

How to Ease Anxiety

Breathe In, Breathe Out

Whether or not you have clinical anxiety, it's common to feel overwhelmed, stressed, or worried. One way to help ease these feelings, is to learn to stay in the present. The past has a lot of guilt and regret, and the future has a lot of uncertainty and fear.

This simple breathing exercise can help you center yourself, think clearly, and find calm:

1. Breathe in for three to four counts.
2. Hold your breath for a moment.
3. Breathe out for five to six counts.
4. Repeat.



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These strategies can help soothe nerves and restore calm.

Concerns about your health or loss of autonomy might seem like a normal part of aging, but for the more than 40 million adults living with anxiety, such fears can be all-consuming. Everybody worries, but not everybody who worries has clinical anxiety.

The prevalence of anxiety decreases with age, but it's still common in older adults. Some symptoms of anxiety – including shortness of breath, chest pain, and heart palpitations – overlap with common medical conditions, and certain medications can cause symptoms that mimic anxiety. That can make it challenging to diagnose anxiety in an aging population. Anxiety also shows up as persistent worry and rumination, as well as fear, agitation, restlessness, and insomnia. If you experience any of these symptoms, make an appointment with your healthcare provider. Here's what you need to know about three types of treatment, which are often used together.

TALK THERAPY. Regular appointments with a therapist can be effective for treating the symptoms of anxiety. In fact, research has shown that cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) – which focuses on reframing unhelpful thought patterns and behaviors – can lead to long-term reductions in anxiety symptoms among older adults. If you have a phobia, such as a fear of falling, some doctors suggest a form of CBT called exposure therapy: Repeated exposures to a trigger (sometimes via virtual reality) can teach you coping skills that will help reduce anxiety. CBT might be the most common research-backed form of behavioral therapy, but more informal approaches to talk therapy can also be effective. Even social interactions can help with coping skills. You don't have to be alone with anxiety.

MEDICATION. Medications such as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) and benzodiazepines can be effective for treating anxiety. But there are some special considerations for older adults. SSRIs – also used to treat depression – need to be taken consistently and often in higher doses to treat anxiety. That can increase the risk of side effects. They have a better safety profile than benzodiazepines, however, which are prescribed to an estimated 9 percent of adults between ages 65 and 80. These have been linked to serious side effects, such as delirium, impaired memory, and balance and mobility problems. There's also a risk of dependency. For these reasons, they should be considered as an anxiety treatment for seniors only after other options have failed. Older adults are more vulnerable to developing drug-related side effects, so a "start low, go slow" approach is recommended, prescribing lower starting doses and increasing them over a longer period of time.

LIFESTYLE CHANGES. Regular exercise and mindfulness – a way of focusing attention on the present moment – can help treat anxiety. Anxiety starts as a problem with the mind, but it affects the body, too. Mindfulness practices such as yoga and tai chi, which helps "anchor you in your body", can help. One small study found that eight weeks of yoga classes seemed to reduce symptoms of anxiety, separate research published last year showed that exercising for 45 minutes at least three times per week was associated with improved mental health. Meditation, breathing exercises, and massage can also help.

The Best Pool Workouts

Water exercise is a smart fitness choice at any age

Spending time in a pool won't just keep you cool – it can help you get healthier, too. Like land-based exercise, water workouts improve blood pressure and cognition, burn calories, and strengthen your muscles and cardiovascular system. And because water is denser than air, it provides more resistance. That allows people to challenge their muscles while putting less pressure on joints, making it possible to comfortably do exercises they might not be able to do on land. Aquatic sessions can safely challenge people with physical limitations. Water lessens the effects of gravity, allowing movement through a wider range of motion.

GET YOUR FEET WET. According to a 2016 review of studies by the British Geriatrics Society, two water workouts per week significantly boosts the physical functioning of healthy people over age 50. They found clear improvements in muscular endurance and aerobic power compared with no exercise. Other research has found that water workouts are especially helpful in reducing pain and disability in people with osteoarthritis, particular those who have knee or hip problems. Pain in these areas is often exacerbated during activities performed in a weight bearing position. When you walk in the water or do other exercises, its buoyancy eases the load on your hips and knees. This minimizes any pain or discomfort you might experience from the activity.

THE FUN FACTOR. The best kind of exercise is the type you'll actually do – and research shows that people like aquatic workouts more than those on land. That may be because aquatic exercise feels easier, so you can work more comfortably at a higher intensity.

By yourself, you can do resistance-band exercises in chest-high water, walk briskly in a pool's shallow end, or wear a flotation belt to run in deep water. To work with others – which may make exercise more enjoyable (when you are able to go back in the pool in groups) – try an aquatic group fitness class. Whatever water routine you choose, do it at a moderate intensity at least twice a week to reap the rewards.



Summer Q & A

Q. I don't like wearing sunscreen. Can clothing plus a hat provide enough protection?

A. Long pants and long-sleeved shirts can help, but you should still apply sunscreen to exposed areas. And even with a broad-brimmed hat, put sunscreen on your face, ears, neck, and chest. They're extra vulnerable, and sunlight can reflect off the ground to those areas. Tightly woven, dark-colored fabrics are better at blocking the sun's rays. Clothes with UPF (ultraviolet protection factor) rating also work well, and tend to be lightweight and work even if they get wet. Look for a UPF of at least 50.

Q. We like to grill fish in the summer. Do I need to worry about it spoiling in warm weather?

A. All year round, raw and cooked seafood should be kept above 135° F or below 41° F. If it's between the two, bacteria such as salmonella can multiply to unsafe levels and cause serious illness, even if the fish looks and smells fine. So don't leave seafood out for more than 2 hours or more than 1 hour when temperatures are above 90° F. (When shopping, pick up seafood last; store in a clean cooler with ice if you can't get it into the fridge within the time frame above.) Freeze it if you won't use it within one to two days. Thaw frozen fish in the fridge or under cold running water in a sealed plastic bag, and cook immediately. Cook finfish to an internal temperature of 145° F on an instant-read thermometer (digital is best); shrimp, lobster, and crab are done when the flesh is opaque. Cook clams, mussels, and oysters until the shells open.

