

# Anxiety and How to Reduce It

Anxiety affects about 19 million adults in the United States. About 1 in 6 people will have anxiety at some time in their lives.

## Challenging Anxiety

**Anxiety begins from your thoughts. Some examples of anxious thoughts include:**

- Constant worrying
- Fear
- Feelings of impending doom
- Negative thoughts you cannot stop
- Negative thoughts about yourself, the future, or the past

**Physical symptoms of anxiety are based on what you are thinking.** Physical responses to anxiety include:

- Faster heart rate
- Chest pain
- Sweating
- Quick, shallow breaths
- Muscle tension
- Light headedness

These symptoms are the body's natural response to danger and helps keep you safe. It is important to know that you are not in physical danger when you feel anxious.

Your thoughts and your physical responses create a cycle of worry and discomfort. To stop this cycle, you can try **behavioral exercises:**

- Relaxation breathing
- Noticing negative or distorted thinking
- Physical exercise
- Take part in enjoyable or distracting activity

It will take practice and time to see less anxiety symptoms.

## Diaphragmatic Breathing Exercise

1. Sit in a comfortable position with your eyes closed, jaw relaxed, and arms loose.
2. Put one hand on your chest and one hand on your stomach.
3. Try to breathe so that only your stomach rises and falls.

**Inhale:** Focus on keeping your chest still.

**Exhale:** Let your stomach fall like you are melting into your chair. Repeat the word calm to focus during the exercise.

4. Keep taking deep breaths. Do not force the breath. Let your body tell you when to take the next breath.

Practice for 3 to 5 minutes a few times a day. This kind of breathing may feel awkward at first. It will feel more natural with practice.

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## Challenging Negative Thoughts

Negative thoughts cause the physical responses of anxiety. They also affect our mood. It is important to learn ways to see and challenge negative thought patterns.

### Examine your thoughts for key words that:

- Do not set realistic standards for yourself and others: must, should, have to
- Are black and white thinking: never, always, every
- Lead to feeling doomed: awful, horrible, disaster
- Are negative labels: jerk, slob, creep, stupid

### Challenge your negative thoughts:

1. Question the negative thoughts you are having. **Is the thought valid?**
2. Challenge the need to fix all problems or take care of things right away.  
**What is the worst thing that will happen if....?**
3. Change the negative thought into a positive self-statement.
4. Play with the negative thought. Try saying the opposite of the thought.  
Try saying the thought very slowly and then quickly. Say it softly and then loudly.

## Recommended Reading

- **The Mindfulness and Acceptance Workbook for Anxiety** by John Forseyth and George Eifort
- **Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers** by Robert Sapolsky
- **The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook and Coping with Anxiety** by Edmund J. Bourne