareness Exercise

This exercise will bring you back into the here-and-now by shifting your focus to sensations in the body. You will have to pay special attention to the physical sensations created by each step of the exercise.

How to practice:

1. Take five long, deep breaths through your nose, and exhale through puckered lips.
2. Place both of your feet, flat, on the floor. Start wiggling your toes then curl and uncurl them several times. Spend a moment noticing the sensations in your feet.
3. Stomp your feet on the ground several times. Pay attention to the sensations in your feet and legs as you contact the ground.
4. Clench your hands into fists, then release the tension. Repeat this 10 times.
5. Press your palms together. Press them harder and hold this pose for 15 seconds. Focus your attention on the feeling of tension in your hands and arms.

6. Rub your palms together briskly. Pay attention to the sound and feeling of warmth.
7. Reach your hands over your head like you're trying to reach the sky. Stretch like this for 5 seconds. Bring your arms down and let them relax at your sides.
8. Take 5 more deep breaths and notice the feeling of calm in your body.

Exercise 3: Visual awareness

This exercise focuses your attention on what you see. IT helps for when you are in stressful situations. For this exercise you will need an item, it can be anything that you want, a mug, a rock, a jewel, or even a necklace.

How to practice:

1. Hold the object in your hand and really bring your full focus to it.
2. Focus on the patterns that run through it, pay attention to the color variances.
3. Notice any color difference or sparkly bit.
4. Look at where shadows may fall on parts of it or maybe if some shapes or forms are different on one side.
5. Feel how heavy or light it is in your hand and what the surface texture feels like under your fingers.

Tip: Practice these techniques when you are calm so that you find them easier to do when you are distressed.

Section Three

Expressive Therapy

What is expressive therapy?

When a traumatic event occurs, we are often not able to fully process it, but are able to express it. The act of writing, drawing or painting helps us organize our thoughts and regulate our emotions; it also helps us make sense of the traumatic event.

Exercise 1: Journaling

Journaling is writing about your experience. You can use any form, language and pronoun you wish. Journaling can be very successful since writing about your experience is by itself a way of letting your emotions and feelings go into your writing. By doing so, you are relaxing and unwinding yourself.

How to practice:

1. Find a comfortable space
2. Grab a pen and a paper, and write anything that comes to mind, don't really think about it. Let your brain wander.
3. Time yourself, try it for a few minutes, and add a minute or two the next day.
4. When you start to be comfortable, try focusing your writing on the event.
5. Include any detail you remember, along with the emotions and feelings that come with them.
6. Is there anything you learned from your experience? anything good? bad?
7. Try doing this for 4 days.

Exercise 2: The Lighthouse activity

This activity is used along with arts and crafts material to help those who feel lost, overwhelmed or isolated. It can help you get acquainted with your feelings and visualize your needs for the future by embarking you in a specific journey.

How to practice:

1. Gather some arts and crafts material.
2. Take a deep breath and give yourself a minute to clear your mind.
3. Acknowledge any feeling you may experience and remind yourself that what you are feeling is normal and that you will get through it. there is usually always a light to help us back to safety.
4. Imagine you have been out on a boat on a clear day, but as the day progressed, the weather has taken a turn for the worse. The sky has darkened, the sea is black and choppy. It is cold, and water is flowing into the boat. You have lost your way and are

unsure of how you will find your way back again. But, in the distance, you see a light – it is a lighthouse showing you the way to safety. you must head towards the lighthouse.

5. Open your eyes, take a second to be aware of the present, and with the material you have gathered, draw, color or paint a lighthouse. Depict yourself in relation to the lighthouse somewhere in the image and to add words that represent sources of guidance in your life.

Exercise 3: Post Card

This activity required a card and some crayons. The purpose is to create a postcard to a person or an event that has happened and include emotions that are weighing on you. This post card is not meant to be sent out, but just to unleash your emotions. In so doing, you will alleviate some stress and be able to visualize the root cause of your feelings.

How to practice:

1. Gather some arts and crafts material
2. Get a postcard and tell yourself that all of your feelings will be portrayed on this card. That is okay, it is for your eyes alone.
3. Start thinking about how you feel
4. Start thinking about why you feel that way
5. Write, draw, or jot the feelings and reasons behind it on the postcard.
6. Repeat with all the feelings you have
7. The post card should include all that you are feeling, the good and the bad.
8. When you feel ready, read it,
9. Acknowledge how you feel
10. Try again until the weight has been lifted

Tips: It can be hard to put your mind to it as we tend to fear that someone else will see or read what we have to express. Remind yourself that these projects are yours and are for your eyes alone.

Section four

Mindfulness

What is mindfulness?

Practicing mindfulness allows you to calm yourself, increase your awareness of your behaviors and bodily sensations, as well as thoughts and behaviors. Mindfulness can decrease your stress, anxiety by helping you be present in the moment while accepting your body and your mind.

Exercise 1: The Raisin Exercise

This is a known exercise for beginners that want to start practicing mindfulness. Although most people do it with a raisin, this exercise can be done by anyone and with any type of food. Try to choose a food that has an interesting taste, smell, or texture.

How to practice:

1. Pretend it is the first time you see a raisin (or the other food you have).
2. Pay careful attention to the following aspects: the way the raisin looks; how it feels, how your skin responds to its manipulation and texture, its smell and its taste.
3. By focusing on these aspects, you are bringing your mind to the present by taking the time to focus on what is in front of you as well as notice everything about the raisin.
4. If your mind does wander and you get distracted, it is normal. Gently guide your mind and focus back to the exercise when you feel your attention is decreasing.

Exercise 2: The Mindful Minute

The mindful minute is an easy and quick exercise that can be done anytime and everywhere. It can take as few as 5 minutes, and you can repeat it as much as you want during the same day.

How to practice:

1. Sit comfortably on a chair or lie down on the floor.
2. Start the mindfulness exercise by focusing on your breath and the physical sensations of these breaths. For example, pay attention to how the air is moving in and how you are feeling it or how your muscles are operating. If you want to count your breath cycle, you can inspire for 4 seconds, hold the breath for 4 seconds, expire for 4 seconds, take 4 seconds pause, and begin again. Maintain a consistency in the time of your breath cycle.
3. Once you feel you are in the present moment, evaluate the situation and try to find what is going on and to understand your current mood: depressed, irritable, worried...Also, scan your body looking for physical symptoms or sensations related to your actual mood, such as muscle pain or stomach burn.
4. Continue to acknowledge your state of mind and your mood, and try to accept the reality without trying to change something. Continue to be aware moment by moment while relaxing your muscles. You can end the meditation by simply put your attention back to your environment and the things around you.

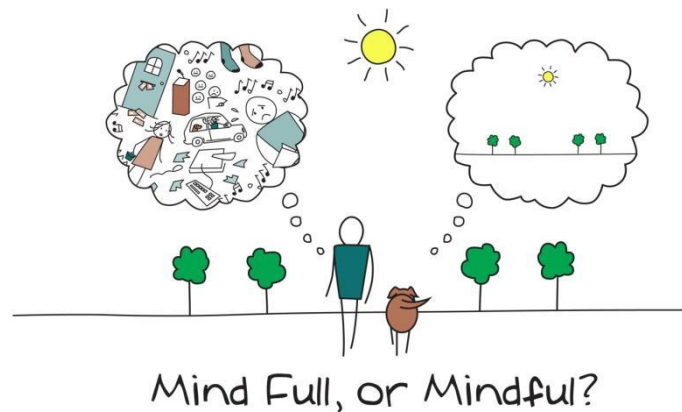
Exercise 3: Mindful listening

As per our nature, we thrive when we feel “heard” and “seen”. This exercise is designed to offer a break from focusing on ourselves and is aims at creating an inner stillness, free from any distractions, whether it be preconceptions or judgments.

How to practice:

1. Get comfortable
2. Think of something that stressed you and of something that you look forward to.
3. Narrate each out loud while noticing how you speak and how you feel when you are speaking.
4. Observe your thoughts, feelings, and body sensations while you are narrating your two different points.
5. Talk out loud about your observations. Here are some guiding questions:
 - a. How did you feel while narrating?
 - b. Did you notice any mind wandering?
 - c. Did you judge yourself?
 - d. How did your body feel?
 - e. Would I share my stories with others? If yes, maybe try this exercise with someone.

Tips: Don't worry if your mind wanders and you find it hard to focus. It is normal for your mind to get distracted, when you notice this, gently bring back your attention to the exercise. Notice how you feel at the end of the exercise.



Section five

Managing Emotions

Why do we mean by managing emotions?

We all experience emotions, and sometimes, we really don't want to encounter them, so we try to suppress them or distract ourselves to avoid them. But, that doesn't always work. What you might not know is the repeated attempt of avoiding your emotions can increase our stress levels, disrupt our sleep, and impact our physical and mental health.

Exercise 1: Acceptance

The act of accepting our emotions we rather not feel is the key to letting go of them. Because when we accept them, we stop avoiding or running away from them. Once we pass this step, we start facing them, and realize that it wasn't as big of a turmoil as we thought it would be.

How to practice:

1. Notice your emotions, acknowledge their existence and untangle yourself from it. For example: You notice you are frustrated, with your inner voice say "I am frustrated, I am accepting that I am frustrated, I am taking a breath"
2. Try thinking of it as a wave, coming and going. Try to notice how your body responds to your emotion. visualizing or picturing it may be helpful.
3. Recognize that you are not the emotion, but that the emotion is a mere part of you.
4. It is up to you to decide what to do with the emotion, having it on your mind does not mean you must act on it. You can try sitting with the emotion, and evaluate what next step is best for you.
5. With time this thought process will reinforce your control over your emotions. Try practicing it once a day and with different emotions.

Exercise 2: STOPP

This exercise helps you when you are having a moment of intense emotions. It helps you in addressing and managing your emotional response to the incident at hand.

How to practice:

1. S – Stop!
 - a. When the moment is peaking, stop, and pause for a second.
2. T – Take a Breath
 - a. Focus on your breathing, noticing how you breathe in and out.
3. O – Observe
 - a. What thoughts are going through your mind?
 - b. Where are you focusing your attention on?
 - c. What are you reacting to?
 - d. What sensations do you notice in your body?
4. P – Pull Back – Try to put in some perspective
 - a. What is the bigger picture?
 - b. What is another way of looking at this situation?
 - c. What would a friend say to me right now?
 - d. How accurate is the information? truth or an opinion?
 - e. What is a more reasonable explanation?
 - f. How important is this? what about in 6 months?
5. P – Practice What Works – take a decision
 - a. What is the best thing to do right now for me and others?
 - b. What can I do that would abide by my thought process?
 - c. How do I respond in an effective and appropriate manner?
6. Try repeating this until you get a better grasp of your emotions

Exercise 3: Mood Journal

Write down the feelings and the responses they trigger. With time, you may recognize a pattern of behaviour and maybe notice the triggers that make you feel and act in such a way. Writing is effective because, when you read something that is already on paper, it is easier to reflect and see a clear pattern of behaviour.

How to practice:

1. Get a journal of your liking

2. Try writing your feelings and responses daily, as it will be more effective when rereading your work and understanding your behaviour
3. Once you understand your behaviour, try tracking your triggers
4. You can add any other element to the list, if you feel it will help you understand your emotions better.

Tips: It is okay if you are unable to focus on these tasks at first. Try to doing one the first point, and come back the next day and every other day, working your way up to conducting the full exercise.
