

# Understanding Anxiety

A Guide to Your Body's Alarm System & Practical Healing Exercises



## What Is Anxiety?

Anxiety is often misunderstood as a purely mental issue — but it is fundamentally a **physiological response**. Think of it as an **alarm system** sounding off inside your body, typically rooted in old, unresolved emotional pain or feelings of separation from childhood.

When you encounter stress, your body activates its **fight-or-flight response**, flooding your system with adrenaline and cortisol. If stress is prolonged, your nervous system can become stuck in the 'on' position — a state known as **anxiety hyperstimulation** — responsible for the terrifying physical symptoms of panic: chest pain, dizziness, severe muscle tension, and heart palpitations.

Instead of recognising this alarm as a physical cry for safety, the brain's analytical left hemisphere *misinterprets* the sensations and begins 'stacking' worries to make sense of the discomfort — creating a vicious cycle.

**The Neck-Down Approach:** To truly resolve anxiety, you must address the physical alarm in the body — not try to out-think your racing mind. The exercises below are designed to do exactly that.

### ◆ PRACTICAL HEALING EXERCISES ◆

1

## The Somatic 'Love Sandwich'

*Calm the Body's Alarm*

*This exercise targets the root cause of panic by providing your body with the physical reassurance it is begging for when the alarm sounds.*

1

### Stop & Shift

When you feel anxiety rising, stop trying to intellectualise it and immediately shift your focus *into your body*.

|   |                             |   |
|---|-----------------------------|---|
| 2 | <b>Locate the Sensation</b> | Find exactly where you feel the alarm vibrating or aching — your chest, stomach, or throat.                                     |
| 3 | <b>Create the Sandwich</b>  | Place one hand directly over that area. Place your other hand on your back directly opposite, creating a supportive 'sandwich'. |
| 4 | <b>Breathe &amp; Affirm</b> | Breathe directly into that space and say — aloud or silently — <b>"I am safe in this moment."</b>                               |
| 5 | <b>Hold</b>                 | Stay there until you feel your nervous system begin to regulate and calm down.  |

## 2

### The Physiological Sigh

*Immediately Deflate Panic*

*This breathing technique expands the lungs fully and sends an immediate safety signal to the brain, forcing your nervous system to relax.*

|   |                            |   |
|---|----------------------------|---|
| 1 | <b>Double Inhale</b>       | Take <b>two quick, sharp sniffs</b> of air through your nose to completely fill your lungs.   |
| 2 | <b>Hold at the Top</b>     | Hold that breath for <b>3–5 seconds</b> . This proves to your brain that <i>you</i> are in control — not the anxiety.                         |
| 3 | <b>Clench Teeth</b>        | Gently clench your teeth together.  |
| 4 | <b>Long Hissing Exhale</b> | Perform a long, slow exhale through your teeth, making a 'hissing' sound. Imagine a highly pressurised tyre slowly deflating in front of you. |

**Tip:** Use this as your first-response tool the moment panic begins.

## 3

### The 4-8 Vagus Nerve Breathing Method

*Activate the Off Switch*

*Deep, slow breathing directly activates the **vagus nerve** — the body's own 'off switch' for the fight-or-flight response.*

|   |                   |  |
|---|-------------------|--|
| 1 | <b>Sit Calmly</b> | Practise this when you are <i>not</i> currently in a panic state, so your nervous system learns to associate it with safety. |
|---|-------------------|--|

|   |                              |   |
|---|------------------------------|---|
| 2 | <b>Inhale for 4</b>          | Breathe in slowly through your nose for a count of <b>4</b> .   |
| 3 | <b>Exhale for 8</b>          | Breathe out slowly through your mouth for a count of <b>8</b> . The extended exhale is what triggers the vagal relaxation response. |
| 4 | <b>Repeat &amp; Redirect</b> | Continue this rhythm as you gently guide your attention toward a calming distraction.   |

**Tip:** The exhale must be twice as long as the inhale — this ratio is the key.

## 4 Scheduled Worrying

*Cure Generalised Anxiety*

*Worry is the fuel of anxiety. Because it is impossible to simply 'stop' worrying, this technique trains your brain to **compartmentalise fear** within strict, healthy boundaries.*

|   |                                    |   |
|---|------------------------------------|---|
| 1 | <b>Set a Worry Window</b>          | Pick a consistent daily time and place for 'worry time' (e.g., 6 PM at the kitchen counter for 15–30 minutes). <b>Never do this in bed or near sleep.</b> |
| 2 | <b>Write Everything Down</b>       | During the window, write every worry on paper so your brain feels heard and taken seriously.  |
| 3 | <b>Walk Away</b>                   | When the timer sounds, leave the paper in that room and immediately do something engaging — call a friend, walk the dog.                                  |
| 4 | <b>Redirect Intrusive Thoughts</b> | When a worry surfaces outside your window, say: <b>"Thanks for telling me. Let's talk about that at 6 PM."</b> Then return to the present moment.         |

## 5 The 3-3-1 Sensory Shift

*Stop Spiralling Thoughts*

*This grounding exercise pulls you out of a mental spiral and anchors your brain firmly in your immediate physical environment.*

|   |                        |  |
|---|------------------------|--|
| 1 | <b>Close Your Eyes</b> | Block out visual overstimulation.                                |
| 2 | <b>3 Sounds</b>        | Listen closely and identify <b>3 distinct sounds</b> around you. |

|   |                  |   |
|---|------------------|---|
| 3 | <b>3 Smells</b>  | Identify <b>3 things</b> you can currently smell.   |
| 4 | <b>1 Texture</b> | Reach out and touch an object nearby. Intensely focus on its <b>texture and temperature</b> . |

**Tip:** Carry a small textured object (e.g., a smooth stone) to use anytime, anywhere.

## 6 Radical Acceptance — The 'Bring It On' Method

*Remove the Resistance*

*Panic attacks survive on your fear of them. The more you resist the symptoms, the stronger they become. Removing the resistance is the most powerful way to end a panic attack quickly.*

|   |                            |  |
|---|----------------------------|--|
| 1 | <b>Stop Fighting</b>       | The moment physical symptoms begin, completely stop trying to suppress them.   |
| 2 | <b>Challenge the Panic</b> | Speak directly to your anxiety: " <b>Bring it on — give me all you've got.</b> "   |
| 3 | <b>Invite It to Worsen</b> | Dare your body to make the panic attack worse. (It can't — your nervous system has a built-in ceiling.)  |
| 4 | <b>Sit with Discomfort</b> | Do nothing to 'fix' the sensations. Accept that it feels awful, and simply let time pass. Once your brain sees you are no longer afraid, the panic rapidly burns itself out. |

**Tip:** This feels counterintuitive but is one of the most clinically validated panic-cessation techniques.

◆ AFFIRMATIONS TO REMEMBER ◆

**"I am safe in this moment."**

**"Thanks for telling me — let's talk about that at 6 PM."**

**"Bring it on. Give me all you've got."**

*"This feeling is temporary. I have the tools to move through it."*

## ■ Ready to Go Deeper?

The exercises in this guide are a powerful starting point — but healing anxiety is a journey. For a comprehensive, step-by-step roadmap to lasting calm, explore:

### **The Path To Healing Anxiety**

An in-depth ebook covering the psychology, physiology, and practical techniques to finally break free from the cycle of fear.

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*This guide is for educational purposes. If you are experiencing severe anxiety or mental health difficulties, please seek support from a qualified professional.*