

WELLNESS

# Curb Your Anxiety

Keep calm and carry on with these 10 tips

DO YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO IN THE moment when anxiety starts to take hold? Try these 10 expert-backed suggestions to relax your mind and help you regain control of your thoughts.

→ **Press Reset**  
When you worry about the worst-case scenario, ask yourself how realistic your fears are.



**1. Stay in your time zone.** Anxiety is a future-oriented state of mind. So instead of worrying about what's going to happen, "reel yourself back to the present," says Tamar Chansky, PhD, a psychologist and author of *Freeing Yourself from Anxiety*. Ask yourself: What's happening right now? Am I safe? Is there something I need to do right now? If not, make an "appointment" to check in with yourself later in the day to revisit your worries so those distant scenarios don't throw you off track, she says.

**2. Relabel what's happening.** Panic attacks can often make you feel like you're dying or having a heart attack. Remind yourself: "I'm having a panic attack, but it's harmless, it's temporary, and there's nothing I need to do," Chansky says. Plus, keep in mind it really is the opposite of a sign of impending death—your body is activating its fight-or-flight response, the system that's going to keep you alive, she says.

BY THE NUMBERS

**40 million**  
Number of adults in the United States who have anxiety disorders.

**\$42 billion** Cost of treating anxiety disorders each year.

**36%** Percentage of people with social anxiety disorder who live with symptoms for 10 years or more before getting help.

**6 million** Number of American adults who have panic disorder in a given year. Typically developing in early adulthood, women are twice as likely as men to have panic disorder.

REVIEWED BY *Arefa Cassaibhoy, MD, MPH*  
*WebMD Senior Medical Director*

**3. Fact-check your thoughts.**

People with anxiety often fixate on worst-case scenarios, Chansky says. To combat these worries, think about how realistic they are. Say you're nervous about a big presentation at work. Rather than think, "I'm going to bomb," for example, say, "I'm nervous, but I'm prepared. Some things will go well, and some may not," she suggests. Getting into a pattern of rethinking your fears helps train your brain to come up with a rational way to deal with your anxious thoughts.

**4. Breathe in and out.** Deep breathing helps you calm down. While you may have heard about specific breathing exercises, you don't need to worry about counting out a certain number of breaths, Chansky says. Instead just focus on evenly inhaling and exhaling. This will help slow down and re-center your mind, she says. 4-7-8

**5. Follow the 3-3-3 rule.** Look around you and name three things you see. Then, name three sounds you hear. Finally, move three parts of your body—your ankle, fingers, or arm. Whenever you feel your brain going 100 miles per hour, this mental trick can help center your mind, bringing you back to the present moment, Chansky says.

**6. Just do something.** Stand up, take a walk, throw away a piece of trash from your desk—any action that interrupts your train of thought helps you regain a sense of control, Chansky suggests.

**7. Stand up straight.** "When we are anxious, we protect our upper body—where our heart and lungs are located—by hunching over," Chansky says. For an immediate physical antidote to this natural reaction, pull your shoulders back, stand or sit with your feet apart, and open your chest. This helps your body start to sense that it's back in control, she says.

**8. Stay away from sugar.** It may be tempting to reach for something sweet when you're stressed, but that chocolate bar can do more harm than good, as research shows that eating too much sugar can exacerbate anxious feelings. Instead of reaching into the candy bowl, Chansky says, drink a glass of water or eat protein, which will provide a slow energy your body can use to recover.

**9. Ask for a second opinion.** Call or text a friend or family member and run through your worries with them, Chansky says. "Saying them aloud to someone else can help you see them clearly for what they are." It can also help to write your fears on paper.

**10. Watch a funny video.** This final tactic may be the easiest one yet: Cue up clips of your favorite comedian or funny TV show. Laughing is a good prescription for an anxious mind, Chansky says. Research shows that laughter has lots of benefits for our mental health and well-being; one study found that humor could help lower anxiety as much as (or even more than) exercise.