

41 Healthy *and 8 Not-So-Healthy* Ways To

Reduce Anxiety & Depression



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The COVID Pandemic may be over, but another pandemic is still wreaking havoc for billions of people around the world.

This “*silent pandemic*” is often ignored by mainstream media, but it is apparent in every news broadcast, lingering beneath every headline.

We are living through an unprecedented pandemic of *anxiety & depression*.

This pandemic is just as important as any pandemic in the history of humanity. Physical health is not the only thing that we should focus on. Mental health is not a secondary thing that should be deprioritized or ignored.

Hundreds of thousands of humans die from suicide each year: one every 40 seconds. Suicide is [one of the leading causes of death in young people](#).

And for the rest of us, anxiety and depression have a huge impact in our lives as well.

Health, happiness, productivity, career, finances, relationships, family... all stem from our state of mind!

Even our physical health relies on our mental health... depressed people tend to neglect things like healthy eating and physical exercise.

Here at Meditation Magazine, we understand the supreme importance of mental health, and the havoc that anxiety & depression can wreak on your life.

Reducing Anxiety & Depression

Over the years, I've found dozens of helpful techniques to reduce anxiety and depression, in the short term and in the long term. I tend to think of long-term techniques as “healthy” and short-term “quick fix” techniques as “not-so-healthy,” but that dichotomy is not so clear.

Reducing anxiety and depression in the short term (in other words, *in each moment*) does generally contribute to a real reduction of anxiety and depression in the long term. This is why I won't refer to most quick-fix solutions as “unhealthy” — many of them do also improve your mental health (to varying extents) in the long-term as well.

The only anxiety-and-depression-reducing quick-fix techniques that I would consider truly “unhealthy” are the ones that have the potential to significantly *increase* anxiety & depression, or otherwise harm your mental health, in the long-term.



41 *Healthy Ways*
To Reduce Anxiety & Depression
For The **Long Term**

1. Practice Meditation (*heals the roots of anxiety*)

Meditation is one of only a handful of techniques that can fundamentally heal the roots of anxiety & depression in the long-term. By letting go of your attachments to thoughts, tapping into a deep sense of inner stillness, and realizing your essential Oneness with the Universe, you can fundamentally change your relationship with anxiety. To use meditation to heal your anxiety, check out my course: [Working With Your Anxiety \(Instead Of Against It\)](#) ✨

2. Exercise until you're drenched in sweat

Get sweaty! I know it's gross, and I know it adds to the laundry pile and you have to take the time to shower, but it's totally worth it. [Research shows](#) that moderate and intense exercise release endorphins, keep you feeling good, relieve stress, and reduce anxiety and depression.

3. Keep your body moving

While intense exercise is great, consistent movement is perhaps even more important. Keep your body moving, even if it's just walking around the house. An active lifestyle is one of the best ways to reduce anxiety and depression in the long term.

4. Practice Breathwork

The breath is the key to gaining conscious control over your inner emotional states.

Practicing intense, energy-pumping breathwork (like The Wim Hof method) can teach you to produce and control excitement & anxiety at will.

Deep, slow, diaphragmatic breathing, on the other hand, can help you cultivate gentle states of inner peace and stillness.

5. Remember: It's OK to feel this way (can quickly defuse a panic attack)

Fighting your feelings, resisting them, and getting anxious about them, is a perfect recipe for making them worse.

Acceptance is one of the most important tools you can use to dissolve anxiety and depression, both in the short term and the long term.

Accept your anxiety/depression as a natural part of life.

Realize that the way you feel is a natural part of being human, a natural response to whatever circumstances or chemical states that you are currently experiencing.

If you're having a panic attack right now, or if you have them every so often, take a moment now to dive deeper into acceptance, by reading our other article: [The 6 Simple Words That Short-Circuit Panic Attacks](#).

6. Practice equanimity (fundamentally heals anxiety)

Equanimity is a state of non-judgmental awareness. That means, for example, that you can FEEL the tightness in your chest, you can FEEL the tension in your shoulders, you can feel the emotions of hopelessness, anxiety, or what-have-you... but don't judge the sensations as positive or negative. Just feel them, experience them, and don't worry about them. This is one of the most powerful ways to transcend anxiety and depression.



7. Remember that this, too, shall pass

The Buddha's second "mark of Existence" is "anicca," roughly translated as "impermanence." The Buddha wanted to remind everyone that everything is constantly changing, nothing is permanent, and that this anxiety, too, shall pass.

8. Get things done

(utilizes anxiety for its evolutionary purpose)

If your anxiety is related to a specific situation — like a messy house, a failing business, a work or school deadline that's fast approaching, etc — take focused steps to remedy the situation(s)!

One might say that the entire reason for the existence of anxiety in the first place... the reason it evolved in us as human animals... is to spur us to take action. Once the situation is remedied, the anxiety will subside, and you'll actually feel great about it!

But “fixing the situation” isn't the end-all of anxiety. The Buddha pointed out that, while fixing this situation may cure your anxiety for a short time, there will always be another problem to solve, and there will always be things that spur your anxiety. That's why, even though getting things done is one of the most direct “cures” for anxiety, it is important to have a wider array of strategies as well.



9. Eat healthy

Instead of stuffing donuts in your face, smoosh a delicious mango in there.

Increase your intake of vegetables. Try adding superfoods like hemp seeds, avocados and nutritional yeast.

Of course, what is life without fresh-baked cookies? Is an un-cheetoed life even worth living?

Healthy eating is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Find what works for you.

10. Develop & nurture loving relationships

[The Harvard Study of Adult Development](#) — the longest-running longitudinal study in the history of humanity — has finally concluded that the secret to health, happiness, and longevity, is: the warmth of your relationships.

This doesn't mean you need to get married, have a romantic partner, or anything like that. But when you are interacting with other people (and animals), do your best to relate to them in kind, compassionate, and loving ways.

But be careful [not to confuse niceness with kindness](#); there is a big difference!

11. Take hot baths & showers

A hot bath or shower can relax your muscles, release endogenous opioids, and relieve anxiety and depression in the short term.

If you incorporate hot baths and/or showers into your daily routine, these short-term effects can add up over time, leading to a somewhat more relaxed and happy life.

12. Take cold baths & showers

While warm baths & showers can be relaxing, cold baths & showers can invigorate you! While you might think that cold water immersion would increase your anxiety, Wim Hof has shown just the opposite. The cold water can put your body into survival mode for just long enough to forget about your anxiety, and come out feeling fresh and new.

13. Give more hugs & cuddles

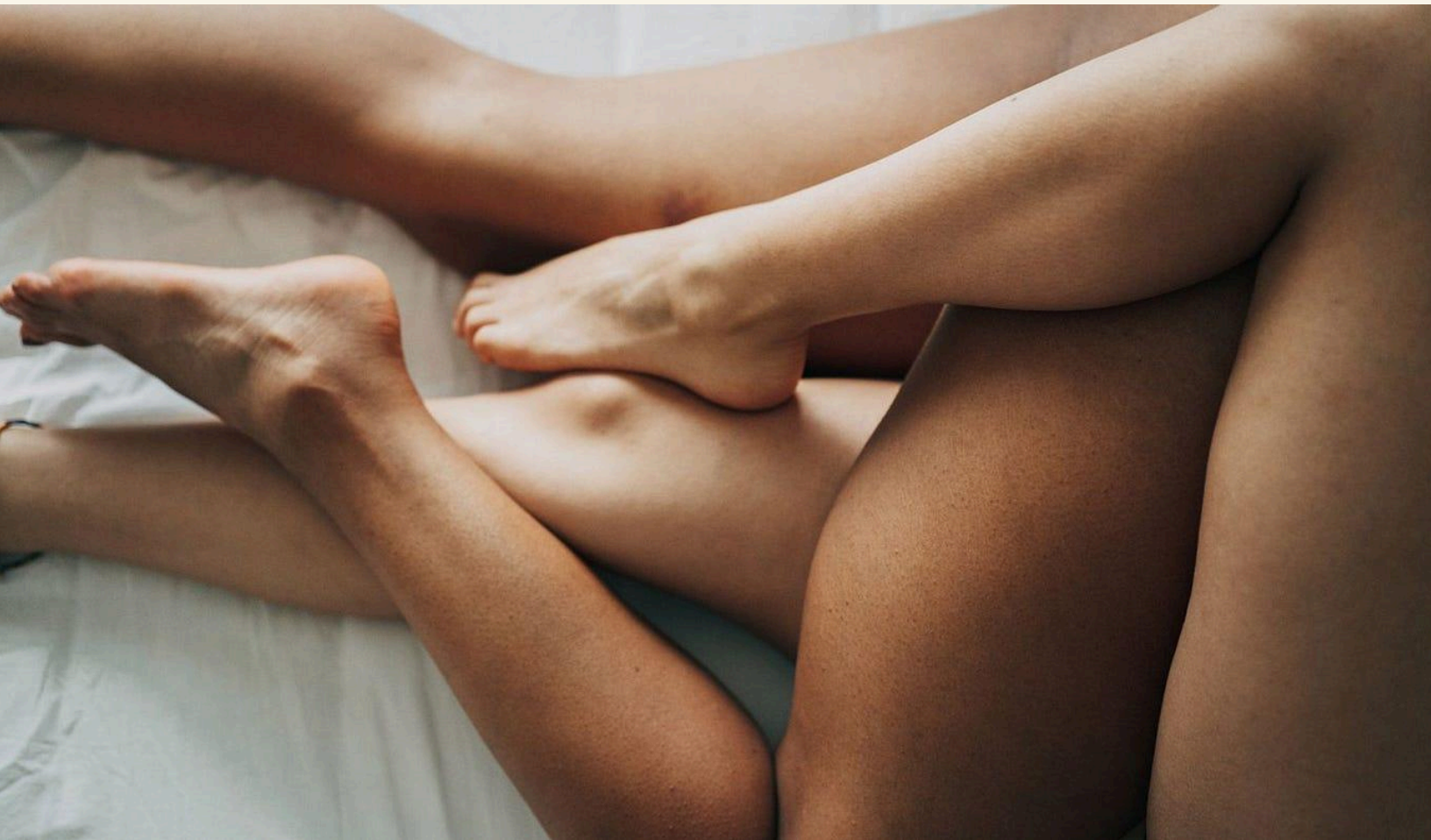
Human touch can release oxytocin – sometimes known as “the hug hormone” or “the happy hormone.” Hugs and cuddles have a powerful, primal way of reducing anxiety. Just think of how fast a crying baby calms down when picked up by a parent!

14. Talk it out with friends, family, or a therapist

Talking it out can be a great way to relieve anxiety... but don't be one of those people who unburdens, all the time, on everyone you meet! Moderation is key. Find the right times, and the right amount of time, to discuss your feelings with family, friends, and/or therapists.

15. Have more sex

Taking human touch to the next level... sex releases oxytocin, and a lot of other things as well. Sex can be a quick way to reduce your anxiety, but be careful not to become addicted, or to engage in risky sex that may leave you significantly unhealthier (and unhappier) in the long term.



16. Treat drugs, medicines, and pharmaceuticals with respect and caution, approaching them with a long-term outlook

The line between “drugs” and “medicines” is a blurry one. Drug stores sell medicines, but shady characters sell “drugs” 🧑🏻

One man’s “drug” is another’s “medicine.” Many governments classify plants and fungi like cannabis, magic mushrooms, peyote and ayahuasca as “illegal drugs,” but ask any Amazonian Shaman (or intellectual stoner) and they’ll describe those same substances as “sacred plant medicines.”

Yes, the line between “drugs” and “medicines” can be seen as a semantic difference, but it is an important one. The word “drugs” has more of a “short term fun, long term harm” connotation, while “medicine” is something that is meant more for long-term health and is not necessarily enjoyable in the short term.

There’s nothing wrong with short-term enjoyment — the happier the moments, the happier the life! — but taking drugs & medicines (and pharmaceuticals too!) with a short-term outlook can lead to addiction, illness, and even death.

When approached with a long-term strategy (for example, taking Ayahuasca with a shaman as a way to confront childhood trauma, or taking pharmaceuticals prescribed by a psychiatrist as a way to get through periods of extreme distress)... the same substances can be used to great effect, to increase health and happiness, and decrease anxiety & depression for the long-term.

17. Take vitamins & nutritional supplements

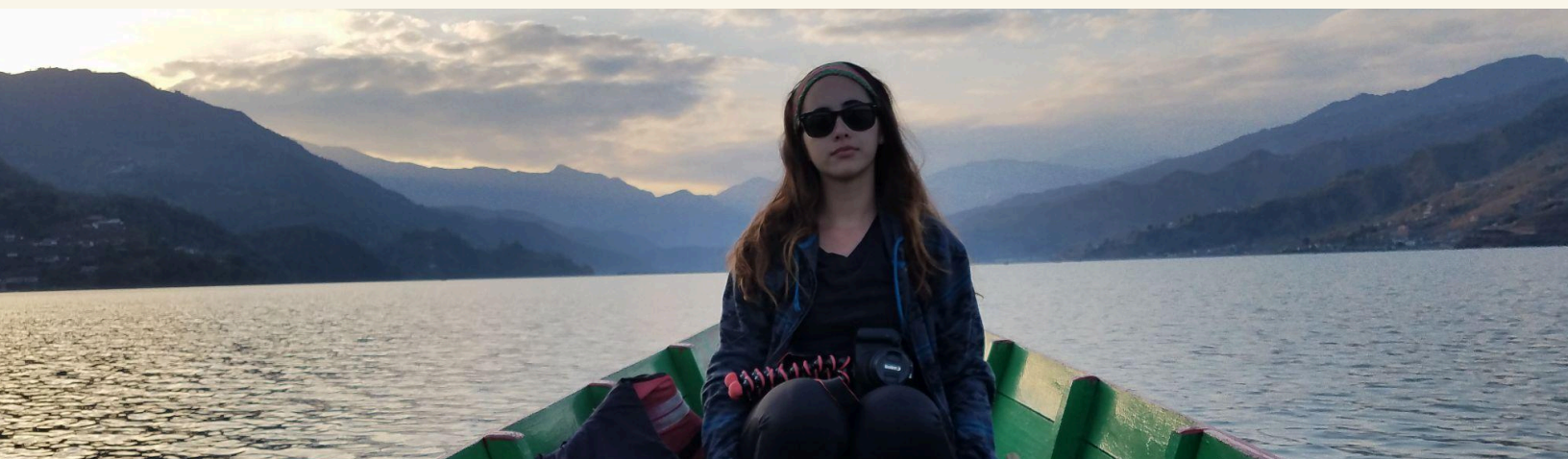
Anxiety and depression can sometimes stem from vitamin deficiencies! If that's the case for you, taking a daily multivitamin may be the best single thing you could do for your mental health.

Supplements like Kava, Ashwagandha, and Valerian can also interact with your serotonin, dopamine and GABA systems to produce relaxing and anxiolytic (anti-anxiety) effects. Incorporating these types of supplements into your diet can reduce anxiety in the short term... and as long as you continue using them, this can lead to long-term anxiety reduction as well.

18. Travel

While traveling can be challenging and even dangerous (especially in these crazy times), it can give you a fresh perspective on life, bring you the joy of new experiences, and expand your mind to new cultures and ways of thinking.

Traveling can even help you realize when your problems and anxieties are location-specific. You can't escape from your brain chemicals, and you can't escape from your thoughts and fears, but you can sometimes escape from difficult situations and toxic relationships, just by getting on an airplane!



19. Cultivate healthy sleep habits

Improving your sleep (getting 7-9 hours or deep restful sleep per night, and not much more or less than that, in a dark and quiet place, preferably during the nighttime hours) is possibly one of the most important things you can do to reduce your levels of depression and anxiety. Sleep is one of the cornerstones of mental health. Without good sleep, humans lose their minds. Messing with sleep is literally a method that is used to torture people.

20. Practice Gratitude

If your mind is constantly thinking of all the bad things in life, why not try remembering all the good things? Practicing gratitude (remembering all the things you're thankful for) can help in the moment, and if you incorporate it into your daily routine (say, after meditation in the morning), it can keep you happy and healthy in the long term as well.

21. Write down what you're anxious about, and note whether it's actually a real problem

If it's not a real problem, practice "letting go." It's not easy, but even just trying to let go is helpful.

If it is a real problem, try creating a step-by-step plan to improve the situation.

22. Get a massage

Massages are like a manual way to relax your muscles. Someone will actually get in there and relax them for you.

This is one of those short-term techniques that can help in the long-term if you approach them with a long-term strategy (for example, using monthly massages, or using massages when you're really stuck in stress, as a way to get back into a healthy flow).

23. Soothe your sense of smell with candles, incense, and essential oils

Indulging the senses can be extremely relaxing. For many people, the sense of smell can make a big impact on states of mind. Buddhist monasteries and Hindu ashrams often use incense for this reason. Spas often use candles and/or essential oils. All of these delightful smelling things are available for relatively low prices on the internet.

24. Eat “Healthy” foods that relieve anxiety, like dark chocolate and green tea

Indulging in healthy and delicious anxiolytic foods can be a delightful way to reduce anxiety and depression.

25. Practice relaxation techniques

If you're feeling stressed or anxious, it can be helpful to practice relaxation techniques (like [progressive muscle relaxation](#)) that can put your mind and body at ease.

26. Laugh

Laughter releases endorphins and starts a party in your brain with all kinds of happy chemicals. Seek out situations where you will laugh... whether it's a hilarious movie, or a "laughing meditation" class! You can even just... you know... laugh right now! Hahahaha. It feels awkward, but hey, if you're alone and nobody can hear you... *why not* just laugh?

27. Play with a baby or a child (or at least watch cute baby videos on YouTube)

Playing with a baby or child can remind you of innocence, childhood, and causeless joy.

It can also help you remember that while you can be truly valuable to others who are less mature and able than you are.

If you approach a baby with stern seriousness, or shy anxiety, they won't respond very well. To get a baby to laugh, you need to smile and laugh yourself. You need to loosen up, relax, enjoy seeing the cute baby, and smile from your heart.

28. Cultivate healthy self-talk

Sometimes, in our minds, we are very harsh on ourselves. We say things to ourselves that we would never say to our friends and loved ones.

The way we talk to ourselves becomes a habit. The bad news is, you might have some unhealthy habits related to self-talk. The good news is, you can change them! All you need to do is intentionally, consciously, talk to yourself differently. Instead of “Why do I always mess things up?” Try “Oh, I could probably have done better by doing abc, but I’m proud of myself for accomplishing xyz!”

29. Read

Reading can help in a lot of ways. Reading nonfiction (like this article) can provide you with strategies that you can use to improve your life, health, and happiness (in this case, to reduce anxiety and depression). Reading fiction can provide access to other lives, worlds and Universes, for short-term enjoyment, but also to gain alternate perspectives, wisdom, and empathy.

30. Volunteer / Help Others

Helping others in need is one of the surest ways to put your own problems in a proper perspective. It also helps take your mind off of yourself (so you’re less “self-centered”) and put it onto helping others. That’s why volunteering, and helping others, makes everyone involved feel good.

31. Listen to music

Listening to music that you love can release endorphins, serotonin and dopamine, and make you feel good. This can help reduce anxiety and depression in the short term, and put you in a good direction for the long term as well.

32. Shake it off

Research has shown that [shaking your body can help “shake off” anxiety and depression.](#)

It's easy to see it in nature: after two geese fight, they both flap their wings to “shake it off.” After a particularly traumatic experience, many animals will shake and shiver to release the tension and avoid holding on to trauma.

In human societies, we often think of shaking as a sign of weakness, and we intentionally avoid doing it. But this prevents us from releasing anxiety the natural way.

The next time you feel particularly anxious, go find a quiet place where there's nobody around to judge you, and just shake it off!

33. Dance it out

Dancing combines exercise, “shaking it off,” and music, for a powerful synergistic anxiolytic effect. The more energetically you dance, the more anxiety and depression you can shake off. You can even dance yourself into euphoria, bliss, ecstasy... which is why there are so many “ecstatic dance” meditation traditions, all around the world!

34. Practice diaphragmatic / deep belly breathing

Anxiety and depression often cause us to take shallow breaths... and in turn, those shallow breaths perpetuate states of anxiety and depression.

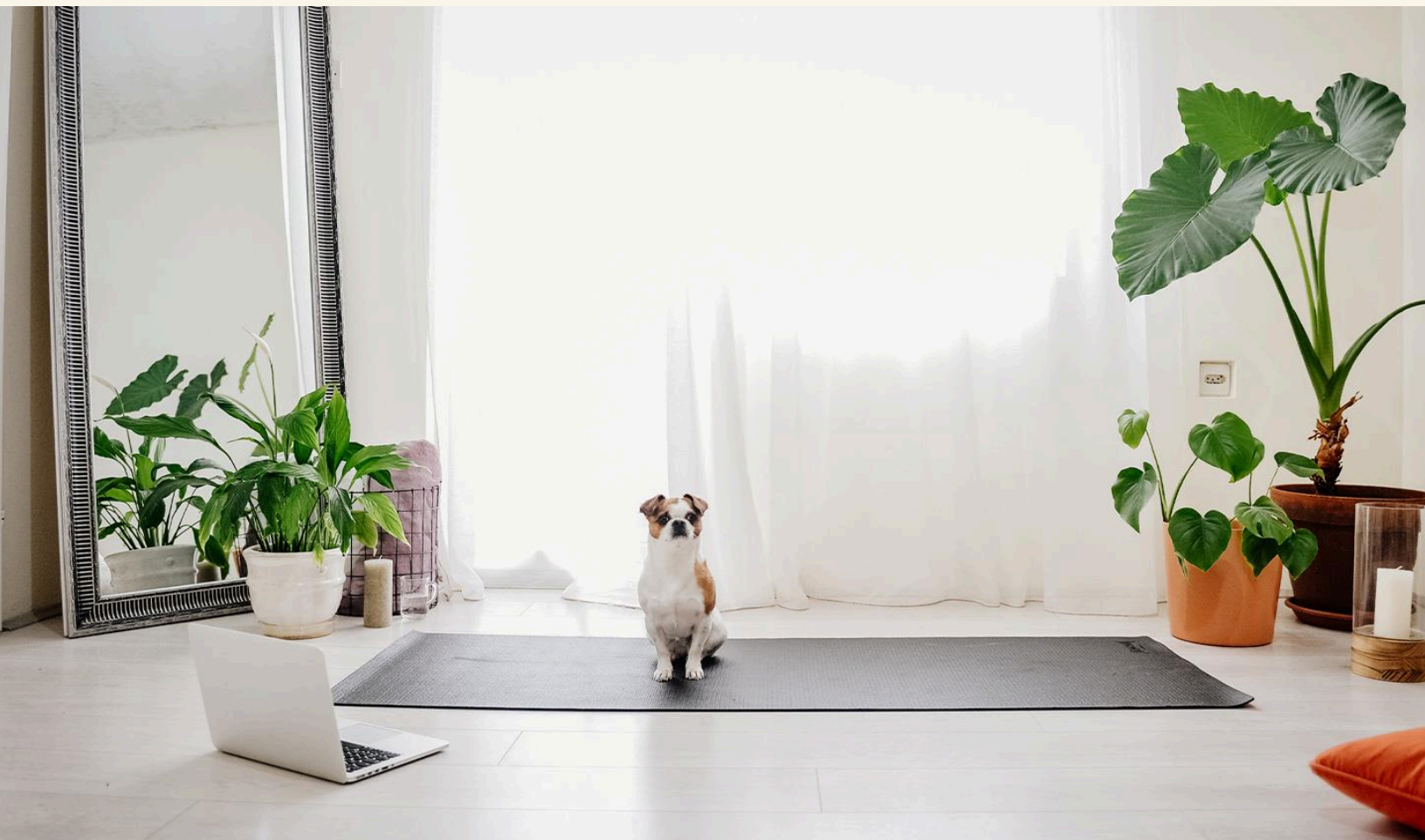
Try taking deeper breaths, by consciously contracting and relaxing your diaphragm (the muscle below your lungs, that controls your breathing). If you’ve never tried this before, just try taking a really deep breath that extends down to the bottom of your belly. The air won’t really fill your belly (it stays in your lungs), but your lungs will inflate to their full size and push your other organs down, so it feels like you’re breathing into your belly.

This deep, diaphragmatic breathing will help calm you and put you in a more relaxed and happy state of mind.

35. Cultivate a sustainable (minimalistic) lifestyle

When you live above your means — meaning, your lifestyle is nicer than you can really “afford” — it can contribute to financial stress and anxiety. While your house may be really beautiful, you know in the back of your mind that it could all disappear if you don’t keep producing more and more money.

When you live easily within your means, you may need to exercise discipline to forgo the fancier things in life — things that you technically have the power to, but probably *shouldn’t*, acquire. But this discipline is well rewarded, by a nervous system that feels settled and secure in the knowledge that even if something unexpectedly goes wrong, it will not cause major changes in your life.



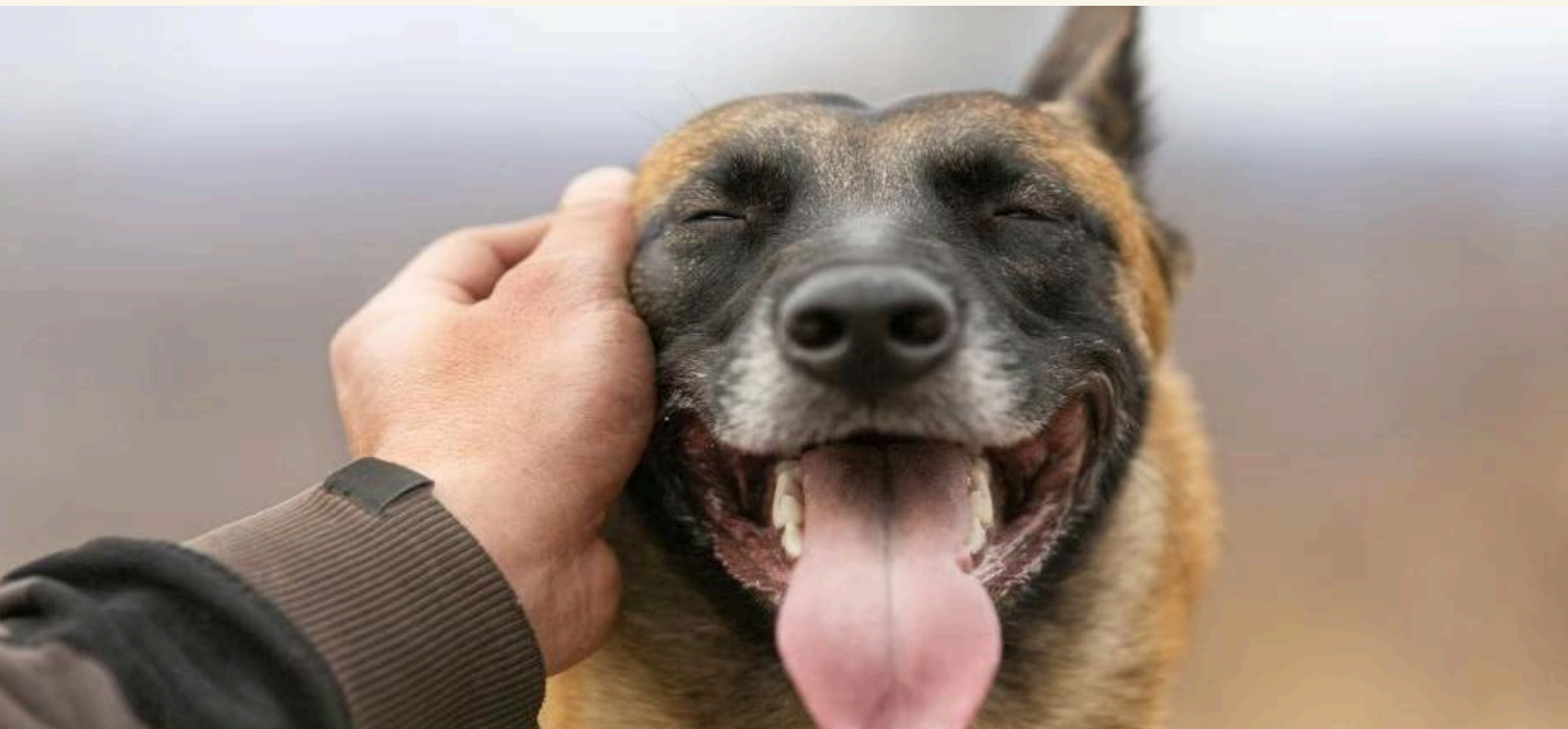
36. Pet a dog (or a cat, or a cow...)

Research has shown that petting non-human animals (and human ones as well!) can reduce anxiety and depression. This type of touch releases oxytocin, just like hugs and snuggles!

This well-researched effect has given rise to a whole industry of “therapy dogs” that go into hospitals for patients to pet and feel better.

You don’t need to “own” a pet to benefit from this effect. If you live in a city, you can often pet the cute puppies on their leashes as they pass you on the sidewalk! The general etiquette for petting sidewalk puppies is as follows:

If the dog seems to be interested in you (coming directly toward you and looking at you), and the dog’s human doesn’t seem to be trying to pull the dog away, then it’s pretty chill if you play with and pet the dog for 15-30 seconds. If the dog (or the human) seems to be in a rush to get away, simply wave goodbye to the dog and the human. If they seem to want to stay and play (and talk), then you’ve made a beautiful connection!



37. Talk to strangers

One of the most common forms of anxiety is social anxiety. As social/tribal animals, we have evolved to feel anxious about what others think of us. We want people to like us, we don't want them to think of us in negative ways, etc.

This often leads people to feel anxious and shy around strangers (and sometimes even around friends and family). This social anxiety can lead to feelings of isolation, loneliness, alienation, and depression.

One of the best ways to break through this fear is by talking to strangers. You can use the “sidewalk puppies” example above as a way to break the ice, but often just a friendly smile at a stranger passing you in the street is enough to begin chipping away at the ice that surrounds you.

A smile, a wave, a tip of the hat... these are all good ways to gently begin interacting with strangers. Genuine, heartfelt compliments (ideally about an item of clothing or accessory, rather than a body part!) are usually well received and make people smile.

38. Make other people laugh and smile

Making others laugh and smile can be a really powerful way to relieve your own anxiety & depression. There is a deep joy and satisfaction that comes from the knowledge that you are making the world around you a happier place!

39. Go outside

Getting outdoors is extremely important. Living in a small box can feel claustrophobic and isolating... just staying indoors for long periods of time contributes significantly to anxiety and depression.

40. Get lots of sunshine

While it's not always easy to get sunshine (especially in the depths of winter), research has shown that sunshine can significantly reduce anxiety & depression.

If you can't find any sunshine, you can order a UV lamp from Amazon! In high latitudes, many people spend some time every day in front of UV lamps to treat depression.

41. Spend time in nature

Getting outside in the city or suburbs is great. You can interact with strangers, get fresh air and sunshine. But getting deep into nature — even if it's just a local park or forest — can put us in touch with our evolutionary roots.

The Japanese have long known the mental health benefits of spending time in nature. They call it shinrin-yoku, or “forest bathing.” It has been shown in many studies that [forest bathing does indeed reduce anxiety and depression](#).

Two ***Not-So-Healthy*** Ways
To Reduce Anxiety & Depression
For The **Short Term**

42. TV, movies, and video games (in moderation)

In moderation, TV, movies, and video games can help relieve anxiety and depression in the short term. Like reading, these forms of media can transport you to another life, another world... they can give you powerful perspectives that can actually help you feel better in the long run.

These “screen-based” forms of media also have an added anxiolytic effect: the light from the screens actually releases endogenous opioids in your brain. It’s like a tiny shot of heroin or morphine. It literally, physiologically eases pain, anxiety, and depression.

However, this little shot of opioids can also have negative effects in the long-run, if you allow them to. They are addictive... which is why we are currently living in The Age of the Binge. And when you pull away from the screen, you get those little withdrawal symptoms... a slight worsening of the anxiety & depression. That’s what’s so addictive: when you pull away, you feel bad. When you get sucked in, you feel good.

If you allow this addictive cycle to pull you in, then TV, movies, and video games can actually be actively harmful to your mental health, and can increase depression, anxiety, and other problems in the long run. But if you use them in moderation, for enjoyment and fun, then they can be a nice part of life that can reduce anxiety & depression in the short term.

43. Drugs & alcohol taken with mostly short-term anxiety-relief in mind (in moderation)

Drugs (or medicines, depending on how you look at them) like THC & CBD, alcohol, and even pharmaceuticals like SSRIs and benzodiazepines, can be helpful or harmful, depending on how you use them.

If you use them in moderation, as useful tools to relax, enjoy, and live gracefully through difficult moments, they can contribute to a happy, healthy life, and reduce depression and anxiety in the long term.

If you use them for instant gratification and relief, without a long-term strategy in mind, they can often lead to addiction, an increase in anxiety & depression over time, and worse.



6 *Seriously Unhealthy (!!!)*

Ways To Reduce Anxiety &
Depression

44. Eating Your Emotions

Shoveling ice cream down your throat may make you feel better in the short term... but you will soon feel sick to your stomach. You may have a stomach ache later, which will tend to increase your anxiety. You'll start becoming overweight and unhealthy, which will further send you down a spiral of anxiety and depression.

Eating is a good thing. Mindless eating of your emotions, with only short-term anxiety relief and instant gratification in mind, will actually lead to *more* anxiety and depression in the long term.

45. Drugs & alcohol (abused)

While drugs and medicines can be helpful if used intelligently and in moderation, with a long term strategy in mind, they can be very harmful if you use them with only short-term relief in mind.

Using drugs for short term relief, with no long term strategy, is a recipe for addiction, and a slippery slope from “gateway drugs” to “hard drugs,” all of which cause more anxiety and depression in the long run.

In the worst cases, using drugs and alcohol with purely short-term intentions in mind, throwing abandon to the wind, can lead to overdose and even death.

46. Emotional & Physical Violence (toward others and yourself)

We've all heard the story of the man who gets yelled at at work, who comes home and kicks the dog and yells at his wife and children.

Venting anger in this way may relieve anxiety and depression for a brief moment, but it returns with a vengeance once the guilt and self-loathing kick in.

Karma is a real thing. If you treat others badly, it will come back around to you. But perhaps more importantly, deep down inside you realize that it's not even about you. You cannot escape your own pain by causing pain to others... pain begets pain. Don't be the villain in the story. It's never worth it.

47. Scrolling On Social Media

"Oh, I just need to see what's below the bottom of the screen here.

"Just one more second.

"I know there's something interesting down there, that will relieve this unconscious feeling of anxiety and depression."

Don't fall for it. It's a trick! Yes it's easy to keep scrolling... but when you look up from the screen and you've been on the toilet for an hour and a half instead of enjoying life and working to improve your real-world problems, you'll feel significantly worse than you did before.

48. Compulsive sex

While sex can be a very healthy thing, when experienced consciously, with the intention to use it as part of a happy, healthy lifestyle. But just like drugs, alcohol, TV, and the internet, sex can become an addiction.

The good feelings that come from sex can take away your anxiety and depression for a moment, but if you've indulged in unhealthy or less-than-ideal conditions, you may actually feel worse afterward.

The healthy response to feeling worse after sex would be to say "Hey, actually, this made me feel worse, I'm going to change the way that I do this in the future." This leads to a learning process which ultimately results in a happier, healthier lifestyle.

The unhealthy response to feeling worse after sex would be to say: "Oh no, I don't feel good right now. I need to rush back in and have more sex again to feel better." This type of short-term thinking will once again lead to an increase in anxiety and depression in the long term.

49. Consistently distracting yourself with TV, video games, or other media

While entertainment, in moderation, can contribute to a well-rounded healthy life, it can easily become an addiction.

When this happens, you end up in a downward spiral, where your life keeps getting worse (because you spend too much time consuming media), and then you feel like you need to “go into” the TV, movies, video games, etc, more and more... to relieve the anxiety that comes from your deteriorating life

circumstances.



Key Takeaways

If you read through the lists above, you'll notice that some anxiety-relievers (for example, drugs) make it onto all three lists: healthy, not-so-healthy, and seriously unhealthy.

The key is to approach all of these anxiety-relievers from a mindset of long-term strategy, rather than short-term compulsion.

To continue with the “drugs” example: if you’re using drugs solely to ease your anxiety in the short term, with no thought or regard for the long term, you will likely end up sliding down a slippery slope of addiction, and hard-and-harder drugs. But if you use the very same substances with a carefully considered long-term strategy, they can be thought of more as “medicines” instead of “drugs,” improving your health and happiness in the long term.

Drugs may be the most obvious example, but the same can be said of many things (especially things that are often considered “vices”): alcohol, sex, TV, video games... even eating.

Keep things in balance, in moderation, and you will soon find your life becoming happier, more joyful, and far less bogged down in the deep dark depths of anxiety & depression.

How To...

Truly, Actually, Fully

Take Care Of Your Anxiety

For The Rest Of Your Life

Anxiety is not something that can be healed in one day, or in one way.

The path to happiness, relaxation, calm and freedom is a lifelong process.

Through decades of meditation, contemplation, and working with my own anxiety and the anxiety of others (as a meditation teacher & anxiety coach, through Meditation Magazine and Meditation University), I've developed a comprehensive method that can truly *heal* your relationship with anxiety in a natural, healthy, and comprehensive way.

I call it The BUTR Method, because it focuses on *Befriending, Utilizing, Transforming, and Reducing* anxiety for the long term. To dive deep into the BUTR method and heal your relationship with anxiety for the rest of your life, check out my new course:

[**Working With Your Anxiety \(Instead Of Against It\).**](#)

As a reward for getting to the end of this eBook, I'm gifting you a coupon to get into the course for 90% off 😊

Just use this code at the checkout: *sixsimplewords90*

Watch the [trailer](#) below for more information about the course:



[Working With Your Anxiety \(instead of against it\)](#)