



# Don't Let Your Worries Run Your Life

by Lawrence E. Shapiro, Ph.D.

Therapeutic Assignments to Help You  
Overcome Your Generalized Anxiety Disorder



# **Don't Let Your Worries Run Your Life: Therapeutic Assignments to Help You Overcome Your Generalized Anxiety Disorder**

**By Lawrence E. Shapiro, PhD**

**Between Sessions Resources, Inc.  
Norwalk, CT**

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Generalized Anxiety Disorder

by Lawrence E. Shapiro, PhD

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*Disclaimer: This book is intended to be used as an adjunct to psychotherapy. If you are experiencing serious symptoms or problems in your life, seek the help of an experienced mental health professional.*

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**About the Author**

Lawrence E. Shapiro, PhD, is a prolific author of self-help books and the inventor of more than 100 therapeutic games. Dr. Shapiro is known for his practical approach to helping others. He has written workbooks, storybooks, card games, board games, and smartphone apps. His work has been translated into twenty-seven languages.

**About the Series**

*Don't Let Your Worries Run Your Life* is part of a series of workbooks designed to give therapists and their clients easy access to practical, evidence-based psychotherapy tools.

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## **Introduction**

Is your life being taken over by your constant worrying? Do you find yourself worrying through the day about money, health, family, work, or other issues? Do you find it difficult to control your worrying even though you know it is not helping you? Do you expect the worst in almost any situation, even when you are aware that there is no real reason for concern?

If you answered yes to most of these questions, you likely have generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), a problem that affects over 3 percent of the US population. GAD is diagnosed when a person finds it difficult to control worrying on more days than not for at least six months and has three or more of the following symptoms:

- Feeling nervous, irritable, or on edge
- Having a sense of impending danger, panic, or doom
- Having an increased heart rate
- Breathing rapidly (hyperventilation), sweating, and/or trembling
- Feeling weak or tired
- Having difficulty concentrating
- Having trouble sleeping
- Experiencing gastrointestinal problems

But you don't have to let your worries ruin your life! You can live your life in the moment. You can do things and go places whenever you want. You can live a fulfilling and happier life in just a few months. This book can help. Its four main sections provide forty-one worksheets to help you overcome your GAD. Although the exercises can be used on your own, we highly recommend you use this book with a qualified psychotherapist who can guide you.

The assignments can be thought of as therapy homework. Your therapist can explain why each exercise is important and also guide you in learning new emotional, cognitive, and behavioral skills that can stop your excessive worrying.

## **The Worry Paradox**

If you are like most people with GAD, you have probably spent countless hours trying to find ways to stop worrying. You may try to talk yourself out of worrying, saying words like, "My worrying doesn't help me," over and over again. You may try to distract yourself from worrying by binge-watching TV or doing something healthier, like exercising.

But these efforts to stop your worrying don't help, do they? If they did, you probably wouldn't be reading this book. In fact, studies have found that the more you try to stop worrying, the more you worry! This is what psychologists call the "worry paradox." A paradox is something that contradicts itself. You would think that trying to stop worrying would help you, but in fact it often makes your worrying worse. This paradox is often illustrated by a simple experiment you might want to try right now.

For one minute, *don't* think about a giant pink elephant in your room.

If you are like most people, as soon as you try not to think about a pink elephant, it appears in your mind. And the harder you try not to think about it, the more likely that elephant is to be there.

Worries work the same way. The more you try to distract yourself from your worries, the more you tell yourself it is useless to worry, the more you try to fight your worries by replacing them with other thoughts, the more your worries will stick around.

So instead of trying to get rid of your worries, this workbook will help you understand your worries and accept them. And when you learn to accept them, you take away their power, and your worries stop being paramount in your life. Will you still worry sometimes? Of course. Everyone does. But this workbook can help you reduce your worries to a “normal” level and give you the skills you need live a happy and fulfilling life without being tormented by constant anxiety.

### **What You Will Find in This Workbook**

This workbook will take you through four main steps to overcoming your worries. Each step corresponds to a section of the workbook where you will learn specific skills on your journey to overcoming your anxiety disorder.

#### **Section 1: Understanding Why You Worry and How It Affects You**

The activities in this section will help you get perspective on your worrying and how it affects your life, including the people you care about.

#### **Section 2: Accepting Rather Than Fighting Your Worries**

The techniques in this section will help you learn to tolerate having worrisome thoughts and help you understand that thoughts are just thoughts and have no special power over you.

#### **Section 3: Breaking the Habits That Keep You Anxious**

You most likely have habits that support your worrying. The techniques in this section will help you recognize and change those habits.

#### **Section 4: Developing New Positive Habits**

This section will help you learn alternative habits that help you live a more worry-free life.

The workbook ends with two appendices: one where you'll find additional information that can help you reduce your anxiety, and one that addresses coping with anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic.



## **Creating a Permanent Change**

There is no right or wrong place to start this workbook. All the techniques in it will be helpful. If you are in therapy for your anxiety, you should discuss where to start with your therapist or counselor, who may suggest specific techniques that will have the most immediate impact.

Learning new skills takes practice. Above all, it is important to be patient with yourself and persist in using these techniques even though they may at times be difficult. The treatment of anxiety, or any mental health problem for that matter, can quite literally change the way your brain works, but this can take some time.

We wish you the best in working to overcome your anxiety. If you are looking for additional resources, we recommend using the website of the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, which can be found at <https://www.adaa.org/>.

## **Section 1. Understanding Why You Worry and How It Affects You**

# Do You Worry Too Much?

**Objective:** To help you determine how your constant worrying is affecting your life.

## You Should Know

Everyone worries sometimes. Thinking about the future, even when it makes you anxious, is a normal biological response to a perceived threat and warns you when you need to take action. However, you might worry all the time, so much that your excessive worrying interferes with your normal daily activities—robbing you of experiencing a full and happy life.

Excessive worry is often associated with depression and other emotional problems. Excessive worry can be a significant stress in your life and even contribute to physical problems. Excessive worry can also interfere with your relationships at home, at school, and even at work. If you constantly hear people say, “Why do you worry so much?” you can assume your worrying has become a problem.

## What to Do

Check off the statements that apply to you and write down at least one example for each statement you check.

\_\_\_\_\_ I constantly worry about something over and over again.

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\_\_\_\_\_ I notice that my muscles ache from so much tension.

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\_\_\_\_\_ My worrying makes me restless or antsy.

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\_\_\_\_\_ My worrying affects my relationships and social activities.

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\_\_\_\_\_ My worrying affects my work or school performance.

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\_\_\_\_\_ I'm driving my family or friends crazy with my worrying.

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\_\_\_\_\_ People tell me I worry too much.

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\_\_\_\_\_ My worrying causes me to lose sleep.

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\_\_\_\_\_ I have a hard time concentrating because I worry so much.

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\_\_\_\_\_ My worrying causes me to be irritable, and I think I take this out on others.

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\_\_\_\_\_ I have several habits that I know don't make much sense, but they reduce my worrying.

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What is one aspect of your worrying that interferes with your life?

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What would be different in your life if you no longer worried so much?

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### **Reflections on This Exercise**

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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# Are Your Worries Realistic?

**Objective:** To understand and accept that events are influenced by the laws of probability rather than your worries.

## You Should Know

Just because something is possible does not mean it is probable. People with anxiety disorders are often consumed with the idea that something terrible will happen if they fail to act in a certain way. They become so overwhelmed by anxiety that they often do not take the time to realistically examine whether what they fear most is likely to come true. For example, it is *possible* you could be struck by lightning, but statistically it is *not probable*. It is also *possible* you could win the lottery, but statistically it is *not probable*. Anxiety disorders can make it difficult to distinguish between what is possible and what is probable.

What if you apply the theory of probability to your anxiety? Probability is the likelihood an event will occur. Of course, it is always possible your fears may be warranted, but is it probable? Most people with anxiety disorders imagine the worst outcome and act accordingly to prevent it. But think about this: if it is possible for the worst outcome to occur, it is equally possible for the best outcome to take place.

Consider Marcia's situation. Marcia was sure she would give a terrible presentation at work and feel embarrassed. She practiced giving the presentation to a friend, practiced in front of a mirror, and even took a video of herself and watched it again and again. Every time she practiced, she increased the probability she would give a good presentation.

## What to Do

This exercise will help your rational mind better understand the concept of probability. You will begin by thinking of something you worry about because you think it could have a terrible outcome. Then you will look at nine other possible outcomes. With each outcome, you will consider the likelihood (probability) that the outcome will happen and why.

Begin by writing down the worst outcome you can imagine. Then write down other possible outcomes. Try to write down at least nine other possible outcomes, *making sure at least three are positive ones*.

Now go back and write in the probability—low, medium, or high—that each outcome will occur and the reasons for your probability estimate. Here are some examples from Marcia's worksheet:

Possible outcomes	Probability	Reasons/comments
<i>I will make an idiot out of myself and get fired.</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>This is not probable because I spent more than 10 hours practicing the presentation. And besides, my work is really appreciated, so why would I be fired for screwing up a presentation?</i>
<i>I will spill a glass of water on my presentation.</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>I'll take a sip of water before the presentation and won't even have a glass of water near where I am speaking.</i>
<i>I'll get a standing ovation.</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Even if I give a great presentation, the subject is not that exciting!</i>
<i>People will be interested in what I say, and someone will give me a compliment.</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>This is what happened before.</i>
<i>I'll have to go to the bathroom in the middle of the presentation.</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>This has never happened, and I'll use the bathroom before I start.</i>
<i>I'll talk too softly, and someone will ask me to speak up.</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>This has happened before, but it wasn't too bad.</i>

Now try this for yourself.

Possible outcomes	Probability	Reasons/comments



Did you find yourself becoming anxious during this exercise? What thoughts came to mind when doing this exercise? Be specific.

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Write down some worries where you need to examine the probability of the outcomes.

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### **Reflections on This Exercise**

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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# Does Your Worrying Hurt You?

**Objective:** To identify the physical symptoms caused by your worrying.

## You Should Know

The excessive worrying associated with generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) can cause you to have physical problems, just like other form of stress. These common physical symptoms are associated with excessive worrying:

- restlessness or feeling keyed up or on edge
- being easily fatigued
- muscle tension
- dizziness
- headaches
- stomachaches
- shortness of breath
- dry mouth

Excessive worry is experienced by your body as stress, so your body reacts by producing stress biochemicals, including cortisol, adrenaline, norepinephrine, and others. An excess of these biochemicals is associated with high blood pressure and heart disease, lowering of the immune system, and a variety of other serious illnesses.

Besides the direct physical problems that excessive worrying can cause, constant worrying can also lead to habits that cause poor health, including overeating or other dietary problems, sleep disturbances, and overuse of alcohol or drugs.

## What to Do

This worksheet is designed to help you examine how your worrying is affecting your health.

**Note:** *If you have ongoing physical complaints, you should always see your doctor to find out if there is some medical cause to these problems and if these physical problems require treatment.*

Begin by writing down your common physical problems that you think might be associated with your worry and anxiety. Note how often they occur: daily, weekly, or monthly. Next, rate your physical problems on how these symptoms are affected when you feel worried, using a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 = not at all affected by my worrying, and 10 = always gets worse when I worry. Finally, add any comments regarding how your worrying affects your physical problems.

Physical problem	Frequency	Rating	Comments

Addressing the physical problems associated with your worrying requires an overall commitment to better health habits. It is important to understand that there is always a mind-body connection to your mental health problems, and that working on your emotional health *and* physical health will always result in the quickest improvement.

Write down ways you can improve your physical health problems. If you anticipate having difficulty in making improvements in these areas, you may want to consult an appropriate health professional.

Sleep

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Exercise

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Nutrition

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Relaxation Exercises

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### **Reflections on This Exercise**

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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# How Do Your Worries Interfere with Your Life?

**Objective:** To understand how your worries keep you from doing the things that are important in your life.

## You Should Know

Thinking about the future is different from worrying. Unlike other animals, humans have a brain that is wired to think about the future. There is nothing wrong with thinking about what might happen in the future, as long as this thinking is based in reality and does not interfere with your living life to the fullest and enjoying each day. However, if you find that excessive worrying is interfering with your life and causing you to be anxious, it is a problem you need to consider addressing.

Worrying can shape your whole life without your even realizing it. You might be so used to worrying all the time that you fail to realize how it is affecting your day-to-day choices. Sometimes you might even justify your worrying by saying that it shows you are concerned about others or it helps you focus on things that can be prevented. Again, it is okay to worry sometimes. But think about whether your excessive worry has become a habit you just take for granted. Has it become such a part of your life that you worry about even the smallest of things throughout the day? Can you control your worrying, or does it prevent you from experiencing your life in the moment?

## What to Do

Use the worksheet on the next page for one week to try to catch each time you think “What if ...,” and write down how this worry is keeping you from living your life to the fullest.

Example:

Your worry: *What if I ask for a raise and my boss laughs at me?*

How is your life being affected? *I might never get a raise if I don't ask for it, and I could really use the money.*

Week of \_\_\_\_\_

[illegible]

Do you see a pattern to your worrying?

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What is something in your past you wish you had done but did not because you worried too much?

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Write down two things you would like to do that your worries are holding you back from.

1. 

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2. 

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Write down two things that could motivate you to try these things despite your worrying; for example, encouragement from a friend or the desire to do something fun with your family.

1. 

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2. 

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What rational statement can you make to yourself about your worrying?

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## Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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# Understanding How Different Triggers Affect Your Anxiety

**Objective:** To identify the triggers that initiate and fuel your anxiety.

## You Should Know

Many things can trigger worry and anxiety, and many of your worries may have several different triggers. Your worries might begin with an external situation or event, and anticipating this event triggers worrisome thoughts, memories, and physical sensations. These triggers can overlap and even seem like they are happening at the same time. When anxiety feels overwhelming, it might even trigger a panic attack, making it hard to recall how this episode started.

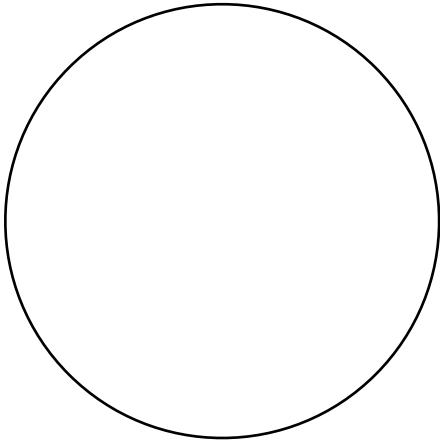
## What to Do

Think about the last time you felt anxious. The circles on the next page represent four different kinds of triggers. Write down where you think your anxiety started: with an external event, a thought, a memory, or a physical sensation. Then draw an arrow to the next circle (trigger), and write in what happened, and so on.

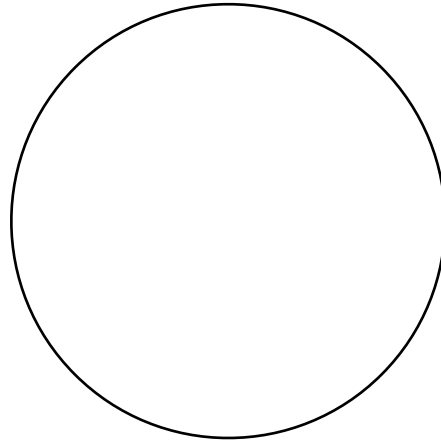
You might discover that only two types of triggers are part of your anxiety reaction, or you might see that all four types of triggers are involved. Make copies of this diagram to fill out every time you feel anxious. See if there are any patterns to your anxiety triggers.

When you feel anxious, write down the triggers that seem to start and fuel your anxiety. Then draw an arrow to the next circle and fill in what happened, and so on.

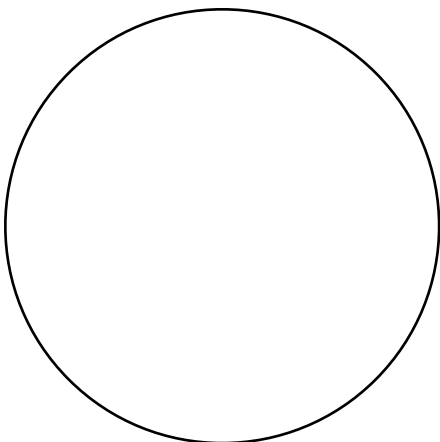
**External Event**



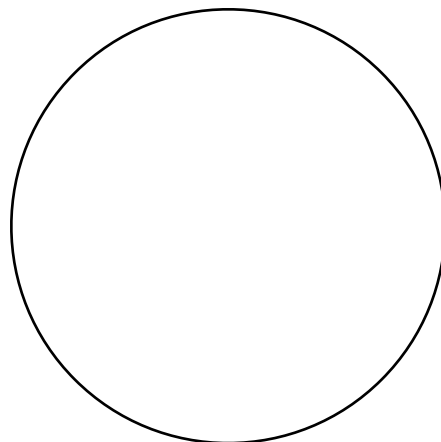
**Physical Sensation**



**Thought**



**Memory**



What was the most common thing that triggered your anxiety: an external event, a thought, a memory, or a physical sensation? Did you identify patterns? Explain.

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Did you try anything to stop one trigger from connecting to another? Describe.

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What can you do to break any patterns you identified?

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### **Reflections on This Exercise**

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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# How Does Your Worrying Affect Others?

**Objective:** To identify how your excessive worrying and anxiety is affecting those around you.

## You Should Know

Most people with anxiety disorders cannot see how their constant worrying affects those around them because their worries are so prevalent and uncontrolled. If you find yourself worrying and anxious all the time, it is almost certain that your state of mind and your behaviors are affecting those around you.

The following are five common ways your anxiety can affect your relationships. Note that your anxiety can affect your relationships in different ways at different times.

- 1. You may be overly dependent.** People with anxiety disorders often seek constant reassurance from those around them. They may want to hear that everything is going to be okay, and they may also require the physical presence of certain people in anxiety-provoking situations.
- 2. You may reject the company of others.** Anxiety disorders can cause people to avoid certain social situations as well as certain people. Some people with anxiety disorders are ashamed of their constant worrying and associated fears and behaviors, so they find it easier to just be alone.
- 3. You may adopt a restricted lifestyle that also restricts those around you.** Anxiety disorders typically cause people to lead restricted lives. This can be hard on the people around you who are constantly disappointed. People with anxiety disorders may avoid traveling, going to crowded places, or doing things that are unfamiliar. In general, people with anxiety disorders seek familiarity and avoid situations where there may be unwanted surprises. This cautious lifestyle will also affect those around you who may limit activities in order to keep you from getting upset.
- 5. You may turn to alcohol or drugs to calm your anxiety.** It is common for people with anxiety disorders to self-medicate using drugs and alcohol. Obviously, this can present an entirely new set of problems that will affect those around you.

## What to Do

This worksheet is designed to help you put yourself in other people's shoes and consider how your anxiety is affecting them. This exercise is not intended to make you feel guilty about your behavior, and it is certainly not intended to make you feel more anxious. Rather, it can help you better understand your anxiety disorder and hopefully motivate you to conquer your worries and fears, if not for your own well-being, then for the sake of others.



Fill in the names of significant people in your life who are affected by your anxiety. These could be relatives, friends, or coworkers. Then write down how your anxious behaviors affect each person. In the third column, you may wish to verify your thoughts with each person. You may find you are correct about how others are affected, but you may also be wrong. It is entirely possible that many people close to you are unaware of your anxiety. Finally, write down anything you can do differently.

<b>Significant person</b>	<b>How does your anxiety affect this person?</b>	<b>Verification (what did they say?)</b>	<b>What can you do differently?</b>

Who in your life is most affected by your problems with worrying and anxiety?

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Is that person aware that you are trying to overcome your problems? \_\_\_\_\_

How do you think life will change for that person if you overcome your anxiety and excessive worrying? Be specific.

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### **Reflections on This Exercise**

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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# Keeping a Worry Log

**Objective:** To determine if there are any patterns to when you worry and what you worry about.

## You Need to Know

According to a report from Johns Hopkins University, people who describe themselves as worriers can spend an average of fifty-five minutes a day worrying. Although this may seem like a lot, people with generalized anxiety disorder spend an average of three hundred minutes a day worrying—over five times as much. Most people who worry say they are thinking about the bad things that can happen, regarding health, money, family, or work. People with GAD typically worry about little things as well as big things; for example:

“Will I forget to put money in the parking meter and get a ticket?”

“Will people show up late for my party and ruin the evening?”

“Will my date hate the restaurant I chose and stop wanting to go out with me?”

Worrying all the time can be a tremendous psychological drain. Are you ready to worry less? Are you ready to have more time for your important relationships, your leisure activities, your work, and even ordinary daily tasks?

The first step to reducing your worrying is to understand it better, and you can do this by identifying the kinds of things you worry about, what triggers them, and how much anxiety they cause you.

## What to Do

Make additional copies of the chart on the next page and record your worries for a minimum of one week. Rate your anxiety from 1 to 10, with 1 = a little anxiety, and 10 = overwhelming anxiety.

Week of \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Time of day</b>	<b>What you worried about</b>	<b>What triggered the worry</b>	<b>Level of anxiety</b>

## Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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## **Section 2. Accepting Rather Than Fighting Your Worries**

# Observing and Accepting Your Worries

**Objective:** To begin managing your worries in healthier ways by observing and accepting them.

## You Should Know

When you are worrying, it can feel impossible to think about anything else. You might seek out ways to avoid your worries, or numb them with unhealthy or harmful behaviors. When you begin to recognize and accept your worries, you can identify healthier ways of managing your anxiety.

## What to Do

Before you can accept your worries, it is helpful to understand what is causing them. The following exercise will help you identify the situations that contribute to your worrying. You can then identify how you typically react or cope.

For the next week, keep track of your worries using the following chart, noting situations that trigger your anxiety; the emotions you experience; and finally, your response or reaction. Make copies of this chart, as necessary. Then review the completed chart and answer the following questions.

Date	Triggering situation	Your emotion(s)	Your coping response

What worries did you experience most often?

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What coping responses did you use most often?

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Did those coping responses improve how you felt? Explain.

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When you are worrying, or your coping responses are causing even more anxiety, it is time to face those worries. The following visualization exercise will help you observe your worries, and any accompanying physical sensations, without analyzing them or becoming preoccupied by them. When you stop trying to fight or avoid your worries, the feelings become less intense, and it is easier to let them go.

Find a quiet, comfortable space to sit where you will not be disturbed or distracted, and set a timer for five minutes. As you become more comfortable sitting with your worries, you can set the timer for longer periods of time. Focus on your breath and your body's sensations throughout this exercise.

- Take several deep breaths and notice how your breath feels in your body.
- Notice your body's physical sensations, including any tightness in your neck or shoulders.
- Observe your worry as it arises. Describe the feeling to yourself, as well as the intensity of that worry.
- Notice whether the worry is increasing or decreasing in intensity as you continue your deep breathing.
- Observe any new worries that join or replace that worry.
- If you notice a need to push away the worry, or to act on a harmful urge, that is normal. Keep observing the worry a little longer.
- Observe how it feels to be aware of your worries, watching them come and go without acting on them.
- Remind yourself that worries are like waves that ebb and flow.



- Notice any judgments you have about yourself, other people, or the worry itself, and let them go.
- Keep watching your worry until it changes or decreases.
- Finish with a few intentional deep breaths.

Describe any physical sensations you noticed as you observed your worries.

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Describe any urges or impulses that arose as you observed your worries.

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Describe what it was like to observe your worries without acting on them.

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Did this exercise change the way you regard your worries? Explain.

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Did this exercise change the way you react to your worries? Explain.

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Can you think of ways to cope with your worries in the future?

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## Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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# Your Worries Are Just Thoughts

**Objective:** To understand that your worries are just thoughts and have no particular power.

## You Should Know

Not all worries lead to anxiety. When people have so-called “normal” worries, they think of them as temporary concerns that can usually be solved pretty easily or that simply resolve themselves. These worries do not trigger physical reactions associated with fear. Normal worries don’t keep coming back, and they don’t affect your daily life.

However, people who worry excessively allow their worries to disrupt their lives. They typically think of their worries as real and something to be feared. They act as if they (or people they care about) are in real danger. But, in fact, there is no danger. People who worry all the time forget that their worries are just thoughts. They give their worries magical powers that, in the real world, make no sense.

## What to Do

This worksheet is intended to help you understand and accept that the worries you have that trigger your anxiety are just thoughts. Begin with the worry that troubles you the most. Then make copies of this worksheet for other worries that interfere with your life and cause you to be anxious.

Write down a frequent worry below:

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**Say out loud: “This worry is just a thought.”**

How much do you believe this?

Rating \_\_\_\_\_ (1 = I don’t really believe this, and 10 = I completely believe this)

**Say out loud: “I am not in danger. No one else is in danger. There is no danger to confront.”**

How much do you believe this?

Rating \_\_\_\_\_ (1 = I don’t really believe this, and 10 = I completely believe this)

**Say out loud: “My anxiety makes my thoughts feel that they can really happen, but I know they can’t. Therefore, I can’t trust my feelings when dealing with my worries.”**

How much do you believe this?

Rating \_\_\_\_\_ (1 = I don’t really believe this, and 10 = I completely believe this)

**Say out loud: “I don’t have to react to this worry. I can just observe it and let it go like I was watching a cloud drift away.”**

Close your eyes and imagine that your worrisome thought is just a cloud floating away. Breathe slowly and deeply as you let your thought drifts away.

### **Reflections on This Exercise**

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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# Welcoming Mindfulness into Your Life

**Objective:** To bring mindfulness into your life by learning how to meditate.

## You Should Know

Have you ever driven your car along a familiar route, going to school or work or to drop your children at day care, only to arrive not remembering how you got there? Have you ever promised yourself just a few pretzels only to suddenly realize that somehow you have eaten the whole bag? This is what it means to be mindless, to travel through life on autopilot, never stopping to recognize what is really important to you.

Mindfulness means being attentive and aware of the thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations that are happening in your immediate environment. It means accepting all this information without judging it as right or wrong, bad or good. Being mindful allows you to function and grow along with the moment instead of flailing about in a past that you cannot change or a future you cannot predict. People who are mindful take their time and allow themselves to appreciate every moment of their present.

You do not need to buy lots of fancy equipment or learn complicated words. You can sit, stand, or lie down, with or without a yoga mat or cushion. You just need to commit to a set amount of time every day. To introduce mindfulness meditation into your life:

- **Understand that your breath is important.** The focus is often on breath because the physical sensation of breathing is universal and natural to everyone. It is the center of life. Always come back to focusing on your breath, no matter what else your thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations tell you to do.
- **Know that the goal is not relaxation.** Mindfulness meditation does not equal relaxation. The goal is not to escape or avoid your pain but to observe it without attaching any meaning to it and move on from it by turning your attention to the present moment.
- **Return and repeat.** It is natural for your mind to wander at first but simply recognize what is happening and return to your practice until you can focus for a longer period of time.
- **Be nice to yourself.** Avoid criticizing your abilities. This is not a contest, and you do not win or lose by being the best or the worst. You win by becoming one with yourself and leaning in to your world as it currently is.

## What to Do

### The 4 7 8 Method

This method of meditation will help you focus on what is taking place around you instead of mindlessly rushing through life. It can help you better cope with the difficult thoughts and feelings that cause you stress and anxiety in your everyday life.

This meditation suggests sitting because that is where many people feel most comfortable as a beginning step. However, you can also lie down. Practice this exercise daily.

**Sit restfully.** Sit in a comfortable but firm chair that supports your arms and legs.

**Observe your legs.** Rest the bottoms of your feet on the floor. Feel the pressure of the floor pressing first against your heels, and then your toes.

**Straighten your upper body.** Sit straight but naturally. Avoid forcing yourself.

**Observe your arms.** Rest your hands and arms where they feel the most comfortable and stretch your hands out, feeling the stretch in each finger.

**Rest your eyes.** You can close your eyes, or if you do not feel comfortable doing that, simply allow them to wander where they want to without force.

**Begin to breathe in and out.**

- Exhale through your mouth.
- Close your mouth and inhale for four seconds through your nose.
- Hold your breath for seven seconds.
- Exhale through your mouth for eight seconds.
- Repeat least four times in a row.

When you are finished, slowly relax your focus and take a moment to notice your thoughts, your emotions, and any sounds in your environment.

### Extending Your Mindfulness Meditation Practice

Sometimes people act purely on their immediate feelings, which are fueled by their fears. This exercise will help you learn to pay attention to all the sensations you experience when you are engaged in an activity so that you can appreciate every detail of your present.

The following activities represent a variety of ways to integrate mindfulness into your everyday life. Experiment with them to find the ones that appeal to you the most.

### *Mindful Eating*

Take a small amount of food and eat it very slowly.

- See the food, paying attention to every detail, line, bump, or ripple.
- Smell the food in order to build your awareness of what it might taste like.
- Taste the food by chewing it slowly so that you experience the entire flavor.
- Listen to the sound of yourself chewing or crunching to draw your attention to yourself and the power of your physical presence.

### *Mindful Observation*

Take the time to become aware of your surroundings, to notice and appreciate the simple beauty of what is in plain sight, in a way you might not usually do.

- Choose a natural object from your present environment (for example, a flower, rock, or puddle) and focus on it for a minute or two.
- Look at the object as if it were completely unknown to you, as if you were a young child seeing it for the first time. Be completely still, and simply notice the details that make up the object. Watch for at least five minutes, or longer if your concentration allows. Try to increase the length of time each time you do the exercise.

### *Mindful Immersion*

Choose a mundane, even tedious task that you complete regularly, and take the time to observe it carefully and with purpose. This practice is designed to promote an increased awareness and appreciation of simple daily tasks and the results they achieve.

- Select a task you do daily (for example, opening or locking doors, shutting off lights, turning off a faucet) or frequently (for example, laundry, washing dishes, washing the car).
- At the very moment you engage in this task—putting your hands in the dishwater or folding one towel—take the time to be mindful of each individual step and to consider where and how the task will eventually end.
  - Notice your surroundings, the feel of the object in your hands, and your emotional state.

Immersion is particularly helpful when you are engaging in a compulsive act that you usually mindlessly complete in a haze of frenzied activity.

### *Mindful Appreciation*

Commit to noticing five things in your day that usually go unappreciated; for example, a coffee pot, a teakettle, a washing machine, the mail delivery, a bird outside your window. Notice its process, the way it looks, the sounds it makes, and its role in making your life easier.

How did it feel to integrate meditation into your life?

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Which practice did you like the best, and why?

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Which practice did you like the least, and why?

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How can you continue to bring more meditation practice into your life?

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### **Reflections on This Exercise**

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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# Calming Your Body with Progressive Muscle Relaxation

**Objective:** To reduce anxiety by learning and practicing progressive muscle relaxation.

## You Should Know

Progressive muscle relaxation is a technique that involves tensing specific muscle groups and then relaxing them. It is termed “progressive” because you relax all the major muscle groups—starting with your head and working your way down to your feet, tensing and then relaxing them one at a time. In only ten to fifteen minutes, you can achieve total body relaxation.

This technique is particularly effective because it enables you to focus on your body tension. Although there are many other relaxation techniques that can help you reduce your anxiety, this technique may be most helpful for people who have body complaints that often accompany high levels of stress and anxiety, such as headaches, stomach problems, or muscle pain.

Relaxation techniques, such as progressive muscle relaxation, can be very effective in reducing anxiety but only when practiced regularly. Engaging in intentional relaxation practice for at least ten minutes a day trains your brain and body to calm down on demand. As soon as you start to feel anxious, you can take a few deep breaths and think about how it feels to be calm, which automatically sends a message to your brain telling it to calm down, and to your body to release muscle tension.

Regularly practicing relaxation techniques not only helps you control your anxiety but may also have other health benefits on the mind and body. For example, some research suggests that relaxation techniques can aid the body in the healing process and help in controlling high blood pressure and asthma, coping with chronic pain, and improving sleep problems. Many medical professionals also believe that daily relaxation exercises aid in preventing disease, reducing elevated levels of cortisol (the stress hormone), and bolstering the immune system.

## What to Do

In this exercise, you will travel up your entire body, from your feet to your head, bringing awareness to each muscle group, first tensing, then relaxing—tensing and relaxing. As you tense your muscles, do not strain or exert yourself. Just notice the tension—gently squeezing, then harder, then hold, then release all the tension, letting go fully.

When you are ready to try this technique, find a place where you won’t be disturbed or distracted for at least fifteen minutes. Recline in a comfortable chair or on a mat, and take a few deep breaths to begin. Use the following audio to help you learn this technique: <https://www.betweenessions.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/BS-Progressive-Relaxation.mp3>. A transcript of the audio is provided below.

After listening for a few times, you can practice this relaxation technique without the audio if you wish, but remember to relax for at least ten minutes.

Find a comfortable, quiet place to sit or lie down, a place where you won't be interrupted and where you can relax completely. Turn off your phone. Lower the lights. You deserve this time—a time to calm your body and your mind. When you are ready, close your eyes.

Now allow yourself to come to a place of stillness, releasing any tension you are aware of. Let the floor or the seat support you fully.

Begin to notice the in-out rhythm of your breath. Notice your belly or chest rising and falling softly, as you gently inhale and exhale. In, out, in, out. No need to force or control the breathing. Just let it happen naturally.

When you are breathing in a steady rhythm, bring your attention to your feet and toes. Notice any tension. Now create more tension by gently scrunching your toes and contracting the soles of your feet. Now squeeze hard, as hard as you can without discomfort. Hold for a few seconds.

Now release. Breathe deeply, in and out. Notice the difference between the tension and relaxation. Enjoy the relaxation. Tense again. Now release. Notice the relaxation. Let go. Breathe.

Now bring your attention to your lower legs, your calf muscles. Notice any tension. Now create more tension by gently contracting the muscles in your lower legs. Now squeeze hard, as hard as you can without discomfort. Hold for a few seconds. Now release. Breathe deeply, in and out. Notice the difference between the tension and relaxation. Enjoy the relaxation. Tense again. Now release. Notice the relaxation. Let go. Breathe.

Now bring your attention to your thighs. Notice any tension. Now create more tension by gently contracting the muscles in your thighs. Now squeeze hard, as hard as you can without discomfort. Hold for a few seconds. Now release. Breathe deeply, in and out. Notice the difference between the tension and relaxation. Enjoy the relaxation. Tense again. Now release. Notice the relaxation. Let go. Breathe.

Now focus on the muscles in your buttocks. Again, notice any tension. Now create more tension by gently contracting the muscles in your buttocks. Now squeeze hard, as hard as you can without discomfort. Hold for a few seconds. Now release. Breathe deeply, in and out. Notice the difference between the tension and relaxation. Enjoy the relaxation. Tense again. Now release. Notice the relaxation. Let go. Breathe.

Next, bring your attention to the muscles in your abdomen. Once again, notice any tension. Now create more tension by gently contracting the muscles in your abdomen. Now squeeze hard, as if you're pushing your abdomen into the back of your chair or onto the surface of the floor. Squeeze as hard as you can without discomfort. Hold for a few seconds. Now release. Breathe deeply, in and out. Notice the difference between the tension and relaxation. Enjoy the relaxation. Tense again. Now release. Notice the relaxation. Let go. Breathe.

Now focus on the muscles in your back. Notice any tension. Now create more tension by gently contracting the muscles in your back—now you might want to arch gently and tighten your back muscles as hard as you can without discomfort. Hold for a few seconds. Now release. Breathe deeply, in and out. Notice the difference between the tension and relaxation. Enjoy the relaxation. Tense again. Now release. Notice the relaxation. Let go. Breathe.

Now focus on the muscles in your shoulders and neck. Notice any tension. Now create more tension by gently contracting the muscles in your shoulders and neck, perhaps lifting them up toward your ears. Now squeeze hard, as hard as you can without discomfort. Hold for a few seconds. Now release. Breathe deeply, in and out. Notice the difference between the tension and relaxation. Enjoy the relaxation. Tense again. Now release. Notice the relaxation. Let go. Breathe.

Relax. Take a few more deep breaths and feel the weight of your body against the floor or chair. See if you can let go even a little more. Good.

Now focus on the muscles in your hands and wrists. Notice any tension. Now create more tension by gently contracting the muscles in your hands and wrists, curling them into loose fists. Now squeeze hard, as hard as you can without discomfort. Hold for a few seconds. Now release. Breathe deeply, in and out. Notice the difference between the tension and relaxation. Enjoy the relaxation.

Now open your hands and extend your wrists in the opposite direction, without hyperextending them. Now tense them hard as you can without discomfort. Hold for a few seconds. Now release. Breathe deeply, in and out. Notice the difference between the tension and relaxation. Enjoy the relaxation. Tense again. Now release. Notice the relaxation. Let go. Breathe.

Now focus on the muscles in your arms. Notice any tension. Now create more tension by gently contracting the muscles in your arms. Now squeeze hard, as hard as you can without discomfort. Hold for a few seconds. Now release. Breathe deeply, in and out. Notice the difference between the tension and relaxation. Enjoy the relaxation. Tense again. Now release. Notice the relaxation. Let go. Breathe.

Now focus on the muscles in your face, starting with your eyes. Notice any tension. Now create more tension by gently contracting the muscles around your eyes. Now squeeze hard, as hard as you can without discomfort. Hold for a few seconds. Now release. Breathe deeply, in and out. Notice the difference between the tension and relaxation. Enjoy the relaxation. Tense again. Now release. Notice the relaxation. Let go. Breathe.

Now bring your attention to the muscles in your lips and mouth. Notice any tension. Now create more tension by gently contracting the muscles of your lips and mouth. Now squeeze hard, as hard as you can without discomfort. Hold for a few seconds. Now release. Breathe deeply, in and out. Notice the difference between the tension and relaxation. Enjoy the relaxation. Tense again. Now release. Notice the relaxation. Let go. Breathe.

Now bring your attention to the muscles in your jaw. Notice any tension. Now create more tension by gently contracting the muscles of your jaw, from the mouth and position of the teeth to the hinge near the ears. Squeeze hard, as hard as you can without discomfort. Hold for a few

seconds. Now release. Now open your mouth and stretch out your jaw completely, creating tension. Hold for a few seconds and release. Breathe deeply, in and out. Notice the difference between the tension and relaxation. Enjoy the relaxation. Tense again. Now release. Notice the relaxation. Let go. Breathe.

When you are ready, slowly come back to the present moment. Wake up your feet and hands, shaking them out if you wish. Wiggle your body and move around slowly at whatever pace is comfortable for you. Before you resume regular activity, take a few moments just to rest and breathe. You may use this recording at any time to help bring awareness to your muscles and to release tension in a safe, mindful way.

Make several copies of this chart, and keep a record of the time that you spend practicing this relaxation technique until it is truly a habit. You want it to become routine—something you do without thinking, like brushing your teeth. It is also useful to note your general mood, both before and after, your daily relaxation exercise.

Day	Time of day	Mood before	Mood after relaxation
Sunday			
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			

## Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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# Remembering That the Movie in Your Head Isn't Real

**Objective:** To accept that your worries are not based in reality.

## You Should Know

Do you watch scary movies? Do you cover your eyes when you see gore? Do you jump or even scream when some horrible monster suddenly appears with drooling sharp teeth or a knife in his hand? Part of the “fun” of watching these movies is the powerful emotional and visceral reactions you have because your mind is tricking you into thinking that what you are watching is real, even though you know you are just watching a movie.

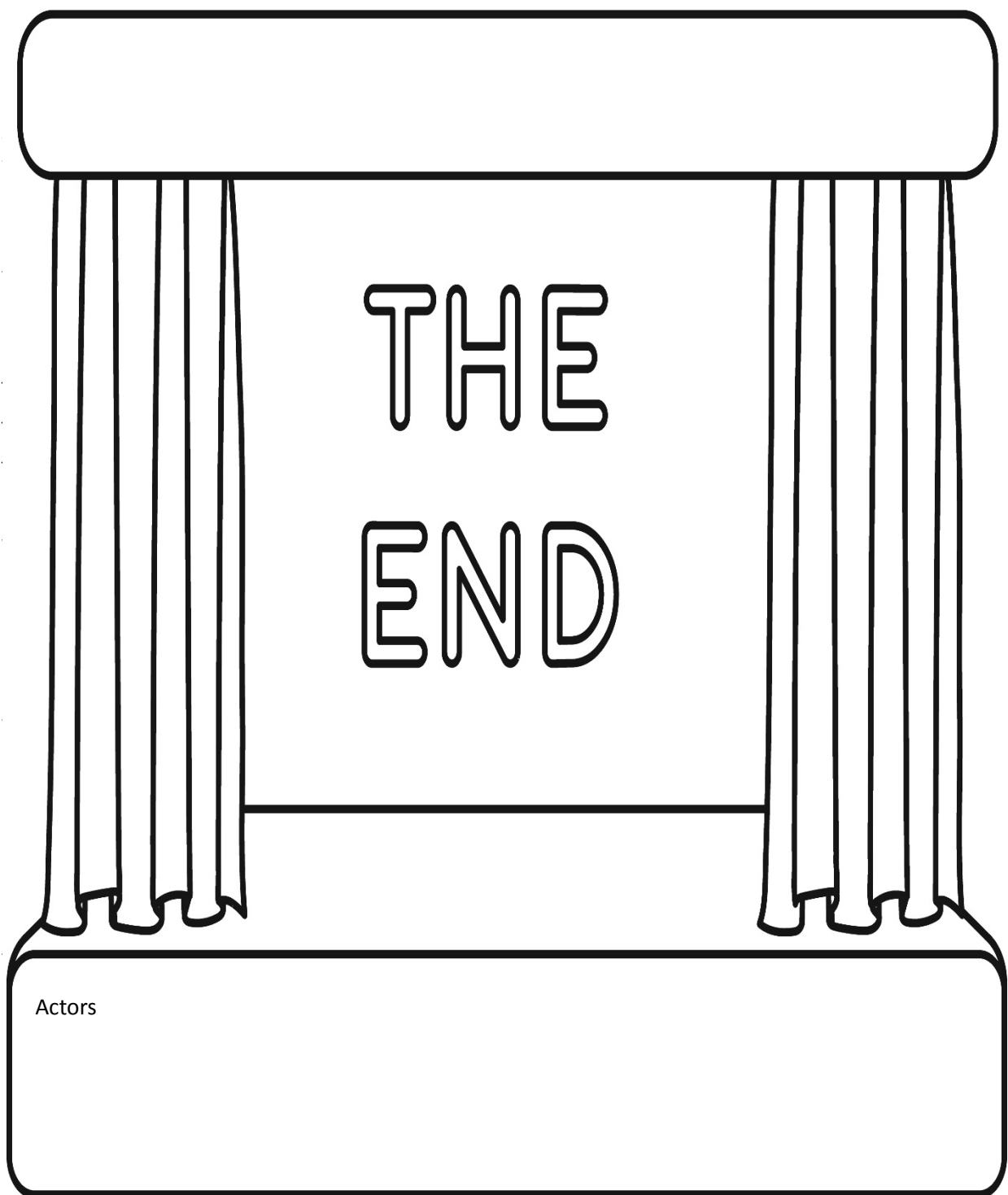
This is a little like what happens when you let your worries get control over your mind. It is like you are watching a “worry movie” in your head, expecting something bad to happen, and you feel like it is real. The movie in your head may even cause a physical reaction in your body—your heart might speed up, you might feel sweaty, or your stomach might feel like it is tied in a knot.

The difference, of course, is that when you leave the movie theater or turn off the TV, you are back to reality and you are fully aware that your reaction was entirely a fantasy. As you leave, you might think about the special effects in the movie, or the actors, or the way other people reacted. You might be thinking about going home or perhaps going out for a snack. You are back to reality.

But when you play a movie about your worries in your head, you never really leave the theater or turn off the TV. You might say to yourself “This probably won’t happen” or “I’m stupid for thinking about this,” but your mind and your body never quite accept the fact that your worries aren’t based in reality and that the things you are imagining aren’t really dangerous.

## What to Do

Begin on the next page by drawing a picture of your most disturbing worry as if it were a movie playing on a screen. Put as many details as you can in the picture, and give the movie a title. Then complete the activities that follow; they will help you learn to observe your worries without responding to them as if they were real.



Date	Rating	Comments

### Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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# Accepting Your Upsetting Inner Experiences

**Objective:** To become aware of how you are avoiding the things that cause you to be anxious and upset.

## You Should Know

Many people deal with their problems by trying to avoid painful thoughts, feelings, sensations, and memories. They think that if they just distract themselves from these inner experiences they will be fine. However, while avoiding unpleasant inner experiences may help temporarily, these strategies usually work for only a short period of time.

There is also a significant personal cost to avoidance. Some people spend hours each day avoiding the things that could upset them instead of using this time to enjoy life. This exercise is designed to help you examine how you are avoiding the things that cause you to be anxious and upset, and how this avoidance keeps you from having a happier and more fulfilling life.

## What to Do

Begin by listing the inner experiences you are trying to avoid.

List three thoughts that upset you.

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List three feelings that upset you.

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List three sensations that upset you.

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List three memories that upset you.

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Write down any additional upsetting thoughts, feelings, sensations, or memories.

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List the things you do to distract yourself from these unpleasant inner experiences.

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List the activities or events you avoid to keep from having painful inner experiences.

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List the places you avoid to keep from having painful inner experiences.

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List the people you avoid to keep from having painful inner experiences.

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List substances—including alcohol, cigarettes, drugs, and food—you use to try to avoid unpleasant inner experiences.

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Is there anything else you do to avoid unpleasant or painful inner experiences?

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Now go back to what you have written and circle the three things you do most often to avoid unpleasant inner experiences. In the space below, write down how your life might be different if you could accept these unpleasant inner experiences rather than working so hard to avoid them.

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### **Reflections on This Exercise**

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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# Using Visual Metaphors to Accept Your Distressing Thoughts

**Objective:** To detach your anxiety from your distressing thoughts.

## You Should Know

Many people spend a lot of time and energy trying to get rid of their distressing thoughts. Not so long ago, psychologists encouraged people to change their thoughts by making them more rational and reality oriented or to just suppress them entirely with techniques like snapping a rubber band on their wrists and saying “Stop!” in a loud voice. Although these techniques worked for some people, they tended to have only a temporary effect, and many found that their intrusive thoughts and worries would come back, often worse than before.

The newest approach to helping people who are overwhelmed by their distressing thoughts is to encourage people to stop trying to get rid of them at all! That may seem strange, because it is the opposite of what you feel like doing, and that is why therapists call it the “anxiety paradox.” Therapists have discovered that the more you try to get rid of your thoughts, the harder it is to get rid of them. When you learn to accept them and detach from your thoughts, they will no longer have power over you.

For example, suppose someone told you to stop thinking about a pink elephant. Immediately you would probably get a visual image of a pink elephant, even though you were told not to do this. The more you try not to think of a pink elephant, the more it comes to mind. This is the paradox in action: the more you try to rid of specific thoughts, images, and memories, the more they will take control of your mind and even your actions.

So stop struggling with your worries! Just accept them. Don’t try to distract yourself. Don’t try to change your thoughts. Certainly, don’t try to dull your thoughts with drugs or alcohol. And don’t pretend that your anxieties and worries don’t exist.

Instead, as difficult as this sounds, just accept your worries, detach from them, and observe them without reacting to them in an emotional way. Try to objectify your worries, remembering that your thoughts are just thoughts; they have no special powers.

## What to Do

This worksheet includes four metaphors that can help you understand and practice the principle of detaching from your worries by objectifying your thoughts and just observing them. After you read the different metaphors, practice using them several times a day. Even if you are not worrying at the time, you should still practice using these visual metaphors.

## Don’t Struggle in Quicksand

When you struggle to get out of quicksand, you sink in deeper. When you relax and float, you will eventually find that you are able to swim or walk out of the quicksand. Contrary to popular

movies, quicksand does not suck you down. Quicksand is usually shallow, and when you stop struggling it is easy to get out.

Try using this metaphor to stop resisting your worries. Imagine that your worries are a pool of quicksand. Struggling will make it harder for you to get out. Accepting your worries as just thoughts and not real dangers will rob them of their power. When you stop struggling, your worries lose their power over you. Just walk away.

After you do this exercise, rate your anxiety from 1 to 10, where 1 = very anxious, 10 = very calm and disengaged from your worries: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Ignore Annoying Passengers in Your Car**

You have probably had the experience of driving a car with annoying passengers. Maybe it is the kids making too much noise in the back seat. Maybe it is a complaining friend or coworker sitting next to you. What do you do? You just consciously tune out the noise from the passengers, letting the noise fade into the background, and you keep on driving. You don't stop the car, and you don't go in the wrong direction. You are aware of the annoyance, but you tune it out.

Now sit back and visualize yourself driving your car with your worries as the passengers. They are clamoring to get your attention, but you just tune them out. They are just background noise, as you keep on going about your daily routine.

After you do this exercise, rate your anxiety from 1 to 10, where 1 = very anxious, 10 = very calm and disengaged from your worries: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Watch the Worry Train**

Imagine that your worries are on a train. Each car contains a different worry. Visualize each car of the train, and then think for a moment about the worry that is in each car. Now sit back and visualize this train pull out of the station. Watch as it rounds the bend and then continues on a journey out of sight.

Relax and visualize this metaphor.

After you do this exercise, rate your anxiety from 1 to 10, where 1 = very anxious, 10 = very calm and disengaged from your worries: \_\_\_\_\_

### **See the Clouds Floating By**

Think of something you are worried about. Say this worry out loud and visualize the worst thing that could happen. Now take a photo in your mind of that worry. Imagine that photo is resting on a cloud. Do not do anything to make the cloud go away, but just let it go where it wants. Watch it from the ground and see what happens to it.

After you do this exercise, rate your anxiety from 1 to 10, where 1 = very anxious, 10 = very calm and disengaged from your worries: \_\_\_\_\_

After you have practiced using visual metaphors every day for one week, answer the questions below.

Have you noticed that you feel less anxious after a visualization exercise? Describe your feelings.

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How would you describe any changes in your moods during this week?

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Were there any changes in your behavior during the week?

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### **Reflections on This Exercise**

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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# Becoming Mindful of Your World Rather Than Your Anxious Thoughts

**Objective:** To draw your attention away from your anxious thoughts by using your five senses to focus on your surroundings.

## You Should Know

Do you often find yourself agonizing over what might happen in the future, worrying about every possible thing that might go wrong, while simultaneously condemning yourself for what went wrong in the past? Being consumed by all this turmoil does not allow you to appreciate or enjoy the moment: a birthday celebration or even a simple night out with your friends.

Anxiety disorders can demand that you ignore what is taking place around you by bombarding you with disturbing thoughts, urges, and images. These unwanted experiences distract you from living your life in the moment and instead encourage you to obsess about a past you cannot change and an uncertain future you cannot predict or control.

What if you tried to live your life according to the uplifting and freeing principles of mindfulness instead of the rigid rules of your anxiety disorder? Mindfulness encourages you to notice and accept your thoughts, while at the same time not be obsessed with them. By teaching you to focus on the present moment in a meaningful, nonjudgmental way, it takes away the power of your anxious thoughts.

## What to Do

This exercise will encourage you to draw your attention away from your anxious thoughts and toward yourself, using your five senses as a guide.

- Commit to using your sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell to channel your thoughts in a purposeful direction.
- Commit to doing this at least once a day for at least three weeks until you become accustomed to focusing your mind on the present.
- Begin by focusing on one sense for at least one to two minutes, taking the time to truly separate that sense from the next as you move from one to the other.

It does not matter what order you practice the five senses in. You can switch them around as you see fit. You can sit in a comfortable position the first few times, and as you become accustomed to the exercise, you can engage in it at any time or place.

At first this exercise may seem silly to you and even somewhat difficult, but as you continue to practice, you will find it easier to incorporate mindfulness into your daily experience until it becomes a natural part of who you are.

## Five Senses Mindfulness Exercise

### Sight

- Observe what is around you, noticing shape, color, and texture.
- Look for things you would not usually take the time to notice, such as shadows, a crack in the sidewalk, the texture of your bedspread, or any other small details that usually escape you.

### Sound

- Take the time to listen to what is in the background instead of what is obvious.
- Don't just notice the sound of laughter, but try to discern different types of laughs.
- Rather than simply listening for the sounds of traffic, try to distinguish horns honking from tires squealing.
- Instead of bristling at loud music, take the time to figure out what genre you are hearing.
- Listen to previously unnoticed sounds, like the hum of the refrigerator, or the clicking of the oven as it cycles on and off.

### Touch

- Become aware of the differing feel of everyday items that surround you.
- Alternate touching items that are cold and warm, and notice how they make your hands feel.
- Touch items with various textures to notice the difference among them.
- Knit, play with play dough, or pet an animal, and notice the sensations in your fingers and hands as you feel your motions unfolding.

### Taste

- Take a drink, and notice the feel of the liquid rolling over your tongue.
- Chew on a piece of gum or candy, and take the time to notice the taste from when you first put it in your mouth until you are finished with it.

### Smell

- Focus your attention on your surroundings to notice what different smells are in the air.
- Keep strong-smelling gum or candy with you to quietly sniff in order to center yourself when you feel your anxiety rising. Other items such as lavender, perfume, or lotion can also provide a satisfying aroma that invokes mindfulness.

## Five Senses Meditation

For a five-day period, set aside at least twenty minutes to practice this meditation, focusing on a different sense each day. For each sense, choose one suggestion from the mindfulness exercise to focus on. Use the following chart to keep a record of your experience.



<b>Sense</b>	<b>Focus of your meditation</b>	<b>What you noticed</b>	<b>What feelings came up?</b>
<b>Day 1</b>			
<b>Day 2</b>			
<b>Day 3</b>			
<b>Day 4</b>			
<b>Day 5</b>			

After practicing mindfulness, what did you notice that you had not previously noticed?

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Over time, how did practicing mindfulness impact your ability to focus on the present?

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What difficulties did you encounter in practicing your mindfulness exercises? What adjustments did you make, if any, to make it easier for you?

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How could you integrate the practice of mindfulness into coping with your anxiety disorder?

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### **Reflections on This Exercise**

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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# Taking a Noticing Walk

**Objective:** To bring awareness to the present moment by taking a walk outside and noticing your environment using all your senses.

## You Should Know

One key component of mindfulness is being aware not just of what's going on inside you (thoughts, feelings) but also what's going on outside your body and mind.

These days, more and more people are walking around outdoors while looking down at their phones, whether it's at the beach, the lake, the mountains, or just around the neighborhood. We're connected all the time. Studies have even shown that looking at our phones constantly is changing our brains to be more active, seeking the next exciting stimulus, scrolling from thing to thing to thing, and never really stopping to notice.

Mindful walking in a beautiful environment is ideal for waking up the senses and noticing what's around us. We don't always have access to a beautiful environment, though, but taking a mindful walk in a noisy city environment can be a good exercise as well. The idea is to give yourself the experience of shifting your perspective outward, while remaining connected to your body, your thoughts, and your feelings.

## What to Do

Go for a walk outside by yourself for a minimum of fifteen to twenty minutes. (In cold weather, you might choose a museum or library.) Turn off your phone. Notice any sounds, really tuning in to everything you can hear—sounds up close, sounds at a medium distance, sounds far away. Take it all in. Notice what you feel in your body when you do this, without judgment and with acceptance.

As an alternative to a listening walk, you might choose to notice the smells in your environment. How many different smells can you notice? What smells pleasant (for example, a flower)? What smells unpleasant (for example, car exhaust, a skunk)? Notice what you feel in your body when you do this.

Noticing what you see is another type of mindful walk. Notice colors, shapes, sizes, and contrasts. Look up to the sky. Look down at the ground. Take it all in consciously. Notice what you feel in your body when you do this.

If you experience some anxiety at being outdoors and opening up your senses, reassure yourself that nothing bad is happening. You could do a simple exercise that will help focus your mind and calm your body, such as identifying everything in your environment that is red, or green, or another color. Tell yourself everything will be okay. Or repeat self-compassionate statements as you walk. Congratulate yourself for trying.

When you get home, record the sounds, smells, and sights in as much detail as you can remember, and what it was like for you. Be creative. Do what feels good for you.

When and where you practiced	For how long?	What did you notice?	How did it feel?

Do you notice any difference in your mood after taking a mindful walk?

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Is this something you could do on a regular basis? If not, why?

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Do you think mindfulness exercises can help you deal with the current problems in your life?

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### **Reflections on This Exercise**

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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# Tolerating and Overcoming the Physical Discomfort of Anxiety

**Objective:** To better tolerate and overcome uncomfortable feelings associated with anxiety by identifying and replicating them.

## You Should Know

You might experience physical discomfort when you are fearful and anxious. If you think about a class or work presentation you have to deliver, your heart may beat faster, your chest may tighten, you may sweat and even feel like you are going to faint.

These physical reactions can be scary, and you may feel like you are having a heart attack or that you are disconnected from reality. When this happens, you can become just as afraid of the physical reactions as you are of the actual situation that causes your anxiety.

One way to break this cycle of anxiety and fear is by practicing the physical sensations that make you nervous and panicky. If this doesn't sound like fun, you're right—it isn't. However, studies indicate this is an important step in conquering anxiety.

## What to Do

There are three parts to this exercise. The first part is to identify the physical sensations that accompany your anxiety. You will do this in the first column of the chart that follows. Circle the physical symptoms you have when you are anxious.

The next part of this exercise is to actually create those uncomfortable feelings. The second column will give you some ideas of how to do this. At first, practice these several times with a coach or friend in the room. This person will encourage you to perform the exercises so that you mimic the physical sensations associated with your anxiety, and they will also protect you from any possible physical injury, like falling if you get dizzy.

The third and final part of this exercise is to record your practice re-creating the physical discomfort that you associate with your fear and anxiety. Although this isn't pleasant, the more you practice, the sooner you will be able to master your anxiety and lead a more fulfilling life. The more you practice the physical feelings that you associate with anxiety and panic, the less likely you are to be negatively influenced by these feelings.

Uncomfortable feelings	How to create those feelings
Lightheadedness Feeling faint	Hyperventilate for one minute. Breathe loudly and rapidly, (similar to a panting dog), at a rate of approximately forty-five breaths per minute.  Place your head between your legs for one minute, then quickly sit up.
Feeling weird or unreal	Think of how big the universe is and how small you are.  Think about all your ancestors who have lived in the 200,000 years that humans have been on the earth.  Sit in a completely dark and completely quiet room for five minutes.
Blurred vision	Stare at a light bulb for one minute and then attempt to read.
Difficulty breathing	Hold your nose and breathe through a thin straw for one minute.
Increased heart rate Tightness in your chest	Drink an espresso or other caffeinated drink.  Do five minutes of moderately intensive cardiovascular exercise, like running up and down the stairs.
Upset stomach	Do twenty jumping jacks after a meal.
Feeling shaky	Tense all your muscles, and hold the tension for one minute.
Sweating	Wear a jacket or wrap yourself in a blanket in a hot room.
Feeling dizzy	Spin around really fast for one minute.

The saying “practice makes perfect” has never been truer than for people overcoming feelings of anxiety. Although it’s not pleasant, practicing the uncomfortable feelings that accompany anxiety will help you control your emotions rather than having them control you. Use this chart to record the dates and times of your practice as well as your reactions. Rate your anxiety about each session from 0 to 10, where 0 = no anxiety, to 10 = extreme anxiety.

Date/time	Physical sensations	Emotional reaction	Rating



## Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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# Understanding What You Can Control in Your Life

**Objective:** To increase the sense of control you have in your life by identifying things you can control.

## You Should Know

You might feel that you have little or no control over what happens to you, no matter how hard you work or how careful you are. Sometimes things go wrong in spite of your best efforts. However, believing that all your experiences, both good and bad, are caused by luck or fate can lead to feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, anxiety, or depression.

## What to Do

Rate the following statements, where 0 = this does not apply to me at all, to 10 = this always applies to me.

- \_\_\_\_\_ I feel I have very little control over my life and what happens to me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I rarely get what I deserve.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I avoid setting goals or making plans because too many bad things can happen along the way.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I am often pressured into doing things or making decisions I later regret.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Bad luck has caused many of the disappointments in my life.
- \_\_\_\_\_ In spite of my hard work and effort, my accomplishments go unnoticed.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Getting a good job depends mainly on being in the right place at the right time.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I often feel hopeless and powerless about situations in my life.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I make my decisions by flipping a coin.

Review the statements you checked off and add up your total score: \_\_\_\_\_

If your score is above 50, you probably feel you have little control in your life, and you might experience depression, anxiety, or feelings of hopelessness or helplessness.

Can you think of situations where those beliefs about control impacted your decision to change or improve your life? Describe.

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Next you will focus on things you *can* control.

Describe a time when you accomplished a task you set out to complete (for example, completing a home improvement or creative project). What skills and strengths did you use to accomplish it? How did you feel about yourself afterward?

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Describe an accomplishment you are proud of that required your planning, motivation, and/or problem-solving skills (for example, raising a child, quitting smoking, or planting a garden).

What skills and strengths did you use to accomplish this task? What goals and intentions did you set for yourself? How much effort did it require? How did you feel about yourself afterward?

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Describe a time when your efforts made you feel valuable, effective, and successful (for example, volunteering at a food pantry or running a 5K race). How did you feel during the activity? How did you feel afterward?

Next, identify three small, achievable goals that are important or interesting to you. Include your desired date of completion. Then answer the questions that follow each goal.

*For this example, Jim wants to improve his photography skills while meeting new people.*

**Goal #1** \_\_\_\_\_

*Jim: To take an adult education class in photography by next April.*

Steps I need to take to make this happen:

*Jim: (1) Search online for local photography classes; (2) Visit my local camera shop for suggestions; (3) Determine how much tuition I want to pay; (4) Register for the class.*

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The things I can control within those steps are:

*Jim: All these things are under my control, except for the pricing of the classes and the availability of the classes, but I will select which class I register for based on those factors.*

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The strengths and skills I can use to address those steps are:

*Jim: I will use my research skills to find a class that meets my needs. I will also use my organization skills by creating a list to track my class options and narrow down my choices.*

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People and resources that can support me in achieving this goal are:

*Jim: In addition to asking my camera shop for recommendations, I can reach out to my social media connections for suggestions.*

**Goal #2** \_\_\_\_\_

Steps I need to take to make this happen:

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The things I can control within those steps are:

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The strengths and skills I can use to address those steps are:

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People and resources that can support me in achieving this goal are:

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**Goal #3** \_\_\_\_\_

Steps I need to take to make this happen:

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The things I can control within those steps are:

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The strengths and skills I can use to address those steps are:

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People and resources that can support me in achieving this goal are:

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Of course, things do not always go as planned. When they don't, it is important to use self-compassion instead of beating yourself up or blaming other people or circumstances.

Using the photography class example, it turned out that the registration was full, so Jim was unable to attend. Instead of saying "I'm so stupid for waiting too long to register," he can say, "I'm disappointed that I'm not able to attend the class by the spring, but I will register early for the summer class and add a reminder in my calendar."

Who can you count on for support and help if you are unable to meet a goal, in spite of your best efforts?

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Did this exercise increase the sense of control you have in your life? Explain.

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Did this exercise change the way you see the role of luck and chance in your past successes or lack of success? Explain.

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## Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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# Managing Catastrophic Thinking

**Objective:** To manage your catastrophic thinking by assessing the risk of your feared situation, and identifying resources in the unlikely instance the situation happens.

## You Should Know

Catastrophic thinking refers to ruminating about irrational, worst-case outcomes. It can increase anxiety, prevent you from taking action, or cause you to avoid situations entirely. When you fear the worst possible outcome, your choices, behaviors, emotions, and relationships can be negatively affected. You might constantly worry that something terrible will happen, and you might frequently experience “what if” thinking: “What if I catch a disease from visiting a sick friend in the hospital?” or “What if my teenage son becomes a drug addict?”

Fear can be a helpful reaction to situations where there are proven threats or dangers. It is important to know the difference between fear that is justified and based on evidence, and fear that is based on catastrophic thinking or unjustified worries.

## What to Do

When fears are justified, there is evidence of a threat or danger to

- your life, or the life of someone you care about;
- your health, or the health of someone you care about;
- your safety and well-being, or the safety and well-being of someone you care about.

Can you think of some examples of justified fears from your own life? Describe them.

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Examples of catastrophic thinking and unproven fears:

- My house is going to get struck by lightning because I just replaced the roof.
- My spouse isn’t answering his cell phone—he must have been in a car accident.
- I can’t go on a cruise because the ship will sink.

Can you think of other examples from your own life? Describe them.

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Catastrophic thinking often causes people to avoid situations out of fear. Unfortunately, avoidance tends to reinforce this type of thinking; the more you avoid the fearful situations, the more power you give them. The best way to conquer your feelings of anxiety is to examine the situation and determine the likelihood of that scenario happening.

Describe a recent situation you avoided because you were afraid something terrible would happen.

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What were you afraid would happen?

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Has that feared situation ever actually happened to you before? Describe.

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Describe a time when your fears stopped you from taking action within your relationships, work, health, and so forth.

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Describe a time when your fears negatively impacted your choices, emotions, or relationships.

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Catastrophic thinking may relate to old beliefs and core values that produce overwhelming emotional reactions. You can examine your thoughts to determine how meaningful, accurate, and useful they are in the present situation. Challenging and changing those beliefs and values is often the key to managing persistent unhealthy or self-sabotaging thoughts.

In order to overcome catastrophic thinking, it is important to dispute the thoughts. You can:

1. Identify it for what it is—an irrational, worst-case scenario.
2. Identify best-case possibilities—the best possible outcomes you wish to see.
3. Look at these best-case possibilities and identify whether they are the most likely outcomes.
4. Weigh the evidence and facts available to you, so that you can develop a realistic contingency plan for coping with the situation.

Identify your feared situations and rank your level of fear from 0 to 10, where 0 = no distress or discomfort, to 10 = extreme upset or anxiety. Next, list the evidence that the situation will happen and the evidence that it will not happen. Then describe a best-case possibility. Finally, estimate the odds of that situation actually happening.

Feared situation	Level of fear (0–10)	Evidence that it will happen	Evidence that it won't happen	Best-case possibility	Estimated odds of fear happening (%)

Did you notice any changes in your level of fear as a result of this exercise? Explain.

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Next, you will develop a contingency plan that includes resources so that you feel safe and prepared in the *unlikely event* that the feared situation actually does happen. After you compile the following lists, make copies and keep them with you.

Write down the names and phone numbers of people who can help and support you—your personal response team.

The people on my response team are:

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Now, think of local agencies and groups you can reach out to for help and support, such as the American Red Cross, your local police or fire department, or your local FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency).

Write down the organizations, websites, and phone numbers that will be most helpful.

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Finally, write down a list of your own skills and strengths you can use to get through this situation (for example, you are good with tools, you know CPR, or you think fast under pressure).

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Did this exercise change the way you see your feared situations? If so, how?

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What other steps can you take to cope with feared situations in the future?

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### **Reflections on This Exercise**

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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# What Are the Odds?

**Objective:** To realize that the odds of something bad happening are extremely remote by thinking rationally about situations you are avoiding.

## You Should Know

Many people avoid certain situations because of their fears and worries. Although they are otherwise rational people, they view certain situations with catastrophic thinking, meaning that they treat a common situation as if a catastrophe were going to occur, even though the odds of this happening are extremely low.

Catastrophic thinking is a type of irrational thinking that is very common in people with anxiety disorders and particularly people who have panic attacks. This type of thinking makes people avoid situations out of fear, and avoiding the situations tends to reinforce this type of thinking.

It is important to remember that the more you avoid the situations that make you fearful, the more power you give them. The best way to conquer your feelings of anxiety and panic is to face the situations you are currently avoiding.

## What to Do

This worksheet is designed to help you think rationally about the situations you are avoiding and see that the odds of something bad happening are extremely remote.

Write down the situation you try hardest to avoid because you are afraid something terrible will happen.

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What are you afraid will happen?

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Has this situation ever happened to you before? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the likelihood (odds) this will happen? \_\_\_\_\_

What are the reasons this probably won't happen?

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What is the very worst thing that could *likely* happen?

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List some things you think about that cause you to worry, even though you know these things are untrue.

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What magical rituals do you do when you cannot avoid a feared situation (for example, repeating certain words, wearing your “lucky” shoes)?

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What will happen if you stop doing these?

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What positive things might help you face your fears (or example, getting support from someone you trust to help you confront the situation you have been avoiding)?

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## Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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# Tolerating Uncertainty

**Objective:** To expand the scope of your life by increasing your tolerance of uncertainty.

## You Should Know

Uncertainty is an unavoidable part of life. No one can predict the future, so we must all learn to accept that there is some degree of uncertainty in everyday life—and that in certain situations there is a great deal of uncertainty.

Most people simply accept uncertainty as a natural part of life, but people with anxiety disorders find it hard to accept uncertainty, particularly in certain situations. For people who worry too much, the uncertainty of certain situations can act as a magnifier for their worries, feelings of anxiety, and even physical problems associated with stress.

Most people with anxiety disorders try to avoid situations that will increase their awareness of the uncertainty in life. They may avoid traveling, changing jobs, and even meeting new people. Some people avoid going to the doctor for a checkup because just making an appointment triggers their worry that something might be wrong with their health.

Avoiding situations that trigger your uncertainty will only diminish your life and narrow your choices. However, with practice, you can learn to accept aspects of life that are ambiguous or uncertain and cause you to worry unnecessarily.

## What to Do

This worksheet is designed to teach you a simple process that can help you deal with uncertainty. The acronym APPLES will help you remember the mindfulness skills you need when you are uncomfortable with uncertainty.

**Acknowledge.** Notice and simply observe uncertainty as it enters into your awareness.

**Pause.** Choose to respond, rather than react, to your experience. In fact, let go of the impulse to react altogether. Put your mind on “pause,” and breathe calmly.

**Pull back.** Remind yourself that in this moment, it is fear, anxiety, or worry doing the talking. Thoughts and emotions are not facts. Notice that the need for certainty is not effective and is an impossible quest.

**Let go.** Give yourself permission to release yourself from the illusory need for certainty. No matter how intensely or loudly your thoughts and emotions may insist that you need certainty, remember that the intensity of these thoughts and emotions are temporary and will pass.

**Explore.** Take a moment to explore your internal experience. Pay attention to your breathing and to all your senses. Observe the sensations around you: the sights, the sounds, the smells, the taste, and what you are touching. The emotional intensity associated with your distress will likely lessen as you do this. Now, choose to actively redirect your attention toward something different from what you are worrying about. Be present in your life.

**Stand alone.** When you are facing an uncertain situation that triggers your anxiety, do not ask anyone to go with you, or try to keep in touch with people through calls or texting.

The only way to learn to tolerate more uncertainty in your life is to put yourself into situations that would normally bother you and then see that being uncertain is not so bad. You can tolerate the thoughts and feelings that go with uncertainty, and you can learn to live in the moment. You can use the APPLES technique to develop an attitude of acceptance, letting go, and paying attention to your thoughts and feelings rather than trying to avoid them. On the chart below, describe situations that commonly trigger your uncertainty. Rate how uncomfortable you feel, where 1= just a little uncomfortable, to 10 = extremely uncomfortable. Then choose at least one situation to practice the APPLES technique. See how many minutes you can spend each week tolerating uncertain situations. Each week see if you can spend *more* time tolerating uncertain situations.

Situation	Rate your discomfort	Date you practiced	Minutes practiced

## Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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# Responding, Not Reacting, to Feelings

**Objective:** To manage difficult situations more skillfully by learning about the difference between reacting and responding.

## You Should Know

Good mental health means becoming familiar with and accepting of all your feelings and not trying to escape or avoid them. Simply noticing your feelings, especially unpleasant ones, without doing anything about them, can be a powerful skill in learning to deal with emotional problems.

The world is full of triggers that cause us to react rather than responding wisely: uncooperative, unsympathetic, or demanding people; events and situations beyond our control; disappointments and dashed expectations; crazy drivers—they're everywhere! But it doesn't mean you ignore your reaction; rather, you can learn ways to work with the reaction.

When we respond, we stop, notice what we're feeling, assess the situation, and then decide what to do next in a thoughtful, wise manner. This definition is very similar to mindfulness—noticing what's happening in the present moment without judgment and with acceptance. Then, mindfully, you can choose what to do next.

As with any new skill, it takes practice and a willingness to experience something new and unfamiliar. There will always be external events that bother us, but if we learn to respond and not react, we can make things better for ourselves, even if we can't change the world to our liking.

## What to Do

Once you are more familiar with your feelings, you can begin to notice where in your body you experience feelings and what their intensity is. This will help you respond instead of reacting. Remember not to judge yourself harshly. That will not help. Start with these steps:

- Take a deep breath. Better yet, take three breaths.
- Notice what you are feeling and where in your body you are feeling it (for example, jaw, neck, shoulders, chest, stomach).
- Note the intensity of the feeling (mild, moderate, strong).
- Let go of any tension you are aware of, to the best of your ability.
- Consider what is at stake—is it worth it to react with anger or impulsive actions? What will the consequence(s) be?
- Respond to the person or situation with compassion, using clear, simple language.

For one week, note any incidents that might normally cause you to be upset and even do something you might regret. See if you can respond to the incident in a positive way.

**Sunday**

Situation: \_\_\_\_\_

Reaction: \_\_\_\_\_

Feeling: \_\_\_\_\_ Intensity: \_\_\_\_\_

Where you felt it: \_\_\_\_\_

Response: \_\_\_\_\_

Outcome: \_\_\_\_\_

**Monday**

Situation: \_\_\_\_\_

Reaction: \_\_\_\_\_

Feeling: \_\_\_\_\_ Intensity: \_\_\_\_\_

Where you felt it: \_\_\_\_\_

Response: \_\_\_\_\_

Outcome: \_\_\_\_\_

**Tuesday**

Situation: \_\_\_\_\_

Reaction: \_\_\_\_\_

Feeling: \_\_\_\_\_ Intensity: \_\_\_\_\_

Where you felt it: \_\_\_\_\_

Response: \_\_\_\_\_

Outcome: \_\_\_\_\_

**Wednesday**

Situation: \_\_\_\_\_

Reaction: \_\_\_\_\_

Feeling: \_\_\_\_\_ Intensity: \_\_\_\_\_

Where you felt it: \_\_\_\_\_

Response: \_\_\_\_\_

Outcome: \_\_\_\_\_

**Thursday**

Situation: \_\_\_\_\_

Reaction: \_\_\_\_\_

Feeling: \_\_\_\_\_ Intensity: \_\_\_\_\_

Where you felt it: \_\_\_\_\_

Response: \_\_\_\_\_

Outcome: \_\_\_\_\_

**Friday**

Situation: \_\_\_\_\_

Reaction: \_\_\_\_\_

Feeling: \_\_\_\_\_ Intensity: \_\_\_\_\_

Where you felt it: \_\_\_\_\_

Response: \_\_\_\_\_

Outcome: \_\_\_\_\_

**Saturday**

Situation: \_\_\_\_\_

Reaction: \_\_\_\_\_

Feeling: \_\_\_\_\_ Intensity: \_\_\_\_\_

Where you felt it: \_\_\_\_\_

Response: \_\_\_\_\_

Outcome: \_\_\_\_\_

How did this exercise help you respond instead of react? Be specific.

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## Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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# Five Steps to Deal with Intrusive Thoughts

**Objective:** To better handle recurring intrusive thoughts by accepting them rather than fighting them.

## You Should Know

Everyone has unacceptable intrusive thoughts at some time. Take a look at these examples:

- Josh walked down the corridor of his school and suddenly had the thought that he might pull the fire alarm.
- Samantha stood near the edge of the rooftop of her building and suddenly thought she might jump off.
- Nadia was very religious, but while she was sitting in church, she suddenly felt like she might shout out some obscene words.

Most of the time, these are passing thoughts. Although they are totally unacceptable and may be completely out of character, they come and go very quickly, and minutes later people forget all about them. In many ways, they are more of a curiosity than a problem.

But for some people, intrusive thoughts get “stuck” in their brains. For example, a common intrusive thought of people with anxiety disorders is that something will happen to a family member and they will be hurt or even killed.

Unfortunately, the more you try to get rid of intrusive thoughts, the more they are sure to come back. Instead of trying to fight your intrusive thoughts, accept them. These five steps can help you do just that.

1. Label your intrusive thoughts as “just thoughts.” Remind yourself that they have no power over you.
2. Tell yourself that these thoughts are just your brain going on “automatic” and you can safely ignore them.
3. Accept and allow the thoughts into your mind. Don’t try to push them away.
4. Breathe from your diaphragm until your anxiety starts to go down.
5. Continue whatever you were doing prior to the intrusive thought.

When you learn to accept your upsetting intrusive thoughts rather than fighting them, they will soon stop being a big part of your life.

## What to Do

Forcing yourself to have the upsetting thoughts you have been avoiding is the only way you can learn to accept them. This may seem strange, but the next thing you need to do is to *practice* having upsetting thoughts.

Write down situations that regularly trigger intrusive thoughts and the most common thoughts you have. Then, rate the distress you experience while having these thoughts, from 1 = they



hardly bother me, to 10 = I can't stand them anymore. Practice the five-step acceptance procedure, then rate your distress again. Do this every day for at least two weeks and see if your intrusive thoughts are still playing a big part in your life.

Week of \_\_\_\_\_

Trigger situations	Intrusive thoughts	Initial level of distress (1–10)	Level of distress after the five steps (1–10)

Week of \_\_\_\_\_ Did this exercise help you learn to accept your upsetting intrusive thoughts rather than fighting them? Explain.

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## Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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## **Section 3. Breaking the Habits That Keep You Anxious**

# Using Coping Skills in Situations That Make You Anxious

**Objective:** To reduce your anxiety symptoms by identifying situations you avoid and learning techniques to cope with them.

## You Should Know

You might believe that the best way to deal with your anxiety is avoid situations that make you anxious in order to feel safe and comfortable. You might not want to feel fear or discomfort, but your desire for safety and comfort represents the biggest obstacle to overcoming anxiety.

To truly overcome anxiety, the first step is to accept the fear, face it, relax into it, and expose it for what it is—baseless and harmless. From a logical point of view, you may know that there is really nothing to fear. You may understand that you are not going to faint or have a heart attack, yet you still recoil in fear when you feel a twinge in your chest or experience lightheadedness. But until you actually experience the fear, face it, and learn that there is nothing to fear, it will be difficult to make lasting progress.

The steps to overcome anxiety include the following:

- Acceptance—Accept your fear and welcome it.
- Courage—Face the fear without running or avoiding the situations that make you anxious.
- Persistence—Repeatedly place yourself in situations that make you anxious.
- Patience—Allow time to pass so that anxious symptoms dissipate.

Many people deal with their anxiety by simply avoiding the situations that cause them to be fearful. While avoidance may reduce anxiety in the short run, it will also restrict your life unnecessarily and possibly exacerbate your fears and worries in the long run. To conquer your fears and anxiety, you must learn to tolerate the situations that bother you, rather than avoiding them. This may seem difficult, but study after study tells us that this is the best way to rid yourself of anxiety.

There are many coping strategies you can use other than avoidance. Relaxation, breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, positive self-talk, and visualization/imagery can all be helpful and effective in decreasing your anxiety. It is important to remember that as long as you do not feed your fear, symptoms will subside naturally, usually within minutes. Coping techniques are designed to break the fear cycle and to limit the duration and intensity of your symptoms.

Although some people mistake avoidance for coping, there is a difference between them. Coping skills must be used when you are in situations that cause you to be anxious, allowing symptoms to naturally run their course, without adding more fear to the process. Avoidance is a problem from a behavioral and learning standpoint because it does nothing

to teach you that anxiety is not harmful, and it creates the false belief that you must try to “escape” from a situation to feel safe. Examples of avoidance behavior include running to be in the presence of a friend or “safe” person or fleeing to a “safe” place, like your car or a specific room in your home.

The only way to overcome anxiety is to experience symptoms without fleeing, avoiding, or adding more fear to the situation. This means that you will experience times of extreme fear and discomfort. The good news is that if you are willing to do that a few times, it will begin to get easier very quickly. It doesn’t take long for your courage to pay off as you suddenly find that you are no longer afraid of certain situations.

## What to Do

The first step is to rank the situations you avoid because they make you anxious. Place a 1 next to the situation/place you avoid most, a 2 by the situation/place you avoid next most often, and so on.

- |  |              |
|--|--------------|
| _____ Public speaking                    | Other: _____ |
| _____ Subways, buses, trains, airplanes  | Other: _____ |
| _____ Using a public restroom            |              |
| _____ Walking on the street              |              |
| _____ Theaters                           |              |
| _____ Shopping centers/malls             |              |
| _____ Dating                             |              |
| _____ Standing in lines                  |              |
| _____ Auditoriums or stadiums            |              |
| _____ Parties or other social gatherings |              |
| _____ Crowds                             |              |
| _____ Restaurants                        |              |
| _____ Museums                            |              |
| _____ Crowded elevators                  |              |
| _____ Large rooms                        |              |

Now that you have identified the situations that make you anxious, choose one that you will practice experiencing over the next few weeks. \_\_\_\_\_. Use this chart to keep a record of what happens.

Date	What happened	Coping skill you used	How did you feel/react?

Which strategies effectively helped you cope with your anxious symptoms?

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Describe what else you can do to cope when you are in situations that make you anxious.

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Write down how you would like to approach that type of situation differently in the future.

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### **Reflections on This Exercise**

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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# Controlling Your Anxiety with a Worry Script

**Objective:** To face your negative thoughts and upsetting feelings by writing about them.

## You Should Know

You might spend hours each day trying to avoid worrying about things that upset you. Do you distract yourself by checking your phone, playing video games, or even self-medicating with drinking, drugs, or overeating? None of these things help reduce worrying.

In fact, the harder you try to avoid the thoughts that make you anxious, the worse they get. Trying to push something out of your mind is a little like trying to push a beach ball underwater: it takes a lot of work to keep it down, and the minute you let it go, it pops right back up again.

Rather than putting all your energy into avoiding upsetting thoughts and images, you can choose to face your fears, and writing worry scripts is one way to help you do this. By writing a script about your biggest worry, you will be facing your negative thoughts and upsetting feelings rather than trying to avoid them. Writing scripts will also help you get a clear picture of what is really upsetting you. Many people who write worry scripts for a few weeks report that they feel less anxious about the things they were worrying about.

## What to Do

To write a worry script, choose a place where you won't be interrupted. Turn off your cell phone, music, and television. Set aside about thirty minutes to complete each script.

- Write about one thing you are worrying about.
- Write about the worst-case scenario of one of your worries.
- Write a script that is vivid and includes how things look, sound, and feel. Include your feelings and reactions.
- Write a new script on the same subject each day, going deeper into your feelings with each script.
- After about two weeks, you can move to the next worry.

If you feel anxious or even tearful while you are writing, keep at it! Experiencing these feelings means you are on the right track. Even though it may be difficult, the more you face your fears and worries, the more likely they will eventually fade.

### My Worry Script

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Beginning time: \_\_\_\_\_ Ending time: \_\_\_\_\_

Summarize what you are worrying about in a sentence. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Describe your worry in vivid detail.

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## Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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# Eliminating Your Safety Crutches

**Objective:** To cope with anxiety without depending on your safety crutches.

## You Should Know

Using safety crutches to deal with your anxiety or other psychological problem may provide temporary relief, but in the long run it does not help. When you use physical crutches for a broken leg, the crutches take the weight off your leg and keep you from experiencing the physical pain, allowing your leg to heal. However, psychological pain is different. Avoiding your psychological pain rather than facing it and accepting it will likely prolong your problems.

Do you use any of these common safety crutches?

- **Disassociation.** When Trevor was feeling anxious before a meeting, he would pretend he was someone who was confident and assertive. However, as soon as the meeting started or someone mentioned his name, he found it hard to even breathe.
- **Denial.** Damian worried constantly about his health and would always think he had the worst disease possible. If he had even a slight headache, he would think he had a brain tumor. But if someone asked him whether something was wrong, he would just say, “No, I feel great,” and keep his worries to himself.
- **Excessive information seeking.** Sharon was worried about her daughter being bullied in school, so she scoured the internet on a daily basis for information and called her daughter’s teacher for an update several times a week.
- **Obsessive checking.** After Craig was robbed, he couldn’t leave the house without checking that it was locked at least three times. Then he started checking to see if he locked his car, if he shut off his computer, and if he locked his office desk. He always needed to check things at least three times.
- **Rituals.** Carrie was always worried about taking a test. She felt that she had to wear the same clothes every time she took a test or she would fail. If she couldn’t find the exact outfit she needed to wear, she would start to feel like she was having a panic attack.
- **Procrastination.** David was worried about getting his term paper done on time, but instead of just working on it, he would watch Netflix all evening and plan on working the next day. Whenever there was something he worried about, David just put off doing it.
- **List making.** Marcus made a list of everything he had to do each day and would check it constantly throughout the day. His list had every detail of his day—even brushing his teeth and taking a shower.
- **Excessive reassurance.** Elizabeth was planning her first trip abroad and kept thinking about all the things that could go wrong. She called her parents several times a day to talk about her fears and worries.
- **Impulsiveness.** Caleb had a difficult time asking women out for a date. However, if he met someone new at the office or at a bar, he would immediately ask her if she were available. None of the women he talked to seemed at all interested in him.

- **Doing everything yourself.** Every time Nora had people coming over to the house she had to clean it completely. Her husband and her teenage children asked if they could help, but Nora was worried that they might not do a good job.
- **Doing everything for others.** Lauren was worried that her middle-school daughter was not going to get good grades, so she did many of her daughter's school assignments herself.
- **Self-medication.** Vanessa carried a small bottle of vodka in her purse and took a shot every time she had to ride in an elevator.
- **Indulging bad habits.** Tara worried that her boyfriend was seeing another woman, and the only thing that kept her from thinking about this was shopping.

## What to Do

Write down the two or three safety crutches you use most. You can choose from the list or write in others you use.

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Describe a recent situation where you used a safety crutch to deal with your anxiety or other problems.

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Describe what you think might have happened if you didn't use a safety crutch.

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Did you ever try to stop using one of these safety crutches? What happened?

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For one week, write down each time you use a psychological safety crutch to deal with your anxiety and what happened as a result of using the crutch.

Week of

[illegible]

What would it take to give up your safety crutches?

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What is the worst thing that would happen if you didn't use a safety crutch?

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Think of a time that you will try facing your problems without using a safety crutch. Write down a date and time you will try this: \_\_\_\_\_. Add it to your calendar.

Write down anything that might get in the way of trying this experiment.

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After you try it, write down what happened.

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## Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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# Giving Up Reassurance Seeking

**Objective:** To cope with your worries without seeking reassurance from yourself or others.

## You Should Know

Many people with anxiety disorders constantly seek reassurance from others that things will be okay. Sometimes people seek reassurance from friends or loved ones. For example, Michael worried about his pregnant wife, even though she seemed to be having an easy pregnancy. He insisted that she call or text him every hour of the day when they were apart.

Other people seek reassurance from medical professionals. Paul had several panic attacks and thought he was having a heart attack. Each time, he insisted on going to the emergency room, even though his doctors had told him that there was nothing wrong with his heart.

Still others constantly read self-help books or search the internet for reassurance. For example, Annie Marie was recently divorced and was worried that she would never find anyone else to love. She had six books on finding love that she read over and over again.

In the past, many psychologists prescribed self-affirmations, a form of self-reassurance, as a way to cope with worries. They would have their patients say positive things to themselves in the mirror or carry around slips of paper with reassuring words written on them. Now we know that this type of self-reassurance will likely just prolong your worries just like seeking reassurance from others.

When you constantly seek reassurance, you are engaging with your worries as if they were real. It is much more helpful in the long run to recognize your worries for what they are and then just let them go.

## What to Do

Answer the following questions, then complete the exercise on the following page.

Is there someone you need hear from every day? Is there more than one person? Write their names here.

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Are there people you always call when you are worried? List them.

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How do you think they feel about your need to hear from them?

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What are some things you seek reassurance about?

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What do you think will happen if you do not get the reassurance you need?

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Every time you feel you need reassurance about something that worries you, write it in the chart below. Then write down how would you like to get reassurance—but don't seek it! Instead, just think about your worry for a few minutes while breathing deeply. Let the thoughts and feelings associated with your need for reassurance just float away. Then, after you have done this, rate your need for reassurance from 0 to 10, with 0 = I don't really need reassurance anymore, to 10 = I must have reassurance immediately.

Why do you need reassurance?	How would you like to get reassurance?	Rate your need for reassurance (0–10)

Make every effort you can to stop asking for reassurance about your worries. Tell the people you would turn to for reassurance that you are trying to change this habit. Write down what you can say to them.

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Now think of all the free time you will have when you stop seeking reassurance for your worries. Write down some positive things you could do for yourself with this extra time.

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### **Reflections on This Exercise**

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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# Tracking Your Checking Behavior

**Objective:** To become aware of whether you deal with your anxiety by checking.

## You Should Know

Compulsive checking behavior is common with people who have anxiety disorders. Some people repeatedly check to see if a door or window is locked. Some people check to see if ovens or faucets are turned off. Some people check throughout the day to make sure that the people they love are okay.

Checking behavior can reduce anxiety for short period of time, but checking becomes a problem when you feel you have to do it. In other words, your checking has become a compulsive behavior. In GAD, checking serves the “magical” purpose of protecting you or someone you care about from future harm. Checking can have other functions if you have other anxiety disorders like obsessive-compulsive disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Checking behaviors include the following:

- Obsessional fears around fires, burglaries, or other catastrophes that are out of proportion with actual risk
- Repeatedly checking locks, electrical appliances, and other perceived hazards before leaving home
- Repeatedly checking the placement of paper, curtains, or furniture to ensure that nothing can catch on fire
- Locking and unlocking doors (or turning appliances on and off) a certain number of times
- Asking others for reassurance that doors are locked, appliances are off, etc.
- Calling loved ones repeatedly to check for safety

Many people get into the habit of checking without even realizing it. If you think that your checking behavior has become a problem and has become disruptive in your life, the first step is to become more aware of how often you do this behavior.

## What to Do

What is something you check on?

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How often do you think you do this? \_\_\_\_\_

What are the potential negative effects of this behavior?

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What are you afraid might happen?

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How does your checking behavior affect other people?

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What would happen if you stopped your checking behavior?

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It is important that you learn to tolerate your worries without checking. To start, you will become aware of how much you engage in checking behavior. Track your checking behavior for one week.

Day 1 Date: \_\_\_\_\_ How many times did you engage in this habit today? \_\_\_\_\_ Day

2 Date: \_\_\_\_\_ How many times did you engage in this habit today? \_\_\_\_\_ Day

3 Date: \_\_\_\_\_ How many times did you engage in this habit today? \_\_\_\_\_ Day

4 Date: \_\_\_\_\_ How many times did you engage in this habit today? \_\_\_\_\_ Day

5 Date: \_\_\_\_\_ How many times did you engage in this habit today? \_\_\_\_\_ Day

6 Date: \_\_\_\_\_ How many times did you engage in this habit today? \_\_\_\_\_ Day

7 Date: \_\_\_\_\_ How many times did you engage in this habit today? \_\_\_\_\_

Total times: \_\_\_\_\_

## Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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# Using Imaginal Exposure to Reduce Your Anxiety

**Objective:** To lessen the control your fears have over you by indirectly exposing yourself to them.

## You Should Know

You may be familiar with the therapeutic concept of directly confronting your fears in person. For example, if you were obsessed with dying from a spider bite, you could expose yourself to holding a spider in your hand. As an alternative, imaginal exposure therapy encourages you to indirectly confront your fears using the strength of your own mind.

## What to Do

You will begin by creating a script where you write in graphic detail about your least feared activity or object and then work your way up to what you fear most. Your goal is to become accustomed to interacting with your fears to the point where the debilitating anxiety you experience is diminished. You will achieve this goal by indirectly exposing yourself to your scenarios over and over again through reading or listening to your story until your anxiety dissipates. Although this may be the scariest thing you have ever done, remember that your fears and anxiety are only one small piece of you. You are made of what you value in life and the future you see yourself living.

Follow these steps:

- Choose one activity, event, or object that makes you anxious.
- Expose yourself to this fear at least once every day for one week at a time or until your anxiety level goes down to 3 or lower on a scale of 1 to 10.
- Keep a record of your experience on an Imaginal Response Worksheet.
- Track your anxiety level before and after each exposure to see how your anxiety level changes.
- Fill out an Imaginal Response Worksheet after each week.

Your script will include:

- the initial triggering event;
- any physical sensations, including what you experience with your five senses;
- your thoughts;
- your actions;
- the immediate consequences of your actions, including your feelings;
- the long-term consequences you fear the most.

Finally, allow yourself to feel anxious! Experiencing your fears and anxious feelings will eventually result in your becoming used to the anxiety they generate, causing it to evaporate.

(Triggering event) *It's completely quiet in my staff meeting at school.*

(Thoughts) *My family disowns me, and I never work as a teacher again.*

(Immediate consequences) *I am ashamed of myself and embarrassed.*

(Long-term consequences) *In the end, my fiancé ends our engagement, and I end up old and lonely in a homeless shelter.*

[illegible]



## **Plan Your Imaginal Exposure**

Commit to at least one session daily for a week. You have several options for the imaginal exposure:

- Read your script to yourself.
- Read it to a trusted friend or family member.
- Handwrite or type it over and over again.
- Listen to it in your car, on your phone, or on any other device.
- Copy it onto Post-it notes that you can attach somewhere you will come in contact with them, such as your bathroom mirror or bedroom mirror.

Do not rush! Take your time and remain in the situation until your anxiety level subsides.

Know that boredom is the opposite of anxiety and is therefore your friend. If you eventually get bored with your script instead of getting anxious, it means that you have conquered your fears.

And don't despair! If you find yourself feeling some anxiety even after you thought you were over this particular fear, re-expose yourself, beginning at the experience where you started feeling the anxiety again.

## **Imaginal Response Worksheet**

First, write down the date and length of the exercise. Rate your anxiety level on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest, before and after the exercise. Add notes as needed; for example, emotions elicited or interesting observations. Record whether you met your goal.

Goal you would like to meet: \_\_\_\_\_

Date	Total time	Anxiety level before exercise (1–10)	Anxiety level after exercise (1–10)	Notes	Goal met? (Y/N)

At the end of the week, write down your thoughts, emotions, hesitations, ideas, progress made, or any other inner about your experience that you feel are important or necessary. Do this every week for the duration of your exposure therapy to track your progress.

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Did this exercise reduce your anxiety? Why or why not? Be specific.

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### **Reflections on This Exercise**

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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# You Don't Have to Be Perfect

**Objective:** To become more tolerant of the discomfort caused by embarrassing behavior by deliberately doing something that may be considered inappropriate.

## You Should Know

Many people with anxiety have unrealistic expectations for themselves. They are tolerant of other people's flaws and gaffes, but not their own. Perfectionism can exist without anxiety, of course, but when the two are paired, it can be a crippling combination. Not only do people suffer from not reaching their own internal, self-imposed level of achievement, but they experience distress in a host of social situations based on an external measure of who they think they are *supposed* to be. Meaning, perfect.

For example, at a choral concert, sixty choir members took the stage via a set of steps visible to the nearly twenty-five-hundred people on the expansive lawn at an outdoor venue. Marsha, who has a fear of making a fool of herself in public, stumbled on one of the steps and fell, *splat*, bracing herself with her hands. People helped her up, and she took her place in the lineup, but she was mortified. She was sure everyone in the choir and everyone in the audience were laughing at her and thinking she was a "stupid idiot." She continued to agonize about it throughout the concert and couldn't enjoy the music.

But here's the catch: It is likely that Marsha was the only one who even gave any thought to it after it happened, much less a critical thought. More likely, people felt empathy and hoped she was okay. This is how anxiety can interfere with one's life. But with awareness and practice, that can change.

What if you were to experience yourself as imperfect by embarrassing yourself *on purpose*? You might feel your anxiety rising at the mere thought. This form of exposure therapy is called "constructive embarrassment." The idea is to expose yourself to uncomfortable feelings and learn to tolerate them—to actually welcome the feeling of embarrassment or humiliation so that you can get used to it and realize that nothing catastrophic happens and that you're only human.

## What to Do

On a scale of 1 (least) to 5 (most), rate the level of embarrassment you fear doing each of the following would cause you. Then plan to do some of these socially "inappropriate" things in public. You might want to invite an understanding friend or group of friends to practice your skills with.

Choose the 1s and 2s at first and work up to trying a 4 or 5, but don't choose an activity that would cause you to have *extreme* anxiety. Afterwards, record your reflections about the experience on the lines below.

Here are some possibilities. Feel free to add your own situations to the list.

\_\_\_ Stumble on purpose.

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\_\_\_ Go to a movie after it has already started and ask to climb over people.

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\_\_\_ Jog in place in a park or at a bus stop.

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\_\_\_ Make a phone call and then say you've got the wrong number and hang up.

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\_\_\_ Knock over your glass of water at a nice restaurant.

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\_\_\_ Dress casually for a formal event (or vice versa).

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\_\_\_ Talk to yourself out loud at a supermarket.

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\_\_\_ Face the wrong way in an elevator.

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\_\_\_ Hum softly during a staff or group meeting.

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\_\_\_ Appear in public with a speck of food on your face.

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\_\_\_ Wear mismatched socks or shoes.

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\_\_\_ At a meeting or in a class, ask a question that you're worried might make you appear stupid.

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\_\_\_ Take an extra-long time at a green light.

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\_\_\_ Do three separate transactions at an ATM while others wait.

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\_\_\_ Skip instead of walking down the street.

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\_\_\_ Pause for ten seconds while giving a talk or speaking in public.

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\_\_\_ Order a messy meal when you're on a date.

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\_\_\_ Your own idea: \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_ Your own idea: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Your own idea: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Your own idea: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What is the worst thing that happened doing any of these exercises? Did anyone make comments to you or look at you in a strange way?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What thoughts did you have after you completed this exercise? Do you feel less anxious about the possibility of embarrassing yourself?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Practicing doing the things your fear most is considered to be the best way to overcome your fear and anxiety. Do you think that you can continue this practice? Who can help support you in continuing to practice this kind of activity?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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## **Section 4. Developing New Positive Habits**

# Developing Self-Compassion

**Objective:** To become more compassionate toward yourself by envisioning an imaginary friend who loves and accepts you as you are.

## You Should Know

You might have something about yourself that you do not like, something that causes you to feel shame, to feel insecure, or to feel not “good enough.” Everyone does. Even people who seem to have everything—beauty, wealth, intelligence, and more—are often living with a sense of great inadequacy.

Do you think you are self-critical? Do you often feel you are not as good as the people around you or that there is something really wrong with you? Ask yourself if you really need to suffer from your sense of not being “good enough.” Suffering is part of the human experience, and we all will have times of pain, failure, and loss. But do you really have to add to your suffering?

Kristin Neff, a psychologist who has dedicated her life to teaching the importance of self-compassion, notes that self-compassion is not self-pity. She explains:

*When individuals feel self-pity, they become immersed in their own problems and forget that others have similar problems. They ignore their interconnections with others and instead feel that they are the only ones in the world who are suffering.*

Self-compassion is also very different from self-indulgence. Self-indulgence is merely giving yourself short-term pleasure, which may actually get in the way of your happiness and well-being. You may indulge yourself with a big bowl of ice cream, or buying something special, or binge-watching your favorite show. These indulgences are fine once in a while, but as you can see, they have little to do with self-compassion.

This worksheet is designed to help you bring self-compassion into your life. It will help you show the same compassion to yourself that you would show to someone you care about very much.

## What to Do

Begin by writing something about yourself you don’t like. Write down one issue or thought that often makes you feel inadequate or bad about yourself, such as your physical appearance, your work, a relationship issue, a mistake you made, and so on. Then continue with the rest of the exercise.

I feel bad about myself because:

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What emotions come up for you when you think about this aspect of yourself? Write down as many emotions as you can.

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Now take a moment to sit with these emotions even though they may make you uncomfortable. Just feel them without judging them. You might have some images or words come to mind. Don't judge them or try to get rid of them. Just observe them. *They are not you, but rather only thoughts and images you have in your mind.*

Write down any images or words that come to mind.

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Now that you are in touch with your self-critical thoughts and feelings, think about an imaginary friend who is unconditionally loving, accepting, kind, and compassionate. Imagine that this friend can see all your strengths and all your weaknesses, including the aspects of yourself you wish you could hide from others.

Reflect on what this friend feels toward you and how they love and accept you exactly as you are, with all your very human imperfections. This friend has a profound understanding of what it means to be human. This friend is kind and forgiving toward you. This friend loves you unconditionally in spite of what you think of as your problems and faults.

In their great wisdom, this friend understands your life history and the millions of things that have happened in your life to create you as you are in this moment.

This friend understands that the things that make you feel bad about yourself are connected to many aspects of your life you didn't choose: your genes, your family history, the place where you were born, and many other things outside your control.

Write a letter to yourself from the perspective of this imaginary friend, focusing on the perceived inadequacy you tend to judge yourself for. What would this friend say to you about your flaws from the perspective of unlimited compassion?

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In the words of this friend, express the deep compassion they feel for you, especially for the pain you feel when you judge yourself so harshly.

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Write down what this friend would say to alleviate some of your pain.

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Write down what this friend would say to help you feel that you are only human, that all people have both strengths and weaknesses.

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If you think this friend would suggest possible changes you should make, write them down. Make sure these suggestions embody feelings of unconditional understanding and compassion.

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What else would your friend say to you to express acceptance, kindness, and caring for you?

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What would this friend say to express the desire for your health and happiness?

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Take a few minutes to feel this compassion. Feel the compassion from your imaginary friend as it soothes and comforts you. Sit back and close your eyes and feel what it is like to experience unconditional love from someone who accepts you exactly as you are without thinking for a moment even the slightest critical thought.

Hold on to this feeling for another minute or two.

Now, imagine that your friend wants to leave you with one important thought to carry with you. Just reading this one thought pours soothing compassion into you and comforts you like a cool breeze on a hot day or a warm blanket on a cold night.

Write down this one thought.

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Now, write down this thought again very slowly. With each word, see if you can feel the compassion and acceptance behind this thought.

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### **Reflections on This Exercise**

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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# Grounding Techniques

**Objective:** To bring awareness to the present moment by learning and practicing grounding techniques.

## You Should Know

Grounding techniques help people stay in the present moment during episodes of intense anxiety or other overwhelming emotions. Staying in the present moment allows them to feel safe and in control by focusing on the physical world and how they experience it.

Grounding is easy to do. Just focus on some aspect of the physical world, rather than on your internal thoughts and feelings. Focus on the present rather than the past. Practice your grounding techniques so that they will come naturally when you are upset. Let go of any negative feelings. Try a variety of techniques, and rate the effectiveness of each technique in keeping you calm. Have others help by reminding you to practice these techniques and to use them as soon as you are feeling emotionally distressed.

Here are some grounding technique suggestions. You can make up your own as well.

- Run cool water over your hands.
- Grab tightly onto your chair as hard as you can.
- Touch various objects around you: a pen, keys, your clothing, or the wall.
- Dig your heels into the floor, literally “grounding” them. Notice the tension centered in your heels as you do this. Remind yourself that you are connected to the ground.
- Carry a grounding object in your pocket to touch whenever you feel triggered.
- Notice your body: the weight of your body in the chair; the movement of your toes wiggling in your socks; the feel of your chair against your back.
- Stretch. Roll your head around.
- Clench and release your fists.
- Walk slowly; notice each footstep, saying “left” or “right” to yourself.
- Focus on your breathing, noticing each inhale and exhale.
- Eat something, describing the flavors to yourself.

Other ideas: \_\_\_\_\_

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## What to Do

Begin by writing in five or more techniques you want to practice. Practice them several times a day for five minutes or until you feel calm and in control. Circle the number that best describes the effectiveness of each technique, where 0 = no effect, 1 = little effect, 2 = effective but took time, 3 = effective in keeping me calm and focused, and 4 = immediate calming effect.

Technique	Date started	Rating	Comments
		0 1 2 3 4	
		0 1 2 3 4	
		0 1 2 3 4	
		0 1 2 3 4	
		0 1 2 3 4	
		0 1 2 3 4	
		0 1 2 3 4	
		0 1 2 3 4	
		0 1 2 3 4	
		0 1 2 3 4	
		0 1 2 3 4	
		0 1 2 3 4	
		0 1 2 3 4	
		0 1 2 3 4	

Did this exercise allow you to become more aware of the present moment? Why or why not?

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Did using grounding techniques reduce your anxiety? Explain.

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### **Reflections on This Exercise**

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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# Reducing Anxiety with Your Breathing

**Objective:** To interrupt the cycle of worry and anxiety by paying attention to your breathing.

## You Should Know

Since the mid-1970s, when Herbert Benson, MD, researched and wrote about the “relaxation response,” we have known that various relaxation techniques can reverse the brain’s fight-or-flight response reaction to fear and anxiety. The amygdala is the alarm center of the brain and gets triggered by even the slightest hint of danger, including your worrying. When it is triggered, it releases a variety of biochemicals that increase your blood pressure, heart rate, and muscle tension. This physical response is what most people refer to when they talk about their anxiety.

Deep breathing, along with other relaxation techniques, can help silence the alarm that triggers the amygdala and restore the body to a sense of calm. When you use deep breathing techniques, your body sends feedback to your brain, saying “All is okay; you can quiet down.”

## What to Do

Find a place where you will not be disturbed. Let people in your home know this is a time when you need to be alone. To get started, you may find it easier to lie on the floor. Use pillows under your head and knees for comfort.

- Place one hand on your lower abdomen.
- Breathe in deeply and slowly as you count to five, pulling your breath into your lower abdomen until it raises the hand that is resting there.
- Release your breath slowly and smoothly as you count to five.
- Focus on your breath as you do this exercise.

Once you have mastered the technique, you can do this without placing your hand on your abdomen.

If you prefer not to lie on the floor, you can practice sitting in a chair. Place your hand on your lower abdomen until you get used to bringing your breath down deep.

Try to relax your body and your mind as you breathe. If you are distracted, simply bring your attention back to your breath. You may enjoy playing some soft, relaxing music or nature sounds.

This video from the Harvard School of Public Health shows Dr. Lillian Cheung demonstrating mindful breathing. Join the class! It takes just over thirteen minutes. Link: <http://youtu.be/8c-1Ylieg3g>.

Once you get into the habit of deep breathing, you will find it easier to use this technique to calm yourself down when you start having thoughts that would normally make you feel anxious.

Here are three simple breathing exercises you can try this week. Choose which ones might be a good fit for you. Sit in a comfortable position in a chair or on a meditation cushion. Avoid

slouching. In each case, if your mind starts generating a lot of thoughts, which it inevitably will, gently return to your breath.

**In and Out Breathing.** Set a timer for two minutes at first, then gradually work up to four or five minutes per sitting. Quiet your mind as best as you can and simply notice your breath going in and out. Don't push or strain or try to control your breathing in any way. Notice: Does the air enter through your nose? Your mouth? Just notice. Inhale. Exhale. Slow. Easy. No effort. Notice your chest or your belly rising and falling as you discover the rhythm and pace of your breathing.

**Counting Breaths.** Sit comfortably and eliminate any distractions. Inhale slowly, counting up to five. One, two, three, four, five. Exhale slowly, counting down from five. Five, four, three, two, one. You may wish to hold for one or two counts before exhaling. Whatever counting pattern you choose, be sure not to strain or force your breathing. Easy, steady, in and out.

**Belly Breathing.** Sit comfortably or lie down on a mat or soft carpet; avoid your bed, as you might fall asleep. Put one hand on your belly and the other hand on your chest. Close your mouth and breathe in through your nose, deeply inhaling but not straining. Notice your belly rising, but keep your chest still. Exhale the air through your mouth, noticing your belly contracting slightly. Repeat up to ten times.

Keep track of your progress on the following chart, noting which exercise, when and where you practiced, and for how long you practiced each day (or whenever you can). Note how it made you feel. For other breathing exercises, do a search on YouTube for "mindful breathing."

Type of breathing	When and where you practiced	For how long?	How did it feel?


Did this practice reduce your anxiety? Why or why not? Describe your experience.

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## Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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# Embracing Your Worries with Humor

**Objective:** To reduce your anxiety through the use of humor.

## You Should Know

Therapists tell us not to fight recurring and unwanted thoughts or worries, but rather embrace them. It may sound strange, but research now suggests that the more you try to stop thinking about something, the more you *will* think about it.

Take a moment and give it a try. Close your eyes and visualize an alligator lying on your bed. Think about this image for a minute. Now try *not* to think about an alligator on your bed. For most of us, this is very difficult, and the image we are trying not to think about keeps popping into our mind.

## What to Do

Write down something you worry about in one sentence.

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Now take a look at the following humorous ways to deal with worries, and put a check mark by the ways you think you might like to try.

\_\_\_\_\_ Sing a song about your worry to the tune of Happy Birthday over and over again for five minutes.

\_\_\_\_\_ Draw a funny picture of the worst thing that could happen if what you worry about came true.

\_\_\_\_\_ Make up a story about something you worry about all the time, and add a terrible ending.

\_\_\_\_\_ Write down the thought you worry about twenty times. Now write it two more times with your nondominant hand.

\_\_\_\_\_ Translate your worry into another language. Now read the translation aloud five times (you can use [www.translate.google](http://www.translate.google)). Now do it again in two more languages.

\_\_\_\_\_ Write the thing you worry most about reversing the letters of each word.

\_\_\_\_\_ Get a plain T-shirt and write or draw your worry on it with indelible marker. Make it as colorful as you can, and wear it around the house for a few hours. Don't forget to take a look at yourself in the mirror!

\_\_\_\_\_ Fill your mouth with food (try some dry crackers if you have them) and say the thought that worries you most five times.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Imagine yourself worrying as if you were in a movie—a horror movie. Visualize yourself in the place where you are most likely to worry, except that Freddy Krueger (or a similar scary villain) is playing you.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Draw a comic strip about your worry or use an online comic-strip creator to make one up.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Create a rap song about your worries with a program like AutoRap (<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/autorap-by-smule/id524299475?mt=8>). Just speak your worries into your smartphone and the app will turn it into a rap song. Play the song at least five times and share it with others.

Add your own ideas to help you embrace your worries with a humorous twist.

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Now for one week, try at least one humorous activity every day involving your most significant worry. Rate how you feel before and after each activity from 1 to 10, with 1 = little or no anxiety, and 10 = extreme anxiety.

Week of \_\_\_\_\_

Activity	Date/time	Rate your anxiety before the activity	Rate your anxiety after the activity



As you practiced different activities, did you notice any new thoughts? What were they?

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Did you find these activities humorous? Did you smile? Laugh out loud?

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Did you find that your anxiety around these worries diminished over the week?

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Did you share what you were doing with anyone else? What was their reaction?

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### **Reflections on This Exercise**

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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# Practicing Self-Care and Self-Calming

**Objective:** To develop a more positive attitude toward life, control your anxiety, and feel more at peace by practicing self-care and self-calming.

## You Should Know

You probably spend a significant amount of time every day doing things to ensure your physical health and prevent illness. But how much time do you take each day doing things to improve your mental health? Studies tell us that such practices will also contribute to better physical health, including improved circulation, a stronger immune system, an improvement in your ability to tolerate pain, and more.

Self-care behaviors address your basic lifestyle. These habits have an almost immediate effect on your physical and mental well-being. They include:

- Getting at least a half-hour of exercise each day
- Getting eight to nine hours of sleep each night
- Eating a well-balanced and nutritious diet, preferably low in sugar and food additives with multiple portions of fruits and vegetables each day
- Consuming alcohol and caffeine in moderation
- Spending time each day in the company of people who care about you

Self-calming techniques are planned and conscious behaviors that trigger your parasympathetic nervous system. These techniques slow your breathing, relax your muscles, and also lower your heart rate and blood pressure. These techniques simultaneously increase the brain chemicals associated with a positive mood and decrease the brain chemicals associated with stress. Self-calming techniques include:

- Progressive relaxation
- Deep breathing
- Guided imagery
- Yoga
- Walking in nature
- Mindful meditation
- Massage

## What to Do

This worksheet is designed to help you develop habits that are important to your mental *and* your physical health.

Use this chart to keep track of your self-care and self-calming techniques for twenty-one days. Researchers tell us this is the amount of time it takes for behaviors to become habits. Rate yourself from 0 to 10, where 0 = my self-care was nonexistent, to 10 = my self-care was excellent. Include the time you spent, the technique(s) you used, and what you can do to improve.

Day	Rate yourself on your self-care (1–10)	Time spent in self-calming exercises	What self-calming techniques did you use?	What can you do to improve?
Day	Rate yourself on your self-care (1–10)	Time spent in self-calming exercises	What self-calming techniques did you use?	What can you do to improve?

## Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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# Filling Your Mind with Positive Thoughts

**Objective:** To reduce anxiety and develop a greater sense of well-being by thinking positively.

## You Should Know

If you are troubled by anxious thoughts, it is important to accept them rather than fighting or avoiding them. You can tolerate anxious thoughts and understand they are just thoughts and cannot hurt you.

There is a four-step procedure to deal with these distressing thoughts:

1. Recognize and label your thoughts.
2. Observe them rather than reacting to them.
3. Replace anxious thoughts with positive affirmations or thoughts.
4. Allow time to pass.

Paying attention to positive thoughts can have many benefits, and continued practice may even help rewire your brain. Replacing anxious thoughts with positive thinking may actually help you cope better with stress, reduce your anxiety, and improve your health.

This worksheet is designed to help you determine if focusing on positive thoughts can help reduce your anxiety and improve your overall sense of well-being. It requires you to write down positive thoughts in a journal for two weeks and then reflect on whether this activity helps you focus less on your anxious thoughts.

## What to Do

Get a journal or notebook, and each day pick an activity from the list on the next page. Use one page for each activity. Complete at least one activity a day for two weeks. At the end of the two weeks, answer the questions about how this activity helped you and whether your anxiety was reduced.

Activity	Date completed
Write down five of your best qualities.	
Describe a favorite memory.	
Describe in detail the best day of your life.	
Make a list of your five most precious possessions.	
Make a bucket list of five things you would like to do.	
Write down five positive adjectives to describe yourself.	
Write down the names of five favorite people you have known.	
Write down five things you would like to do with your family.	
Write down five things you would like to do with your friends.	
Write down the names of five people who inspire you.	
Write down five things you are grateful for.	
Write about a dream place you would like to live.	
Write about a favorite sports hero and why you admire them.	
Write down something you are proud of.	
Describe a memorable happy birthday.	
Describe a favorite holiday and what you like about it.	
Describe a favorite place in nature.	
Write down a favorite dream you remember.	
Write down a favorite memory from your early childhood.	
Write down five things you are good at.	
Find and write down three inspirational quotes.	
Describe what you would do if you won \$10 million in the lottery.	
Write down the names of five people you love.	
Write down the names of five people who have influenced you.	
Write down five things you have accomplished.	
Write down five good things that happened at school.	
Write down three vacations you would like to take.	
Write down the five funniest movies or TV shows you enjoy.	
Describe a favorite character from a book.	
Describe a favorite character from a movie.	
Write down any positive thoughts you are having today.	

At the end of the two weeks answer the following questions.

Did you notice any change in your thoughts over the last two weeks? When did this happen?  
Describe your experience.

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Ask someone who knows you well whether they noticed anything different about you in the last two weeks. Write down what they said.

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Did you notice any decrease in your anxiety over the last two weeks? What did you notice?

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What was your favorite assignment out of all the activities you completed? Describe.

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### **Reflections on This Exercise**

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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# Overcoming Anxiety with the Help of Exercise

**Objective:** To identify types of activity you can consistently engage in to decrease anxiety.

## You Should Know

Regular exercise can help you overcome your anxiety in a number of ways. During exercise, your brain increases the production of chemicals that can lift your mood and regulate your emotions. With regular exercise, you'll feel stronger and more confident, and more likely to feel that you can make positive changes in your life. Exercise will also increase the oxygen flow to your brain, which may help you think more clearly, rationally, and positively.

## What to Do

Circle the types of exercise you can do on a regular basis.

bike riding	baseball	football	handball
jogging	hiking	soccer	karate or other martial arts
walking	skateboarding	surfing	Pilates
weight lifting	basketball	skiing	yoga
tennis	swimming	dancing	golf

Write down other physical activities you think you can do that aren't listed above.

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To come up with an exercise plan, choose three exercises you would like to do over the next week. Decide how much time you need for each. Fifteen minutes? A half hour? An hour? Write down how often you can realistically do them in a week. Then write down which days are best to exercise and what time of day is most realistic.



Exercise	Time needed	Number of times a week	Best day and time

Once you have made a plan, use this chart to record how many times you actually exercise and the effect that exercise has on your anxiety.

Day	Type of exercise	Amount of time	Mood before	Mood after
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				
Sunday				

After one week of consistent exercise, did you feel less anxious, more anxious, or about the same?

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Describe your experience, including obstacles or challenges.

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### **Reflections on This Exercise**

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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# How Diet Affects Your Anxiety

**Objective:** To improve your diet to decrease anxiety symptoms.

## You Should Know

If you have anxiety, you may feel physically unwell. Coping with anxiety can be challenging, but making lifestyle changes may lessen your anxiety symptoms and make you feel better. Watching what you eat can help. Since diet, stress, and mood are all intertwined, it's important to consider what you're consuming—not only for your physical health but also for your emotional well-being. It's not necessary to go to extremes in changing your diet. By simply being more mindful of what you're putting into your body, you can find small ways to improve, and that can add up to big changes.

What you may want to avoid to lessen anxiety:

**Caffeine.** This stimulant is in coffee, tea, chocolate, soda, energy drinks, and some over-the-counter medications. The temporary boost it provides can end in fatigue, headache, and tension. Caffeine is a potential trigger for anxiety attacks and a contributor to other health issues such as insomnia, heartburn, aggression, irritability, heart palpitations, and high blood pressure.

**Salt.** Sodium is present in many processed foods, so check labels and look for low-sodium or salt-free alternatives. Sodium consumption affects fluid retention, weight, and blood pressure, all of which, in turn, can affect your mood.

**Sugar.** Excessive intake of simple sugars (such as white or brown sugar and honey) can cause health problems such as hypoglycemia, which is often accompanied by symptoms similar to those experienced during a panic attack, and diabetes. Also, the temporary uplifting effects come with some other serious downsides, including an increased risk of depression in those who have a sugar-heavy diet.

**Preservatives and hormones.** These substances are present in processed foods and many types of meats. Our bodies were not built to handle these additives, and their possible side effects have been heavily debated. Swapping in some whole, unprocessed, organic foods can help reduce consumption of these potentially harmful substances.

**Nicotine and alcohol.** Introducing these substances into your system can cause a range of problems—including aggravating anxiety. Nicotine is a stimulant, like caffeine, and alcohol a depressant. Both can affect your sleep.

What can you eat to improve symptoms of anxiety? Try the following:

- **Eat a protein-rich breakfast.** You'll feel fuller longer, and your blood sugar will remain steady so that you have more energy.
- **Eat complex carbohydrates.** Carbohydrates increase the amount of serotonin in your brain, which is calming. Eat foods rich in complex carbohydrates, such as whole grains; for example, oatmeal, quinoa, whole-grain breads or cereals.
- **Drink plenty of water.** Even mild dehydration can affect your mood.
- **Pay attention to food sensitivities.** Some foods or food additives can cause unpleasant physical reactions. These physical reactions may lead to irritability or anxiety.
- **Regularly eat healthy, balanced meals.** Nutritious foods are important for overall physical and mental health. Eat lots of fresh fruits and vegetables. It may also help to eat foods high in omega-3 fatty acids on a regular basis. Nutrient deficiencies can cause irritability, anxiety, and fatigue.

**Note:** *Changing your diet will make some difference to your general mood and well-being, but it's not necessarily a substitute for treatment. Lifestyle changes, such as improving sleep habits, increasing social support, using stress-reduction techniques, and getting regular exercise will also help. If your anxiety is severe or interferes with your day-to-day activities or enjoyment of life, you may need counseling (psychotherapy), medication, or other treatment.*

## What to Do

For the next month, keep track of what you consume, and describe how you feel each day. Rate your anxiety symptoms where 0 = no anxiety, to 10 = extreme anxiety. Make copies of the following chart, or use a notebook or diary.

Week of \_\_\_\_\_

Day	Food and beverages	Substances or medications	Anxiety symptoms	Rate anxiety (0–10)
Monday				
Tuesday				

Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				
Sunday				

After tracking your consumption for one month, describe your experiences. Did you have a decrease in anxiety symptoms? Explain.

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Describe what you added or cut out this month. Did it make a difference, either increasing or decreasing your anxiety symptoms? Describe.

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## Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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# Reducing Anxiety by Getting More Sleep

**Objective:** To improve your sleep habits in order to decrease anxiety symptoms.

## You Should Know

Do you have a hard time falling asleep or staying asleep? Anxiety causes sleep problems, and recent research indicates lack of sleep can aggravate anxiety. Sleep deprivation, common in anxiety disorders, may actually play a key role in stimulating brain regions that contribute to excessive worrying and activation of areas of the brain associated with emotional processing. Serotonin levels are impacted, affecting your mood. Getting enough sleep is an important part of your overall plan to overcome your anxiety and is also important for your general health.

There are a variety of techniques that can help you get the sleep you need, but, of course, they work only if you are diligent at trying them and then using the ones that are most effective. Here are some things you can try:

- Listen to soft music, read, take a warm shower, or meditate before going to bed.
- Exercise for at least thirty minutes each day, but not right before you go to bed.
- Write a to-do list for the following day, and then clear your head of those concerns.
- Practice deep breathing or progressive muscle relaxation before you fall asleep.
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol, and nicotine, either entirely or at least in the evening.
- Keep your bedroom at a cool temperature (60–65 degrees).
- If you are sensitive to light and sound, wear earplugs and a sleep mask, or try a white noise machine to mask the sound. You can find a variety of white-noise apps online.
- If you have trouble falling asleep, get out of bed and do some light activity (like reading) in another room. Go back to bed when you feel drowsy.
- Go to bed and get up at the same time every day.
- Avoid eating heavy meals for at least two to three hours before bed.
- Make sure your mattress and pillows are comfortable.

## What to Do

For two weeks, use this chart to track your sleep and the methods you used to sleep better.

Date	Hours slept	Trouble sleeping?	Methods tried	Successful?
		🍏 Yes   🍏 No		🍏 Yes   🍏 No
		🍏 Yes   🍏 No		🍏 Yes   🍏 No
		🍏 Yes   🍏 No		🍏 Yes   🍏 No
		🍏 Yes   🍏 No		🍏 Yes   🍏 No
		🍏 Yes   🍏 No		🍏 Yes   🍏 No
		🍏 Yes   🍏 No		🍏 Yes   🍏 No
		🍏 Yes   🍏 No		🍏 Yes   🍏 No
		🍏 Yes   🍏 No		🍏 Yes   🍏 No
		🍏 Yes   🍏 No		🍏 Yes   🍏 No
		🍏 Yes   🍏 No		🍏 Yes   🍏 No
		🍏 Yes   🍏 No		🍏 Yes   🍏 No
		🍏 Yes   🍏 No		🍏 Yes   🍏 No
		🍏 Yes   🍏 No		🍏 Yes   🍏 No
		🍏 Yes   🍏 No		🍏 Yes   🍏 No
		🍏 Yes   🍏 No		🍏 Yes   🍏 No

What else can you do to sleep better?

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Did the activities help you sleep better? Describe the two activities that helped you the most.

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Did you face obstacles or challenges to falling asleep and staying asleep? Explain.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **Reflections on This Exercise**

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What else can you do to make progress in this area?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# Preventing and Managing Lapses in Overcoming Your Anxiety

**Objective:** To identify early warning signs of a lapse so that you can respond appropriately.

## You Should Know

As you start to successfully manage your anxiety, you will see that your symptoms begin to decrease or even disappear. However, you should know that at some point there may be a lapse—a temporary reappearance of symptoms. The more prepared you are for a lapse, the more likely it is that you will successfully get through it.

Lapses are common and can occur while you are still in therapy or months after you have finished your treatment. They tend to happen during times of high stress, when you allow yourself to loosen up on using your coping skills or start to make unhealthy choices, and they can be clues to stressful situations that require change.

## What to Do

This worksheet will help you develop a plan to respond to a lapse now, so that you know what to do if and when it happens. When you manage your lapses, you are actively decreasing the risk that a relapse will occur.

These tips can help prevent or manage a lapse:

- Be patient. Remember that change takes time and that a lapse does not mean you are back at square one.
- Do not avoid your anxiety. Be honest with yourself about your symptoms and what you are doing to cope with them.
- Reach out to someone if you need help. You do not have to suffer through anxiety alone.
- If you see symptoms creeping up, do not give up on yourself! A lapse can be discouraging, but you always have a choice to work through it.
- Do not mask your anxiety. Be careful of behaviors that temporarily give you comfort but limit your ability to make healthy choices, such as drinking alcohol. If you find yourself drinking more than usual, it may be a sign that you are masking some stress or anxiety.
- Live a balanced life. Managing anxiety is not just about coping skills. A healthy diet, restful sleep, exercise, hobbies, and leisure activities all contribute to an anxiety-free life.
- If you have been prescribed medication for your anxiety, keep taking it as prescribed. Talk with your doctor if you are thinking about stopping.

Now answer the following questions.

What are the people, places, thoughts, behaviors, or things that trigger your anxiety? In other words, what makes you anxious?

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Write down the main symptoms you felt when you first began treatment. Try to be as specific as possible for this exercise, because the longer you live without the symptoms of anxiety, the more difficult it may be to look back and remember how much they once impacted your life.

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Write down the coping skills that you have found most helpful in decreasing your anxiety. Try to include details about why these skills have helped you or why you liked using them. You'll want to revisit these coping skills if a lapse comes up.

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### **Reflections on This Exercise**

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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# Does Your Anxiety Make You Depressed?

**Objective:** To determine if you need treatment for depression as well as anxiety.

## You Should Know

If you have anxiety, you might also have symptoms of depression. These two problems are very different, but they do share some symptoms. Both depression and anxiety often cause people to be nervous or irritable, to find it hard to focus, and to have trouble sleeping.

It is often difficult to determine which problem came first. Being depressed can make you anxious, and being anxious can make you depressed. However, depression comes along with a different set of symptoms that need to be addressed.

The major indicators that you are depressed include:

- Frequent sad mood
- Inability to enjoy daily activities
- Lack of energy
- Feelings of guilt or worthlessness

**Note:** *If you have suicidal thoughts, seek help immediately. Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-8255.*

## What to Do

This worksheet will address one of the most common problems associated with depression: the inability to do fun or pleasurable activities. Planning your day so that it includes enjoyable activities can help motivate you to spend more time doing things that will lift your mood and bring purpose to your life.

Write down an activity that always makes you smile. \_\_\_\_\_

Write down an activity that always relaxes you. \_\_\_\_\_

Write down an activity that you do with other people. \_\_\_\_\_

Write down an activity that stimulates your thinking. \_\_\_\_\_

Write down an activity that makes you proud of yourself. \_\_\_\_\_

Write down an activity that brings back wonderful memories. \_\_\_\_\_

Write down an activity that is always fun. \_\_\_\_\_

Write down other activities that give your life meaning and purpose: \_\_\_\_\_

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On the chart, schedule at least two activities each day. Choose activities that you know are possible to do, ones that require relatively little effort. After the activity, rate your mood, from 1 = sad and hopeless, to 10 = happy with my life. Add comments about each activity. Make copies of this chart and fill in a chart every day for at least a week.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time	Activity	Rating	Comments
7:00 a.m.			
8:00 a.m.			
9:00 a.m.			
10:00 a.m.			
11:00 a.m.			
Noon			
1:00 p.m.			
2:00 p.m.			
3:00 p.m.			
4:00 p.m.			
5:00 p.m.			
6:00 p.m.			
7:00 p.m.			
8:00 p.m.			
9:00 p.m.			
10:00 p.m.			

What did you find most challenging about this activity?

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Did you find that you experienced an increase in anxiety when engaging in activities? Explain.

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Think of people, resources, or tools that can help you plan fun activities. List them.

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### **Reflections on This Exercise**

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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## **Appendix A: Medication and Your Anxiety**



# Ten Facts You Should Know About Medication for Anxiety

Taking medication for anxiety can be a good idea for some, but not for everyone. Medication can help you cope with the immediate or intense symptoms of anxiety, but you will still need to learn these four psychological skills needed to overcome this problem:

- How to calm your anxious mind
- How to tolerate anxiety and psychological discomfort
- How to replace your fears with rational thinking
- How to change your behavior so that you no longer avoid your fears

Like all medications, there are known side effects for antianxiety drugs you need to consider, but you should also be aware of these facts:

1. Xanax and other benzodiazepines are considered to be the most addictive of all the anti-anxiety medications. These medications are so addictive that withdrawal symptoms can be severe enough to cause seizures.
2. It can take about four hours for Xanax to leave your system and one to two weeks for withdrawal symptoms to subside.
3. Drinking alcohol when on these medications is very dangerous. Some medications can double the effects of alcohol.
4. Common antidepressant and antianxiety medications include Xanax, Celexa, Zoloft, Ativan, and Prozac.
5. According to a study done in 2016, 1 in 6 Americans take some sort of antianxiety or antidepressant medication. Between mid-February and mid-March, 2020, use of anti-anxiety medications increased by 34.1 percent.
6. Xanax and other benzodiazepines are known to make you drowsy and are sometimes used as a sleeping aid for insomnia. They also usually contribute to some memory loss, though not severe.
7. Despite their sedating properties, some people who take antianxiety medication experience paradoxical excitement. The most common paradoxical reactions are increased anxiety, irritability, and agitation.
8. Many medications originally approved for the treatment of depression have been found to relieve symptoms of anxiety. These include certain selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), tricyclic antidepressants (TCAs), monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs), and the newer atypical antidepressants.
9. People over age sixty-five should be cautious about taking antianxiety drugs since they are more sensitive to the sedating effects of these medications. Even small doses can cause confusion, amnesia, loss of balance, and cognitive impairment that looks like dementia. If you are pregnant or have problems with alcohol, you may also have problems with antianxiety medication. Always give the prescribing doctor a complete medical and psychological history.
10. Medication for anxiety should always be combined with cognitive behavioral therapy and attention to lifestyle issues including exercise, sleep patterns, and nutrition.

# Keeping Track of How Medication Affects You

Many people decide to take medication to help with their problems, particularly their anxiety and depression. This is a decision you should make with your therapist and a physician with a knowledge of psychotropic medications. If you do decide to take medication, you might not experience immediate relief. In fact, while there have been many advances in psychopharmacology, finding the right medication to help you with your anxiety will almost always take some time.

There are different types of medications that help change the balance of chemicals that affect your emotions, and these are frequently taken in combination. It takes time and patience to determine exactly which combination of medications will work best for you. Unfortunately, there is no simple formula that will guide a physician to give you the exact medication that will help you with your anxiety.

It is important to remember that psychological problems can also be a side effect of medications you take for other purposes. For example, drugs that treat high blood pressure can trigger anxiety. Always consult with your physician and pharmacist about the side effects of your prescription and nonprescription medication and ask how they interact and possibly affect your mood.

Keeping track of how you feel and function is really the only way for your prescribing physician to know which medications help your anxiety. Use this worksheet to keep track of your prescription and nonprescription medication, and bring it with you whenever you have an appointment with your doctor.

Date	Medication	Dosage	Time taken	Side effects	Mood



## **Appendix B: Anxiety and the COVID-19 Pandemic**

# Coping with Face Mask Anxiety

**Objective:** To identify ways to help you overcome fear and anxiety related to wearing a face mask.

## You Should Know

Even though you want to help stop the spread of coronavirus and keep yourself safe, you might be struggling with wearing a face mask. Quite a few people say that when they put on a face mask, they worry they will have a difficult time breathing, and *their worrying actually makes this come true*. In other words, it is not the mask itself that is causing breathing difficulties, but rather the anxiety about having your mouth covered that causes you to feel your breathing is restricted.

## What to Do

There are also other reasons why people have difficulty wearing a face mask. Check off any of the following statements that apply to you.

- \_\_\_\_\_ I feel dizzy or sick when I wear a face mask.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I feel trapped or claustrophobic when I wear a face mask.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Covering my face changes the way I look, making me feel like I look foolish.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Having certain materials touch my face bothers me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I wear glasses, and they steam up so I cannot see clearly, causing me to feel upset.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I feel like I am being smothered by the mask.
- \_\_\_\_\_ My breathing is shallow, and I am afraid I will hyperventilate.

You might never feel totally comfortable wearing a face mask; however, there are things you can do to make the experience easier. Here are some tips:

- Get fresh air outside before and after you put on your mask.
- Do something to relax before and after you wear a mask; for example, breathing exercises or meditation.
- Choose a face covering that hangs down your neck (a neck gaiter), rather than one that fits around your jaw.
- Keep your body as cool as possible; for example, wear loose-fitting clothing.
- Add a scent to your mask, such as lavender oil.

- Experiment with different fabric types or ways to secure your mask. Some fit around the ears, some tie behind your head. Take the time to find a face mask that is most comfortable for you.
- Choose a transparent mask or see-through face covering so your face is not obscured.
- Calm yourself by focusing on your surroundings rather than on the face mask.
- Distract yourself; for example, listen to music or podcasts through headphones.
- Remind yourself that wearing a face mask is important for your health and the health of others.
- Use calming statements to get through your anxiety, like “I will be okay,” or “I can get through this.”

Write down ideas from the above list you think will help you cope with wearing a face mask.

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These tips might reduce your anxiety, but the best way to overcome your face mask anxiety is to just gradually increase your time wearing a mask—even if it bothers you. Wear a mask for five minutes, then ten minutes, then twenty minutes, then thirty minutes, then longer (especially if you expect to be required to wear a mask for longer periods of time; for example, on an airplane). This method of gradually facing your fear and anxiety, also called exposure therapy, is the best way to get over any fear.

Many people tell us that wearing a face mask will be required in some places for months or even years to come, even after the COVID-19 pandemic is over. However, the good news is that manufacturers are rushing to improve face masks, making them more comfortable and easier to breathe through.

What else can you do to reduce your anxiety and distress about wearing a face mask?

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## Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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# Coping with Dental Anxiety During the COVID-19 Pandemic

**Objective:** To reduce your dental anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic through education and preparation.

## You Should Know

If you have dental anxiety, your fear of going to the dentist may be magnified by the thought of becoming infected with COVID-19 during a dental procedure. Even if you have been quarantined, you may have pressing dental needs, and you might have to visit your dentist for an urgent matter. The best way to deal with your fear and uncertainty is to communicate with dental staff, prepare for your appointment, and educate yourself about protecting yourself if you require an in-person dental appointment.

Now that stay-at-home orders are being lifted, dental practices are reopening. According to the American Dental Association, no cases of COVID-19 have been attributed to any dental practices in the United States. Dental staff know some patients continue to be worried enough to avoid dental offices, even if they are in pain or overdue for important procedures. Delaying checkups or care for dental pain can potentially turn a small problem into a root canal, infection, or tooth extraction—adding treatment time, higher costs, and even more pain. Dental staff can provide comfort and security during these uncertain times.

## What to Do

Here are some tips on how you can work as a team with dental staff to cope with dental anxiety during the pandemic:

**Communicate.** When you call the dental office:

- Honestly discuss any symptoms you have, travel history, exposure to coronavirus, and dental anxiety triggers.
- Let them know if your situation is an emergency, and explain any underlying medical conditions so they know whether you are a high-risk patient.
- Ask about the office's infection control practices, starting with what happens before the visit.
- Inquire whether patients are screened over the phone before coming into the office. All patients should be screened; if they are not, that is a red flag.
- Understand your dentist can disclose your Patient Identifiable Information (PII) to authorities for contact tracing if contamination occurs within the dental office.



**Discuss telehealth as an option.** Many dental offices are providing telehealth services—appointments by phone or virtual visits using video chat. Ask to schedule a telehealth appointment with your dentist for a new or ongoing nonurgent matter. If your dentist would like to see you in person following the telehealth session, they will let you know. Your dentist will explain the risks of having a dental treatment during the pandemic.

**Understand the requirements for sanitation and disinfection.** The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has set specific guidelines for dental practices to ensure the safety of their patients and staff. Dental offices have protective equipment and follow safety measures to help protect you, the dentist and office staff, and other patients. Dental staff have been instructed to follow these steps by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC):

- Wash hands frequently for twenty seconds or use 60 percent alcohol sprays or gels.
- Wear face masks and other personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Practice social distancing.
- Ensure proper disposal of used tissues, face masks, and other contaminated items.
- Avoid aerosol-generating procedures (for example, use of dental handpieces, air/water syringe, ultrasonic scalers) if possible.
- Consider using HEPA filters and ultraviolet irradiation of upper-room air to kill any circulating germs during aerosol-generating procedures.
- Allow appropriate space between waiting room chairs, or let patients wait in their cars until they are called in for appointments.
- Clean clinical spaces after each patient, and clean common spaces several times throughout the day.

**Educate yourself.** Dental offices are following new protocols and procedures during the COVID-19 pandemic. Extra precautions such as those outlined above have been put into place to keep patients and staff safe. You can find detailed information on your dentist's website or by calling the office.

**Plan your dental appointment.** It is important to know what to expect before your appointment so you can prepare everything you will need. Have forms, insurance documents, and a face mask ready to take to your appointment. Check with the dental staff to see if you can submit your paperwork and insurance information via fax or email before your appointment. If possible, wait in your car until the staff are ready to see you.

**Use protective items.** When you enter the dental practice, keep your mouth, nose, and eyes covered with protective equipment before and after your dental procedure. Keep the following items handy during your appointment:

- Face mask
- Face shield
- Disposable gloves
- Tissues
- Alcohol-based wipes or hand sanitizer gel (*at least 60 percent alcohol*)
- Disinfectant spray for your shoes, car, or other items

Dental staff are trying to make patients feel as comfortable as possible during these uncertain times. They will follow a protocol to keep you safe, and you should do what is necessary to reduce your anxiety and keep yourself healthy. To help you, respond to the questions that follow.

Do you have an urgent dental situation that might require an in-person appointment? \_\_\_\_\_  
If not, will you request a telehealth appointment? \_\_\_\_\_

Write down the questions you will ask when you call to make your appointment. Have you reviewed your dentist's website for current protocols? Why or why not? Explain.

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Outline the steps you will take to ensure you are comfortable during your dental appointment:

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What else will help you feel more comfortable visiting the dentist during the COVID-19 pandemic?

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Is there anything else you can do to lessen your anxiety?

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Did this exercise reduce your anxiety about visiting the dentist during the COVID-19 pandemic? Explain.

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### **Reflections on This Exercise**

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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# Coping with Sleep Problems During the Pandemic

**Objective:** To develop a habit of focusing on feelings during the day to improve your sleep.

## You Should Know

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, you may be experiencing disrupted or poor sleep. You may lie awake, unable to fall asleep. You may wake up in the middle of the night and find your mind beginning to race, or you may wake up very early in the morning and lie awake for a long time. Maybe your sleep patterns have been thrown off—you are awake when you should be sleeping, and you want to sleep when you need to be awake.

What is it about the pandemic that is making it so challenging to get a good night's sleep?

Researchers have identified five common pandemic-related causes of sleep problems:

**Loss of structure.** If you are working remotely, quarantined, or furloughed, you probably no longer need to get up as early, commute, or juggle multiple deadlines or demands. When you have demands placed on you from the outside (employer, children's school schedules, and so forth), you are forced to follow a regular routine. If you have lost some of those external demands, your routine is disrupted. You might feel uprooted and out of control. Along with the disruption in routine, regular healthy habits—such as eating nourishing meals, showering each day, and exercising—begin to slip. Healthy habits support you in managing and coping with stress related to the loss of structure and routine.

**Anxiety and fear of the unknown.** The pandemic has created stress, anxiety, and/or fear in everyone. You might ask yourself, “Will someone I love get sick? Will I get sick and maybe even die? Will the economy recover? Will I ever return to work? Will my family survive financially?” Depending on where you live, you may still be in lockdown or transitioning in phases. The lack of answers and uncertainty about the future makes it difficult to slow your mind. You might toss and turn at night, ruminating and obsessing about the what-ifs.

**Loss.** You may have lost your job, income, or social plans. Projects may have been delayed or canceled. You may be grieving if you have lost friends or family members to illness. Your usual social connections and activities may feel very distant. You may long for the past, when things were “normal.”

**Reduced stimulation.** Pre-pandemic you may have had a busy life—socializing with friends and family, working hard, shopping, attending concerts or other events, or going to the gym. All these activities stimulated you, allowing you to burn energy. Now you may be using far less energy, causing you to feel restless, antsy, or jittery.

**Lack of connection.** Feelings of disconnection and loneliness are a real consequence of the pandemic. If you feel alone, you have lots of company!

You may believe that overthinking is keeping you up at night, but it is actually your feelings. Feelings are messages from your body, and they are closely connected to the problems and challenges you face every day. Feelings are supposed to be helpful, guiding you to take action or

focus on finding solutions. Feelings can inform, empower, and motivate you to do what is required to be happy and healthy. If you ignore feelings, they will get stronger. Yes, feelings may be keeping you awake at night—but they are incredible messengers. When you are lying in bed, there is nothing external stimulating you. Feelings you have been ignoring or suppressing will take the opportunity to surface so your brain can acknowledge and process them.

## What to Do

The way to sleep better during this stressful time is to acknowledge and process your feelings—but during the day, not at night. You can make a conscious effort to process them during the day, freeing your mind and body to get much-needed sleep.

For the next two weeks, spend a few minutes every day sitting quietly and focusing your attention inward to process your feelings. Close your eyes, and tune into the sensations in your body, focusing on how and what you are feeling. Sit with your feelings instead of escaping or ignoring them. Complete the following chart for two weeks, then answer the questions that follow.

Date	Amount of time	Feelings that came up	Notes


Describe the problems you had with sleep before starting this exercise.

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Have your sleep problems gotten worse since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic? Explain.

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After completing the exercise for at least two weeks, describe the most common feelings you experienced. You might ask yourself why you are having those feelings, what they mean, and what your body is trying to tell you. Be specific.

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What can you do to address your feelings? Perhaps you need to set up a daily routine, make the effort to connect with people, exercise, talk to a friend, or allow yourself to grieve. Brainstorm ideas here.

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**Note:** *If you feel nothing during this exercise, your feelings might be suppressed, which is sometimes the result of childhood emotional neglect. You can still get in touch with and process feelings that are disrupting your sleep. A counselor or psychotherapist can help you with this.*

Since you have completed the exercise, how is your sleep? The same, better, or worse? Explain.

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### Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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# Protecting Yourself from Anxiety Contagion During the Pandemic

**Objective:** To reduce the likelihood of pandemic-related “anxiety contagion.”

## You Should Know

It is normal to experience anxiety during the coronavirus pandemic, especially when there are still so many unknowns and our lives may change from day to day. However, many people find that their anxiety levels are getting out of hand, and they have a difficult time dealing with anything else.

Studies suggest that negative emotional states are contagious, much like the virus. The more you are exposed to panicky and anxious people, the more anxiety you are likely to experience high levels of anxiety. Fortunately, studies also find that positive emotional states are also contagious. Being in the presence of people who are calm, confident, and positive can reduce your fear and anxiety. This is especially true when you are around positive people who are authority figures, or people you depend on and respect. You can fight the effects of anxiety contagion by spending more time with people in your life who make you feel comforted, safe, and calm—or just make you laugh.

Additionally, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that you limit the time you spend watching the news, reading headlines online, and visiting social media sites. Hearing about the pandemic constantly will serve to increase your anxiety, fear, and feelings of helplessness.

## What to Do

This worksheet is designed to help you regain some control over your anxiety by limiting what some people refer to as anxiety contagion. Write the names of people like this below, and also note how you will communicate with them (for example, face-to-face, by phone, or by video chat).

Your supports	How you will communicate with them



If you cannot name any personal supports, consider watching webinars and videos that offer encouragement, calmness, and reassurance. Personal development websites and apps like Sounds True, Shambhala Publications, Headspace, and Simple Habit are all offering free courses and meditations to help people navigate through fear and anxiety.

Write down some resources you plan to explore:

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Here are some suggestions for reducing your exposure to news and screen time featuring pandemic-related information:

- Limit your viewing time of coronavirus news. For instance, if you usually watch the news or read headlines several hours a day, try reducing that to one or two scheduled times a day—and ideally, not at bedtime.
- Unsubscribe from media alerts and breaking news on your phone and email.
- Pick a single news source you trust.
- Turn your phone off while sleeping.
- Look for feel-good stories that highlight the kindness, creativity, and problem-solving abilities of people around the world.

Add other ideas here:

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Which activities were most effective in dealing with anxiety contagion?

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What improvements have you noticed in your own anxiety level and mood as a result of this exercise?

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### **Reflections on This Exercise**

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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What else can you do to make progress in this area?

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# Don't Let Your Worries Run Your Life

If you answered yes to these questions, you likely have generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), a problem that affects over 3 percent of the US population. GAD is diagnosed when a person finds it difficult to control worrying on more days than not for at least six months and has three or more of the following symptoms:

- Feeling nervous, irritable, or on edge
- Having a sense of impending danger, panic, or doom
- Having an increased heart rate
- Breathing rapidly (hyperventilation), sweating, and/or trembling
- Feeling weak or tired
- Having difficulty concentrating
- Having trouble sleeping
- Experiencing gastrointestinal problems

But you don't have to let your worries ruin your life! You can live your life in the moment. You can do things and go places whenever you want. You can live a fulfilling and happier life in just a few months. This book can help. Its four main sections provide forty-one worksheets to help you overcome your GAD. Although the exercises can be used on your own, we highly recommend you use this book with a qualified psychotherapist who can guide you.

This workbook will take you through four steps to overcoming your worries. Each step corresponds to a section of the workbook where you will learn specific skills on your journey to overcoming your anxiety disorder.

Learning new skills takes practice. Above all, it is important to be patient with yourself and persist in using these techniques even though they may at times be difficult. The treatment of anxiety, or any mental health problem for that matter, can quite literally change the way your brain works.

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## About the Author:

Lawrence E. Shapiro, PhD, is a prolific author of self-help books and the inventor of more than 100 therapeutic games. Dr. Shapiro is known for his practical approach to helping others. He has written workbooks, storybooks, card games, board games, and smartphone apps. His work has been translated into twenty-seven languages.

## About the Series:

Between Sessions Resources produces a variety of tools to enhance the effectiveness of psychotherapy and counseling. This workbook is part of the company's ongoing efforts to standardize the treatment of both common and uncommon mental health problems.

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