

# Coping Strategies to Counter Anxiety

You can learn to cope with anxiety attacks so well that they will no longer frighten you. Practicing the techniques below will help to diminish the intensity and frequency of anxiety attacks.

## Talk to another person

**Talking** to someone nearby will help you get your mind off of your anxious thoughts.

## Move around or engage in physical activity

**Moving around** and doing something physical lets you dissipate the extra energy or adrenaline created by the fight-or-flight reaction. Instead of resisting the normal physiological reaction that accompanies anxiety, you can move on it.

## Stay in the present

Focus on concrete objects in your **immediate environment**. Staying in the present and focusing on external objects will help minimize the attention you might give to troublesome physical symptoms or anxious thoughts. If possible, you might try actually touching objects nearby to reinforce staying in the immediate present.

## Engage in a simple, repetitive activity

- **Unwrap** and open a package of mints and have one.
- **Count:** backwards from 100 by 3s; count the number of people in line and time how long it takes each person to get to the head of the line; or count the money in your wallet.
- Take out and **read** coping statements which you have written out.
- **Sing.**
- **Place** a wet or cool towel on your face.
- **Feel** the edge of a key.
- **Think** of other simple forms of distractions that redirect your attention away from your bodily sensations or anxiety-provoking thoughts.

## Do something that requires focused concentration

Once you are able to engage in an activity, it has a greater and more lasting capacity to distract your attention:

- **Read** a good book or magazine.
- **Solve** a puzzle.
- **Knit or sew.**
- **Write** a running account of your changing level of anxiety.
- **Engage** in a card game.
- **Calculate or compute.**
- **Plan** your day's activities.
- **Paint or play** with clay.



## Experience something immediately pleasurable

Pleasure is incompatible with an anxious reaction: Have a loved one **hold** you or have a pleasurable **snack or meal**.

## Visualize a comforting person or scene

**Imagine** a safe person or a peaceful scene. See your safe person standing right there with you, offering you support and reassurance. Practice seeing your peaceful scene as part of a daily relaxation or meditation practice.

## Practice 'Thought Stopping'

This technique is used to disrupt a pattern of negative or anxious thoughts. It can be used with deep breathing to divert an anxiety attack.

- **Say** "stop" either out loud or in your head.
- **Visualize** a stop sign.
- **Replace** anxious thoughts with calming and supportive statements to yourself: "This will pass", "I am calm and strong" or any other coping statement you develop.

## Practice deep breathing

**Slowing down your respiration** and breathing reverses the reaction of the fight-or-flight response. Practice this for 3 or 4 minutes.

## Practice muscle relaxation

Use the CALM technique: **Chest, Arms, Legs, Mouth-Clench**—hold each area for 10 seconds and then release.

## Repeat positive coping statements

Negative self-talk aggravates your mind and causes anxiety. Any positive coping statements will help to **divert your mind** away from both the bodily symptoms of anxiety and from the fear-inducing self talk. Coping statements may include: "I can handle these symptoms", "This is just anxiety," "I will let this pass," and "I can ride this through."

Remember that everyone has experienced anxiety and everyone feels uncomfortable in some situations. Practicing the above can help you to prepare for when an anxiety provoking situation occurs.