

## Tips For Decreasing Anxiety Symptoms

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**#1 Accept It.** Did you know that about 10% of the world's population experiences mental health issues, including anxiety? That's like every person in the U.S. and several smaller countries around the world combined. So, if you're experiencing anxiety symptoms, accept the reality that you're not alone, you're not weak, and you don't have to be defined by your anxiety. Sometimes normalizing a mental health challenge helps to reduce the intensity of symptoms.

**#2 Breathe.** We do it every day-breathe. When we breathe (inhale/exhale), we activate both our sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems. When we exhale, we experience a momentary state of relaxation. Six times a day, five minutes at a time, give attention to breathing. Inhale for at least five seconds and hold it. Exhale for at least seven seconds.

**#3 Take a Mind-cation.** Sometimes anxiety symptoms are experienced because our mind is focused on the there and then instead of the here and now. Mindfulness, or as I like to say, a mind-cation, can ground us in the present. Find a quiet spot and think of a relaxing place (e.g., mountain cabin, beach, or even a favorite room in your house). Use your five senses, and through mindfulness, experience that environment as if you are there.

**#4 Relax.** You may be saying, "If I wasn't anxious, then I could relax." I understand. When experiencing anxiety symptoms, your body is in the "fight, flight, or freeze" state. What may help is an intentional progressive muscle relaxation technique. Try starting with your toes and ending with the top of your head--tense one group of muscles at a time. Hold for seven seconds and then release before moving to your next muscle group. Try doing six sets three times a day.

**#5 Exercise.** For some, exercise may seem like drudgery. However, the positive effects of exercise on mental health, especially the reduction of anxiety symptoms, should not be ignored. Exercise doesn't mean a gym membership or the purchase of expensive equipment. Go for a 30-minute walk around your neighborhood five times a week. Take the stairs instead of the elevator. Don't park next to the front door at your favorite store. Instead of mowing your yard with a riding mower, try using a push mower. These are just a few ideas to get you started.

**#6 Be Distracted.** When anxiety symptoms begin to overwhelm you, allow yourself to be distracted. You DO have time for a distraction. Listen to music, read a book, watch a movie, have a small snack, or go for a mindfulness walk. One of my favorite distractions is silly YouTube videos that make me laugh. Laughter is not just good for the soul; it is also good for the brain and reduces anxiety symptoms.

**#7 Ask for Help.** Research shows that more people experience mental health illnesses than cancer, heart disease, and diabetes combined. However, mental health issues often go undiagnosed and untreated resulting in unnecessary life dissatisfaction. Give yourself the gift of

asking for help. Here's a suggestion, visit [psychologytoday.com](http://psychologytoday.com) and locate a professional in your area who may be able to help.