

# FEELING ANXIOUS?

*Tools for overcoming anxiety*



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## Are you anxious?

Do you have an upcoming appointment, test or procedure?

Do they make you feel uncomfortable?

Are you afraid of something? – Pain? Consequences? Something else?

**Your feelings are understandable and common. The purpose of this guide is to make you feel better.**

## Why am I anxious?

From mild nervousness to fear, a lot goes on in the body and mind.

An uncomfortable situation creates anxiety which may be intensified by your thoughts. – When thoughts become negative in an exaggerated way, the situation feels more threatening than it actually is.

A situation that makes you anxious creates sensations in your body and noticing them makes you feel even worse. When one is anxious, the body is preparing for battle in a way.

**It is possible to stop this chain reaction which leads to fear or panic. This is a skill that can be practised.**

On the following pages you will find tips and exercises that can make you feel better in situations that make you anxious.

## Path to fear

### UNCOMFORTABLE SITUATION

E.g. a blood test, an imaging test



### SENSATIONS IN THE BODY

E.g. increasing heart rate, sweating



### DISTRESSING THOUGHTS

E.g. "What if I faint because of the pain? What if I throw up?"



### INTENSIFYING OF SENSATIONS

E.g. the heart beating faster, the arm pits becoming wet...



### EXAGGERATED ASSUMPTION OF HOW THREATENING THE SITUATION IS

E.g. "I cannot handle this at all!"



## FEAR, PANIC



## How can I calm myself down?

Accept and face your worries. Avoidance and forced positivity will make the situation worse.

When you are in the middle of a situation that makes you anxious, try to pay attention to things other than your anxiety or the sensations in your body. Read a magazine, look around or think about the previous day.

If this is not possible and the anxiety is bothersome, try doing some calming exercises. You may feel better by doing some exercises involving the body, such as a particular kind of breathing or challenging your own thoughts.

Try the calming exercises presented on the following pages.



## Try this 1

### *Calming breathing*

1. Find a comfortable position. Don't, however, cross your legs.
2. Place one hand on your chest and the other on your belly.
3. Breathe in and out slowly (if possible, through your nose).
4. Try to breathe in a way that only the hand resting on your belly moves when breathing. Your chest should remain still.
5. Pay attention to your breathing and continue to breathe peacefully for a while.

This so-called **diaphragmatic** breathing usually relieves anxiety immediately. It has also been shown to relieve headaches, to lower blood pressure and help with insomnia.

## Try this 2

### *Concentrate for a while*

Stop everything you are doing for a while and concentrate on your worry. Accept it as it is. Think about it and yourself with kindness. This is what you are feeling now and it is alright.

Listen to the sensations in your body for a moment: the peaceful rhythm of your breathing, how your clothes feel against your skin and how the floor feels underneath your feet. Observe yourself peacefully, irrespective of what your sensations are like. Make a note of them without judgment. Close your eyes for a moment.

Imagine what your worry might look like. Is it a box, ball, bag or something else? Then let it go. See in your mind's eye how your worry peacefully leaves you. Close your eyes again for a moment.

Return to the present moment. Examine your mind and body again. Perhaps you feel more relaxed than a moment ago. Start the exercise from the beginning when needed.

**Exercises like these of living in the moment often work by relaxing the body and the mind.**





# Try this 3

## Challenge your interpretation

When anxious, one often draws negative conclusions. Then the likelihood of a negative outcome will often not be evaluated and the possibility of less negative options will be ignored.

### An example of a thought

I have been feeling strange. The results from this procedure will most likely confirm that I am seriously ill.

### Outcome:

The procedure is my sentence and waiting for it makes me scared and anxious.

### Challenging your thought:

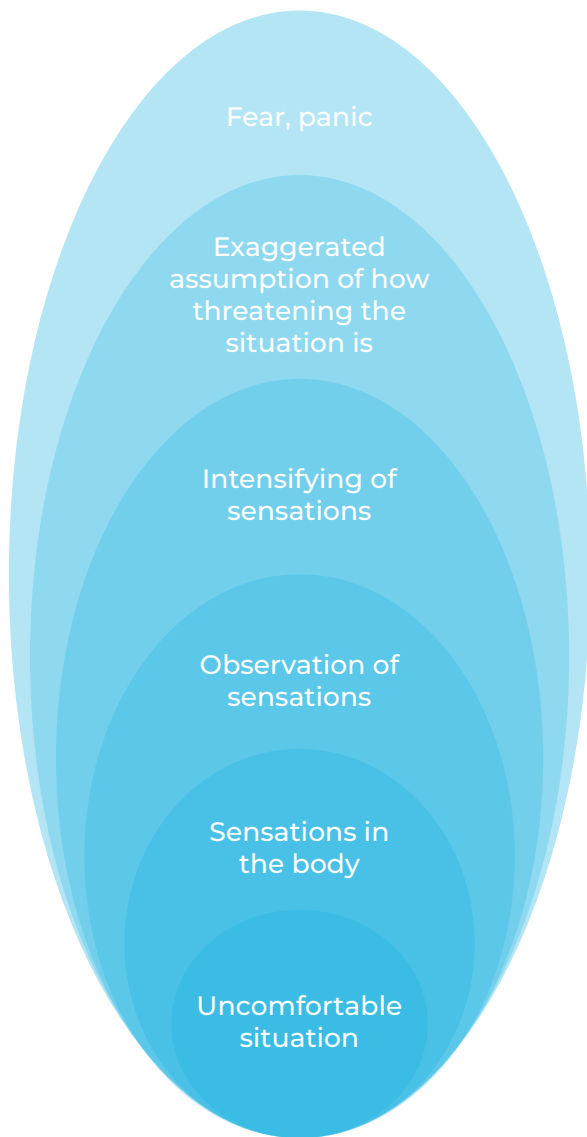
I may be feeling strange because I am unsure and worried about my health. The upcoming procedure will give me more information about an important matter.

### Alternative outcome:

I am nervous about having the procedure but on the other hand, it will decrease the uncertainty. My anxiety says nothing about the results of the procedure and the procedure itself is not threatening.

Now choose something that worries you right now. Then think about your answers to the following questions. This often puts the matter into perspective.

Worry:
<i>The worst that could happen:</i>
<i>The best that could happen:</i>
<i>The most likely outcome:</i>
<i>If the worst happened, what could I do to cope with it?</i>



## AUTHORS

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## More information

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## How to cope with an illness?

Check out the tips from psychologists for the most common concerns and for coping with an illness.



Read more about the Guide for Coping for Patients and Their Loved Ones here.

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