

## Exercises to Soothe Anxiety

1. **4-7-8 breathing exercise** by Dr Andrew Weil.
2. With your thumb or index finger, close your right nostril and breathe through your left nostril, working up to 3 minutes. This activates your parasympathetic nervous system which helps calm you.
3. Keeping your head straight, look up with just your eyes, you can do a circle of 8 or look from left to right in whatever pattern you like, until you feel more calm.
4. Tapping your thymus and/or collarbone continuously, become aware of your exhale, and as you breathe out, purse your lips, which naturally elongates the exhale and activates your parasympathetic nervous system.
5. Put one palm across your forehead, and the other palm on the back of your head, near the base of your neck. Stay in this pose for one or two minutes, then switch hands and continue for another 2 minutes or so. It is easier to do this lying down, your hands and arms don't get as tired. Continue switching hand positions until you find a sense of calm/relief.
6. This exercise is from Linda Graham. When you feel anxious, let your body find the 'opposite' posture. Say for example, you curl up and feel tight and contracted when you're anxious, what would be the 'antidote' to that body posture for you? Try moving your body into that position and if it feels right, you can also move in that pose/posture.
7. **The collar bone point** (kidney and adrenal gland meridian), is a great point to tap when you're feeling anxious. Try tapping on it continuously, you can always combine it with some of the breath exercises above if you like. Ask yourself while you're tapping, what are you fighting? Your feelings, a situation, a person, your anxiety?
8. Soft palate relaxation from *Forward Facing Trauma Therapy* by Eric Gentry. Your goal is to locate and then relax the muscles of your soft palate. **1.** Sit down comfortably and shift your focus to the muscles along the roof of your mouth. **2.** Release all the tension in this area. **3.** Now expand your focus to include the muscles in your face and jaw. **4.** Release the tension in these muscles too. **5.** Next, with all of these muscles relaxed, silently say the letter "R" to yourself and try to gently maintain the subtle arch this creates in the roof of your mouth for five seconds. **6.** Repeat this exercise five times. **7.** Notice the relaxation in your body.
9. Stephen Porges believes **tapping on the face** points (eyebrow, side of eye etc.) activates the **ventral vagal/social engagement system** which calms sympathetic/dorsal dominance.

10. Exercise from *Reinventing the Body, Resurrecting the Soul* by Deepak Chopra. Lie down before you go to sleep at night. Assume a position flat on your back without a pillow; spread your arms and legs at your side. Draw in a deep, slow breath, then release it through your mouth in a sigh, as freely and naturally as your body wants. Some sighs may be quick, almost like a gasp; others may be as deep as a sob. You may feel a sense of relief, sadness, grief, elation, or any other emotion. Be aware of the emotions as they arise; you are not just releasing physical tension; you are accessing bodily memories at the same time. The natural discharge of tension bundles thoughts, feelings, and sensations together, so let them all go at once. Do this exercise for no more than ten minutes, because it can be intense; allow yourself to fall asleep if your body wants to. That is also part of the discharge process.
11. From *Thriving in Chaos* by Sandy Dow. Catch yourself when you are saying "I am anxious". Reframe it to "There is a part of me that is anxious". When you feel a grip of fear, anger, or sadness, be open to accepting a scared and confused part of yourself. Add a message "Even though a part of me is having a tough time, I accept that part of me"\*. This will have a way of separating from the anxiety rather than having it take you over. \*You can use this phrase in your tapping.
12. If the anxiety feels just too overwhelming and appears to be in all of your body, try using the **pendulation exercise** by Peter Levine. This exercise is empowering and hopeful, it is a tangible felt experience of areas in your body which feel neutral, calm and even good, while also being aware of the areas that feel bad and contracted. Pendulating between the two allows you to release traumatic stress.
13. From *Coping with Trauma-Related Dissociation* by Suzette Boon, Kathy Steele & Onno van der Hart. **1.** Notice 3 objects that you see in the room and pay close attention to their details (shape, colour, texture, size, etc.). Make sure you do not hurry through this part of the exercise. Let your eyes linger over each object. Name three characteristics of the object out loud to yourself, for example, "It's blue. It is big. It is round". **2.** Notice 3 sounds that you hear in the present (inside or outside of the room). Listen to their quality. Are they loud or soft, constant or intermittent, pleasant or unpleasant? Again, name 3 characteristics of the sound out loud to yourself, for example, "It is loud, grating and definitely unpleasant". **3.** Now touch 3 objects close to you and describe out loud to yourself how they feel, for example, rough, smooth, cold, warm, hard or soft, and so forth. **4.** Return to the 3 objects that you have chosen to observe with your eyes. As you notice them, concentrate on the fact that you are here and now with these objects in the present, in this room. Next, notice the sounds and concentrate on the fact that you are here in this room with those sounds. Finally, do the same with the objects you have touched. You can expand this exercise by repeating it several times, 3 items for each sense, then 2 for each sense, then one, and then build up again to 3. You can also add new items to keep your practice fresh.
14. Take a walk, dance, read a book, write down how you feel, have a bath, go to the cinema in the middle of the day, listen to music. Do what brings you a sense of calm, hope and joy.
15. **Slow way down.** When we're feeling anxious we tend to do everything fast, by slowing everything you do down, from walking to making a cup of tea, to your breath; you will engage your parasympathetic system. Know that it can take 20 to 30 minutes for stress hormones to completely leave your body but you will feel some of the effects of slowing down immediately, like your breath becoming deeper and slower as you put your attention on it.
16. Don't be afraid to do nothing, we often feel a desperate urge to get rid of our anxiety which often makes it worse. Be as kind to yourself as possible.