



ILLUSTRATION: SOPHIE BLACKHALL-CAIN

Instant calm

If your worries are getting the better of you, try these tips from top holistic health experts to calm your mind and find your heart centre. Charmaine Yabsley reports.

Press the point

Rachel Holm suggests acupressure: "Your Heart 7 point is located on the inside of the wrist, on the crease in line with your pinkie finger is. Using the thumb of the other hand, gently press and knead this point in a circular motion for two minutes. Repeat on the other hand. Another point for easing anxiety is Pericardium 6, which is in the middle of the inside forearm, two and a half finger-widths away from the wrist. Gently press and knead the area for two minutes, take nice deep breaths, and feel a sense of calm wash over you."

Get moving

Belinda Reynolds says: "Many stressful events can't be avoided; however we can help our body to manage internal or physiological responses to stress, ultimately helping us to recover more quickly. Exercise is crucial in maintaining brain health and maximising production of brain chemicals that help with mood management - so find a form you enjoy."

Eat mood food

"Ensure your diet is rich in fibre," adds Reynolds. "Eating nutrient-dense plant foods, including nuts and seeds, keeps you regular and feeds the good gut bacteria that positively influence mood health. The B-group vitamins, zinc and magnesium also support mood health, as do good fats from cold-water fish, walnuts, avocado, and olive oil. Vitamin D is essential for countering anxiety and depression, so get out in the sun and take a vitamin D3 supplement to support healthy levels."

Say thank you

"Research shows there is an inverse relationship between gratitude and anxiety - the more grateful

you are, the less anxious you will be," says Gillian Mandich. "Make a conscious effort to intentionally focus on things you are grateful for by writing them down - and the more specific you can be, the better."

Be a rag doll

"My go-to yoga pose to ease anxiety is Rag Doll (Uttanasana)," says Amanda Graci. "It calms the brain, reduces stress, anxiety, and fatigue, and you feel the benefits immediately. Stand with feet hip-width apart, engage your core, and fold forward from the hips. If you have tight hamstrings, bend your knees slightly. You can either place your palms by your feet or grab opposite elbows. Adding a slight sway back and forth also feels nice. Hold for 10 breaths and roll up slowly, with your head last to rise."

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Tune out, turn off

"Choose a time in the evening - for example 7:30 p.m. - when you turn off all electronic devices, put away your laptop and mobile phone, and just enjoy your evening," says Melo Calarco. "Technology actually creates anxiety: playing on your phone or checking emails and social media feeds keeps you in a constantly stimulated state, which is a sure way to increase over-thinking and worrying in bed. Evenings should be a time of rest and restoration, so create this space at home and reclaim your downtime with calming activities like reading, listening to music, or engaging in conversation with your family."

* Meet the experts



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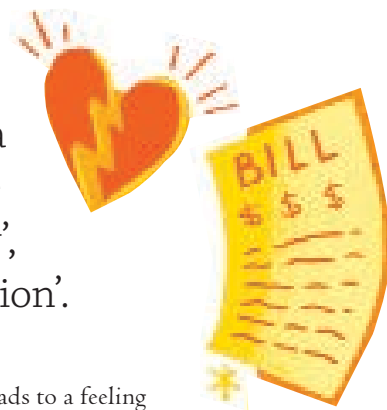


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Breathe deep

"If there were only one technique to help you manage stress, worry and anxiety, it is your breathing patterns," adds Calarco. "When stressed, our heart rate increases and we shallow-breathe, or even hold our breath without realising it. This puts us in a state of high alert and triggers the fight-or-flight stress response. Deep belly breathing or diaphragm breathing is very effective in taking us out of the stress response and putting us into the relaxation response."

Give it a name

"Anxiety is the meaning we place on two feelings, excitement and confusion, that we experience when we think about future actions," explains Ben Harvey. "The issue is that they happen at exactly the same time, with the same strength. First, give it a name: What we call these feelings has a huge impact on our experience, so instead of 'anxiety' spend a week calling it 'expansion'. Say to yourself, 'Every time I feel expansion and follow through with my action, I am increasing my self-worth'. Then, let the excitement win! Reduce the confusion by breaking down the future action into smaller pieces, allowing excitement to become the dominant feeling."

Write it out

"Start journalling," advises Alyce Pilgrim. "Writing down how you feel has a naturally calming effect, allowing you to clear your mind. A gratitude journal, where you only write what you are thankful for in your life, shifts perspective from one of lack, to one of abundance."

Go to the wall

"Legs Up the Wall is a restorative, nourishing, grounding, and relaxing pose," says Prema Deva. "Lie on your back with your buttocks right up to a wall, then extend your legs up the wall and arms out by your sides, palms up. Add a folded blanket under your hips for support and an eye pillow for extra relaxation. Combine this pose with deep breathing for 10 to 15 minutes and feel the calming benefits."

Live in the present

"Anxiety is often mistaken as a feeling, but it is in fact the self-limiting mental process of imagining a future scenario and then discounting ourselves, our resources and the time frame to the event,

which leads to a feeling of fear," explains Ami Cook.

"Working objectively with the very structure of this thinking, and shifting the mind's attention from future thinking to the present, is a key to eliminating anxiety. We can then begin to count our existing skills and knowledge, the support of other people and resources, the time we have to get ready, as well as working on that inner critic and the limiting beliefs stopping us from stepping up and stepping out."

Chew the (good) fat

"Low-fat diets create havoc with hormones, causing anxiety, depression, and moodiness," says Christine Cronau. "Diet plays a huge role. Quality, natural fats - butter, avocado, and grass-fed animal fats - rebalance hormones and help the brain function more effectively; fats make us feel good, naturally."

Feel the fear

"Anxiety can leave you trapped in your head and distanced from the physical experiences of living," says Clarissa Hughes. "Mindfulness practices, like breathing exercises and short body scans, help you to come back into your body. Rather than trying to force a feeling of calm, mindfulness encourages you to 'feel' the anxiety and explore it with curiosity. Where is the anxiety located in the body? Notice your breath, how does it feel? When you stop resisting, you'll find anxiety subsides."

Roll with it

"A simple shoulder roll opens up the chest and increases the flow of oxygen to the brain and body," says Michelle Ball. "Unlike pulling your shoulders back or trying to sit up straight, this gentle rolling motion keeps your shoulders in a healthy place without muscle strain. It's best to roll one shoulder at a time. Move it a little bit forward, a little bit up, then as far backwards as you comfortably can without moving your body significantly. Now breathe fully."

Try special K

"Kava is traditionally drunk for its sedative effects," says Chantelle Bell. "A nurturing herb that has been scientifically proven to treat anxiety, it calms mind and body, without affecting mental clarity. It's perfect for people who find that their

mind circulates persistent unwanted anxious thoughts as soon as they go to bed. Kava takes the edge off, so you fall asleep sooner and achieve deeper, more restful sleep."

Brew the right tea

"Herbal tea is a healthy caffeine-free alternative to jitters-provoking coffee," says Lisa Guy. "Herbal teas have wonderful therapeutic properties that ease anxiety and help you sleep. Chamomile has been used for centuries to ease nervousness and anxiety, and induce restful sleep. Lemon verbena is often used by herbalists to treat chronic anxiety. For extra calm in your cup, meditate on a mantra and turn your tea drinking into a daily mindfulness ritual."

Learn to breathe

"We're anxious when we 'exist' in our head, but relaxed and calm when we're not," says Vanessa Aitkin. "Breathe in and out slowly through your nose for equal counts (in for five, out for five), while imagining your breath entering and leaving your body through your heart area. Once you have this image or feeling, think of a positive emotion such as love or gratitude and feel that emotion entering your body and filling up your entire being. This will take you out of your head, and out of your anxious feelings."

Keep it simple

"Knowing that one day you are going to die and that all this is not going to matter will reduce anxiety," says Prosper Taruvinga. "If people are afraid of the next second or a lifetime, they limit themselves from doing things they actually love. When they are trapped in living a life that is not meant for them, that's when they get anxious. Get rid of external influences. Unfollow social media, cut out TV, don't read celebrity magazines. Just go out there and smell the fresh air. Life is simple - we just over-complicate it."

Get baking

"Making bread can work wonders on worries; when I bake, it clears my mind to wander," says Frederic Davoine. "I knead dough and gaze out my window. It's like exercising - you feel happier and lighter afterward - and at the end I have a tasty loaf of bread to enjoy."

Wake up with yoga

"Morning yoga boosts your endocrine system," says Christine Buisan. "This system can become slow and sluggish, especially in perimenopause, triggering anxiety, weight gain, depression, and

insomnia. Try to do yoga every morning, ideally for one hour, but even a few simple poses and stretches can help."

Commute smarter

"Building relaxation and exercise into your daily commute will help to provide the time-out our body so desperately craves," says Ali Cavill. "Leave your car at home and cycle to work. Get off the bus or train one stop early and take a leisurely walk. Take the stairs in between meetings. Take lunch breaks outdoors, and always have a non-work related book handy."

Listen to your body

"Listen to what your body is trying to tell you; after all, it knows you best!" adds Cavill. "Ease into a light workout on low energy days, without guilt. You'll feel better for any exercise, no matter how gentle and this lets you try different workouts, like a stretch class, if you're used to lifting weights." ✱



✱ Meet the experts



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