



Calming strategies

Every person becomes stressed and anxious at different times in their life. The key is not letting it get out of control; and being able to return your mind and body to a relaxed state quickly and easily. This handout includes many ideas and strategies to help you in everyday life and in situations which cause you to experience stress and anxiety.

Five second calmers

- ▶ Stop. Empty your mind. Take slow, deep breaths.
- ▶ Focus only on your breathing.
- ▶ Check in on how your body is feeling right now.
- ▶ Yawn and stretch as high and as wide as you can.
- ▶ Drop your shoulders and loosen the muscles throughout your body.
- ▶ Reach up and stretch as tall as you can, filling your lungs with air, then flop forward, letting your arms dangle towards the floor and pushing the air out with a loud exhale.
- ▶ Push your toes into the end of your shoes and wiggle your toes.
- ▶ Look at a photo that makes you happy such as family, holidays, or a special place.
- ▶ Say calming and reassuring statements to yourself.
- ▶ Hydrate; have a drink of water, wash your face and wet the back of your neck.
- ▶ Jump on the spot, dance, or shake your arms and legs to let out the emotional energy, and let in some feel-good hormones.
- ▶ Shake your whole body and bounce without your feet leaving the floor.
- ▶ Imagine yourself calm and relaxed.

Tips

Practice calming strategies daily.

Experiment with calming strategies when you feel calm and safe so they are easier to use when you are becoming stressed or anxious.

Try mixing-and-matching different strategies.

Notice which strategies work best for you, then make them yours.



Other quick calmers

- ▶ Go outside and focus on the nature around you; the sky, clouds, trees, birds, the view.
- ▶ Take off your shoes, walk on different surfaces and notice the sensations on your feet.
- ▶ Do some exercise.
- ▶ Listen to some relaxing, nostalgic or uplifting music.
- ▶ Distract yourself by focusing on something different, for example a puzzle or a picture.
- ▶ Stimulate your senses; eat something tangy or spicy, sniff a scent, list everything you can see and hear around you, rub some surfaces.
- ▶ Do some yoga or tai chi.
- ▶ Do something with your hands; e.g. play with an elastic band, sticky tape or plasticine.
- ▶ Do something creative; write a poem or song, draw, paint or take photos of nature.
- ▶ Light a candle and watch the flame.
- ▶ Take a shower or bath.
- ▶ Pat or play with a pet.
- ▶ Recite a poem or saying, or sing a song.

*The most important person to help you achieve calmness is YOU.
The best time to start practicing calming strategies is TODAY.*

Calming strategies using breath, mind and body

Breath

Controlled breathing

This is the one of the most effective ways to relax quickly, as deep breathing signals your body to relax.

- ▶ Sit comfortably. Place one hand on your belly and one on your chest. Take some slow, deep breaths into the belly. It's helpful, but not essential, to breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth. If you are doing abdominal breathing correctly, the lower hand should move as much as, or more than, the hand on your chest.
- ▶ Continue this slow, deep breathing for a couple of minutes, imagining the breath calming your body and clearing your mind. Notice how you feel.
- ▶ Focus on controlling your breathing throughout each day, whenever you become anxious and before stressful events.

Breathing and tapping

- ▶ Cross your arms in front of you, with your right hand on your left shoulder and your left hand on your right shoulder.
- ▶ Close or lower your eyes and slow your breathing.
- ▶ In your mind, picture a peaceful or calm place. Think of a positive word connected to the place.
- ▶ When you feel calm, tap your hands alternately on each shoulder slowly four to six times.
- ▶ Take a breath and focus on how you feel. If you are feeling better, do it once more. Open your eyes and spend a few moments looking around you.

*Your breathing is your greatest friend.
Return to it in all your troubles,
and you will find comfort and guidance.*



Mind

Naming and challenging

Notice negative thoughts as they appear, challenge them, and switch them with positive thoughts.

Name the feeling you are experiencing.

For example "I feel nervous about catching the bus tomorrow".

Name the thoughts that are behind the feeling.

"The bus might crash on the highway."

Challenge the thoughts

"The bus isn't likely to crash; hundreds of buses operate safely each day. I'll make sure I'm holding onto the railing during the trip."

Switch the thoughts

"I'm going to be fine catching the bus tomorrow. I'm strong and capable."

Visualising

Mentally picturing yourself being calm and successfully doing something can help you to feel calm and in control. For example, in the example about catching a bus, picturing yourself catching the bus and arriving safely can be helpful leading up to the event. While on the bus, it can also be helpful to mentally picture yourself being calm.

Mantras or positive sayings

Having your own mantra or selection of positive sayings to use when needed can be powerful. Some examples are listed below. Make up your own, write them down, practice using them.

"I'm a good person and I deserve good things to happen in my life."

"Everything is going to be okay, I just need to breathe."

"I am strong enough to get through this."



Mental grounding

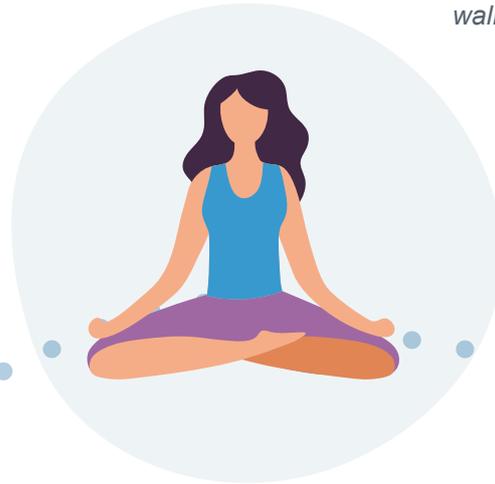
Grounding involves focussing on the present and what you are seeing, hearing and feeling right now. Here are some ideas for grounding using the mind.

- ▶ List all the sounds you can hear around you.
- ▶ Recite a poem or song lyrics.
- ▶ Count to 10 or say the alphabet very slowly.
- ▶ Do a Sudoku, crossword or other puzzle.
- ▶ Do a maths problem in your head.
- ▶ Describe your surroundings in detail, including colours and shapes.
- ▶ Picture the route you take to get from your place to work, or the shops, or a friend's house.
- ▶ Remind yourself of the present by saying details about yourself and what is happening (silently if you are in public).

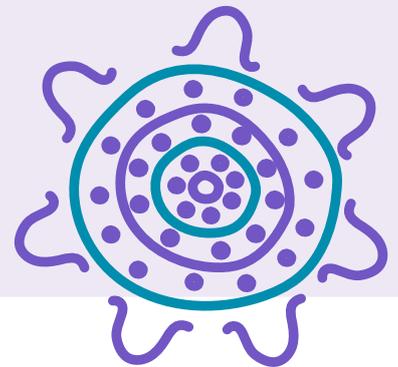
For example, "My name is X, I was born on Y, and I'm Z years old. Right now I am in the supermarket one block from where I live. I'm going to pay for my groceries, then walk home slowly."

Mindfulness meditation

Mindfulness is purposefully focusing your attention on the present moment and accepting whatever you become aware of without judgement. You can learn mindfulness and meditation on your own by following books, apps or recordings, or by attending a class. Search online for more information.



Figuring out how to stay calm won't make life perfect, but it will help you to find enjoyment and happiness; and ease the stress of daily life.



Body

Physical grounding

Here are some ideas for grounding using the body.

- ▶ Run cool or warm water over your hands, notice how it feels.
- ▶ Trace your hands against the physical outline of your body.
- ▶ Pat a pet and really focus on the feel of its coat, ears, tail and belly.
- ▶ Carry a grounding object in your pocket (e.g. a stone) to touch. Focus on the feel of its surface.
- ▶ Slowly eat some spicy food. Then taste something icy cold. Focus on the different sensations in your mouth.
- ▶ Inhale the smell of a flower or essential oil, especially lavender or vanilla. Focus on the smell, try to describe it.

Quick muscle tensing and relaxing

- ▶ Tense your feet, lower legs, thighs, buttocks, pelvic muscles, abdomen and lower back muscles. Hold them tight for a few moments and notice the tension. Then release the tension completely and let all those muscles soften and relax. Notice the difference.
- ▶ Repeat and tense other parts of your body. Take a deep breath in. Notice how your body feels. Let your breath out, making a 'whoosh' sound and let your muscles relax.
- ▶ As you continue to breathe, focus on releasing, softening and letting go. Let the tension continue to flow out with every out-breath.

Self-massage

Sit comfortably and give yourself a five minute massage to relieve muscle tension. You can knead the muscles at the back of your neck and shoulders, or use your fingertips and thumbs to massage your face and scalp. It's possible to self-massage many muscles in the body, which can be particularly relaxing when combined with deep, slow breathing to the sound of soothing music.

Twisting

- ▶ While standing, slowly turn your upper body to the left and twist your head to look as far as you can over your left shoulder.
- ▶ Hold the position, notice how the muscles feel to stretch.
- ▶ Name something you can see to the left.
- ▶ Repeat to the right.
- ▶ Face ahead and name something your body feels. Light or heavy? Tired or energised? Tense or relaxed?
- ▶ Repeat twisting to the left, then right again. Name something else you feel.

Repeat this process slowly until you feel calmer.



*Everyone gets anxious and stressed.
You are not weak. You are not inferior.
You are learning new ways to manage and enjoy life.*



Resistance pushing

Find a movement that involves using your strength to push against something. Here are some examples.

- ▶ While sitting, rock slowly back in your chair, leaving your feet on the floor and stretching your head and shoulders back.
- ▶ Stand about one metre from a solid brick wall, step one foot forward with knee bent and place two hands against the wall at shoulder height. Push and hold for several minutes.
- ▶ Do slow, controlled push-ups on the floor.

Rhythmic movement

Repetitive movement helps us get out of our head, grounds us and helps us to reconnect with our body. Go slow, focus on the movement of your body, the sensations and your breathing. By integrating our body and mind, we reset our nervous system.

Try the following:

- ▶ walking or jogging
- ▶ swimming or paddling
- ▶ jumping on a trampoline
- ▶ bouncing a ball
- ▶ dancing
- ▶ drumming
- ▶ knitting, crocheting or stitching
- ▶ playing with play doh
- ▶ rocking in a rocking chair
- ▶ swinging in a hammock
- ▶ throwing and catching a frisby or ball
- ▶ yoga or tai chi
- ▶ pedalling a bike
- ▶ climbing steps.

Be kind to yourself

Any type of change takes time. Recognise that you are human and that leading a calmer life will take practise. Allow your feelings and reactions without being angry and upset at yourself. Be patient with yourself. Give yourself permission to take time to practise new ways to cope.

Helpful resources

There are many ways to find other ideas for calming. These include: taking an online class, doing a workshop, uploading phone apps, searching ideas on YouTube, reading books on the topic, listening to podcasts, finding information on the internet and speaking to other people.



Starting small changes today will set you up for a brighter tomorrow

The **Sexual Assault Resource Centre (SARC)** is a free 24-hour emergency service providing medical and counselling services for people who have experienced a recent (within 14 days) sexual assault. Counselling for any sexual assault/abuse experienced recently or in the past is also available to people of all genders aged 13 years and above. Call SARC on **(08) 6458 1828** or Freecall **1800 199 888**.