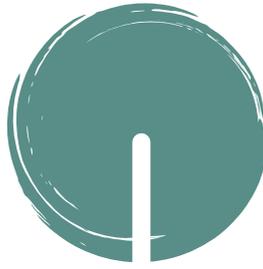


# Tools, Tips & Techniques to better deal with Anxiety & Panic Attacks





**WELCOME!**



**Hi!**

**My name is Jo Rust. I'm a Mental Health Coach and I LOVE helping people who struggle with mental illness by sharing useful information, tips, tools and techniques on how to better cope with mental illness.**

**I'd like to make use of this opportunity to thank you for downloading this ebook!**

**I hope it will be helpful and useful to you.**

**We'll be focusing on a bit of theoretical information first. But not to worry - there are lots of practical tools for you to use as well!**

**There are worksheets included that you can print and complete in your own time. Please do participate in the activities as it helps cement the learning experience.**

**Let's dig in...**



# What is anxiety?

If you type the words "what is anxiety" into Google search, these are some of the definitions that'll pop up on your screen:

*"Intense, excessive and persistent worry and fear about everyday situations. Fast heart rate, rapid breathing, sweating and feeling tired may occur."*

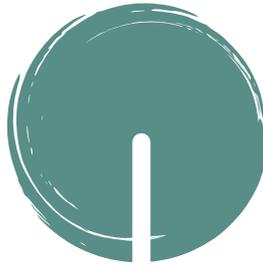
Or:

*"Anxiety is a normal emotion that causes increased alertness, fear, and physical signs, such as a rapid heart rate." - Medical News Today*

Or as WebMD defines it:

*"Anxiety is a normal emotion. It's your brain's way of reacting to stress and alerting you of potential danger ahead."*





## So what's the difference between normal anxiety and anxiety disorders?

### NORMAL ANXIETY



Specific, identifiable trigger.

Can be helpful in potentially dangerous situations.

Has a definite starting point and ending point.

Lessens or goes away when stressful event is over.

Physical symptoms dissipate fairly easily once you've distanced from the trigger.

A normal response to toxic situations.

### ANXIETY DISORDERS



Can come from nowhere.

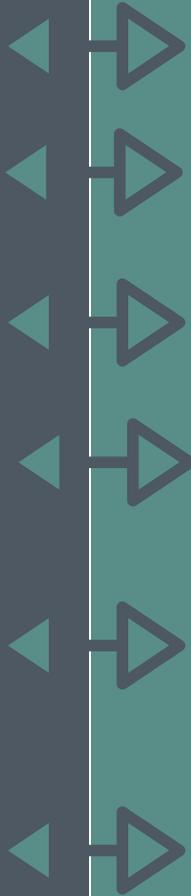
Has a negative impact on your day-to-day life.

Can last for weeks or months and be very exhausting.

Can last for long periods of time without any identifiable trigger.

Physical symptoms can be longer lasting and include, sweating, racing heart, dizziness, trembling.

Can feel impossible to control or manage.





## Different types of anxiety disorders.



### GENERAL ANXIETY DISORDER

Excessive, unrealistic worrying about everyday occurrences and situations in life. Can feel uncontrollable and interfere with relationships and work. People with GAD excessively worry about things over long periods of time.

### PANIC DISORDER

Panic disorder occurs when you experience numerous, unexpected panic attacks. It can be quite overwhelming and terrifying. A feeling of overwhelming terror with no reasonable explanation.



*Social Anxiety*

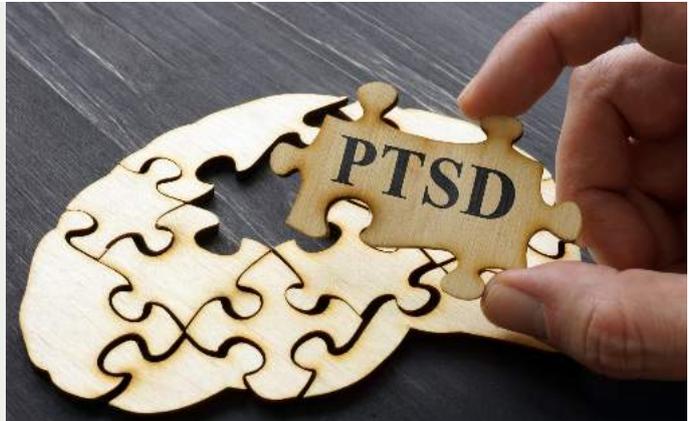
### SOCIAL ANXIETY

This is a chronic mental health condition that makes interacting with other people or being in social situations, terrifying. You'd experience an irrational fear of being judged or scrutinized.



## PTSD

Post traumatic stress disorder -caused by experiencing a traumatic event. Triggers can make an individual relive the trauma, accompanied by intense emotional and physical symptoms that may include nightmares, flashbacks, dissociation, depression and more.



## OCD

Obsessive compulsive disorder. Ever watch the movie: "As good as it gets?" Jack Nicholson's character displays the symptoms of OCD perfectly. Repeated, unwanted thoughts lead to irrational, compulsive behavior.

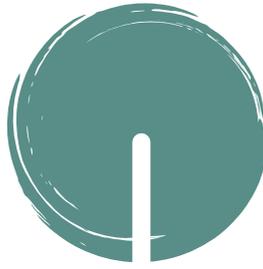
## SEPARATION ANXIETY

In children this can manifest as a child who is irrationally terrified of being separated from their parents. In adults, it may present as a fear of being away from a romantic partner or loved one.



## PHOBIAS

We all have them. A fear of spiders. A fear of crowded spaces. A fear of confined spaces. There are many types of phobias. But the fears associated with these phobias can be irrational and extremely overwhelming.



# What's the difference between anxiety attacks and panic attacks?



VS

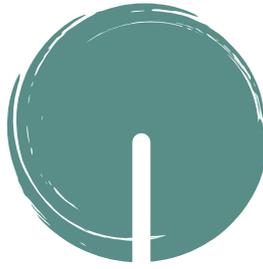


## **Anxiety Attack:**

Symptoms of anxiety usually builds up over time and a trigger for the anxiety can be identified. This build up can last for minutes, hours or even days. Symptoms may include; muscle tension, trouble sleeping, loss in concentration, fatigue, irritability, increased heart rate, dizziness, feeling restless.

## **Panic Attack:**

Come on suddenly and causes overwhelming physical and emotional distress. Some people describe it as if feeling like you're having a heart attack. You have this irrational, yet very real feeling of impending doom. You feel like you might die. (Although panic attacks on their own are not lethal). Symptoms include; hyperventilation, sweating, racing heart, visibly shaking, derealization (feeling detached from the world around you - the world looks fuzzy and unreal to you), or depersonalization (feeling detached from yourself, like an outside observer of yourself)



## Let's explore treatment options:



### PSYCHOTHERAPY / TALK THERAPY



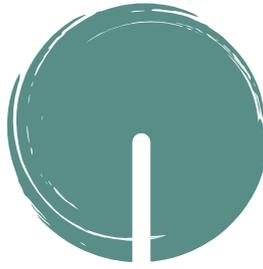
Psychotherapy, or 'talk therapy', is when a trained professional (like a counselor or psychologist) helps you work through, and overcome your problems in a way that helps you live a better life.

This is done by implementing a number of psychological methods. The treatment that best works with addressing anxiety disorders is called CBT.

CBT stands for 'Cognitive Behavioral Therapy'. This form of treatment focuses on changing our negative / distorted thought patterns, which in turn has an impact on our ability for emotional regulation - which finally helps change the reaction / behavior to these thoughts and emotions.

CBT has been around since the 60's and was introduced to the world by Dr Aaron T Beck, of the University of Pennsylvania.

Today it is considered as one of the most effective psychological treatments for an array of mental illnesses.



## MEDICATION



Although you might not really like the idea of having to take medication, it can truly help. It also doesn't necessarily mean that you have to remain on medication for the rest of your life. Sometimes it's used as a short- to mid term treatment.

That being said, it can be quite tricky and a timeous pursuit to find the right medication for you. Not all medication works the same way for all people. Different medications affect different people, differently.

A very important note here is to always make sure you ask about the side effects of the medication that's prescribed to you. Psychiatrists are highly professional specialists in their field, but - not all psychiatrists are created equally. The same goes for counselors and psychologists. You sometimes have to go through a few of them before you find the right fit for you.

### **Different medication options:**

Antidepressants. SSRIs (Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors). SNRIs (Selective Serotonin-Norepinephrine Reuptake Inhibitors). Benzodiazepines. Beta Blockers. Antipsychotics. Anticonvulsants.

Ok, I know that some of these words might be foreign to you, so let's break them down and look at what exactly each of these different medications do?



## **SSRIs - (Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors)**

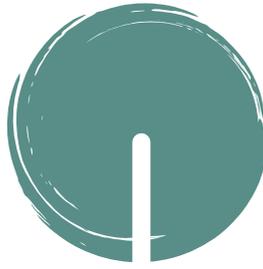
Developed in the 70's. The goal with this type of medication is to treat depression by increasing Serotonin (the happy molecule) levels in your brain. It prohibits (inhibits) the reuptake of the neurotransmitter Serotonin, thereby creating an increase in Serotonin levels in the brain. It has been hypothesised that depression happens due to insufficient levels of Serotonin.

The aim with this medication is to aid in lifting your mood.

It could take anything from 2 to 6 weeks before you start to feel the effects. Again, this varies for different individuals. So if it's your first time using this type of medication - try and practice a little patience, as the effects won't kick in right away.

Common side effects of SSRIs can include (but not limited to):

- Feeling agitated
- Feeling shaky or anxious (?? I know. It's ironic.)
- Indigestion
- Lowered libido
- Loss of appetite
- Dizziness
- Dry mouth
- Blurred vision



## **SNRIs - (Selective Serotonin-Norepinephrine Reuptake Inhibitors)**

This is a class of antidepressant drug that can be used for the treatment of anxiety disorders. As with SSRIs, these types of drugs inhibit the reuptake of Serotonin (the happy molecule) and Norepinephrine (also known as Noradrenaline, which improves alertness and energy) - which results in an increase of these neurotransmitters in the brain.

So the idea is to try and both lift your mood and energy levels.

Common side effects of SNRIs can include (but not limited to):

- Tiredness
- Constipation
- Insomnia
- Lowered libido
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Dry mouth
- Dizziness
- Excessive sweating



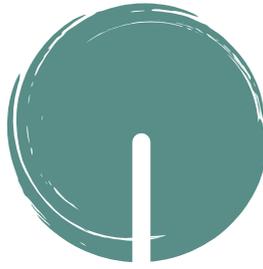
## **Benzodiazepines (Benzos)**

Benzodiazepines are more commonly known as tranquilizers. It's a psychoactive drug with sedating effects. These can work really well for treating anxiety disorders, BUT they can commonly be abused as these drugs can lead to addictive behavior. An example of some of the best known Benzos you may of heard of are Valium and Xanax.

Short term use is usually safe and effective. But long term use can lead to dependence and other adverse effects.

Common side effects of Benzos can include (but not limited to):

- Drowsiness
- Lightheadedness
- Muscle weakness
- Memory problems
- Slurred speech
- Confusion
- Being wobbly
- Fatigue



## Beta Blockers

Beta Blockers are used to lower your blood pressure. It blocks the hormone epinephrine, also known as adrenaline. Your heart rate slows down and in turn your blood pressure is lowered.

These are most effective as short term, event related treatment. It blocks the physical symptoms of anxiety, such as: elevated heart rate, sweating, tightness in the chest. Though they do nothing for the psychological or emotional effects caused by anxiety.

So they are quite effective when used for example phobias: like public speaking.

Possible side effects of Beta Blockers can include (but not limited to):

- Dizziness
- Cold hands and/or feet
- Difficulty sleeping
- Nightmares
- Feeling sick
- Fatigue
- Poor circulation
- Diarrhea or constipation
- Sexual dysfunction



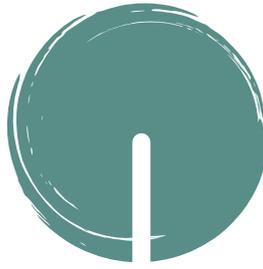
## **Antipsychotics**

The words can sound pretty scary. If you're prescribed an antipsychotic to help with the treatment of your anxiety, this does not mean that your doctor thinks you might be psychotic. Atypical antipsychotics have shown promising results in treating some anxiety disorders in conjunction with other treatments.

Antipsychotic drugs help regulate the functioning of brain circuits that control thinking, mood, and perception. They are most commonly used to treat patients who suffer from bipolar disorder, major depressive disorder and schizophrenia.

Possible side effects of Antipsychotics can include (but not limited to):

- Shakiness
- Restlessness
- Weight gain
- Sleepiness
- Sexual dysfunction
- Dry mouth
- Emotional blunting
- Blurred vision
- Urinary retention



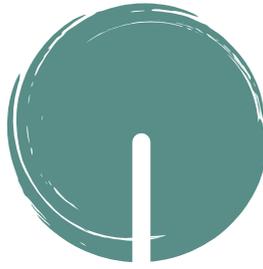
## **Anticonvulsants / Antiepileptics**

This type of medication works by reducing hyperactivity in the brain.

Although these types of drugs are more commonly used to treat Epilepsy, migraines and other brain disorders; they can be quite effective in treating anxiety disorders as well. This is achieved by decreasing activation within the fear circuits in the brain and thereby lessening the symptoms of anxiety.

Possible side effects of Anticonvulsants can include (but not limited to):

- Fatigue
- Dizziness
- Drowsiness
- Shakiness
- Weight gain

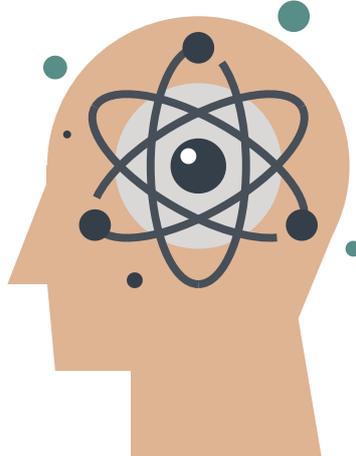


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## SELF HELP - (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy)

**THOUGHTS**

Our thoughts affect  
how we feel and act



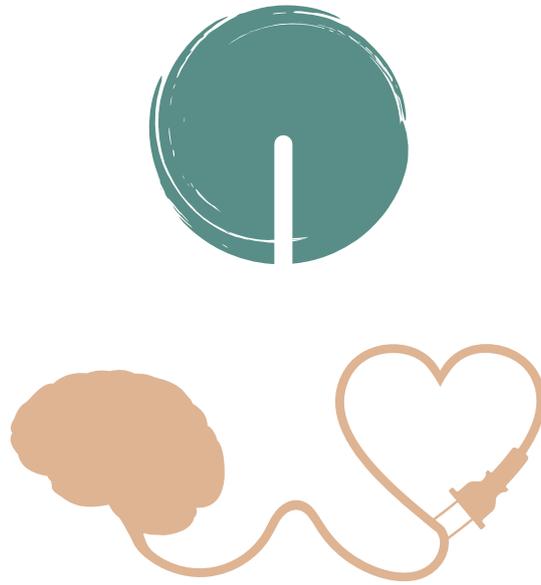
**BEHAVIOR**

Our behavior affects  
how we think and feel



**FEELINGS**

Our emotions affect  
how we think and act



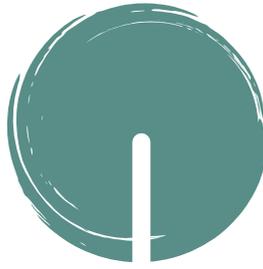
CBT works on the premise that your thoughts, emotions, attitude and behaviors are all interlinked. Negative or distorted thoughts can keep you in a vicious cycle.

For example: **NEGATIVE THOUGHT:** "I'm so fat" = **NEGATIVE EMOTION:** "Feeling ugly or undesirable. Which leads to feeling depressed" = **NEGATIVE ACTION/ BEHAVIOR:** "Binge eating or emotional eating to suppress feelings of depression because of thinking that you are fat".

As you can see, this is not healthy or helpful. CBT equips us with a number of tools that we can implement to help break this vicious cycle and replace negative or distorted thoughts with more positive and realistic thoughts. More positive thinking help elevate our mood. Feeling better helps us to behave in healthier more productive ways.

CBT is goal oriented. It aims to help us face difficulties in our life so we can attain our goals. It's also a **hands on approach** that **requires you to be invested in the process.**

Let's have a look at examples of '**cognitive distortions**'.



# Cognitive Distortions

## FILTERING

Focussing only on the negative and ignoring the positive.

## CATASTROPHIZING



I have a gold medal in this one!  
Always expecting the worst case scenario.

## POLARIZED THINKING

All or nothing thinking.

## HEAVEN'S REWARD FALLACY

Expecting to be rewarded for self sacrifice.

## CONTROL FALLACIES

Either assuming that only others are to blame. Or assuming that only you are to blame.

## ALWAYS BEING RIGHT

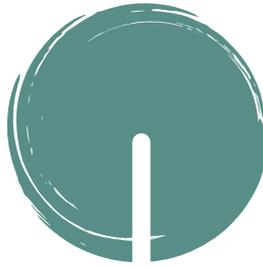
Being right supercedes everything.

## FALLACY OF FAIRNESS

Assuming that life should be fair.

## PERSONALIZATION

Always assuming responsibility for everything.



## **OVERGENERALIZATION**

Ex. I went out with a 51 year old narcissist - so now all 51 year olds are narcissists.

## **JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS**

There's this saying:  
"Assumption is the mother of all f\*&kups."

## **EMOTIONAL REASONING**

If I feel it, it **MUST** be true.

## **BLAMING**

Everyone else is always wrong.

## **FALLACY OF CHANGE**

Expecting others to change.

## **GLOBAL LABELLING**

Extreme generalization.

## **"SHOULD"**

Unwilling to budge on one's own rules for behavior.  
Unacceptable if you or others break these rules.

Source: **Positive Psychology**



# 9 Essential CBT Tools & Techniques



**JOURNALING**



**NIGHTMARE EXPOSURE  
& RESCRIPTING**



**RELAXED BREATHING**



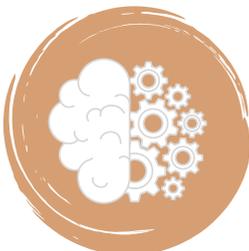
**PLAY THE SCRIPT  
UNTIL THE END**



**UNRAVELLING  
COGNITIVE  
DISTORTIONS**



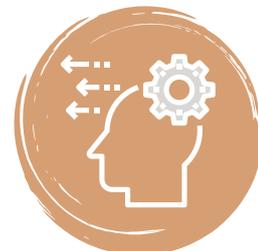
**PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE  
RELAXATION**



**COGNITIVE  
RECONSTRUCTING**



**INTEROCEPTIVE  
EXPOSURE**



**EXPOSURE AND  
RESPONSE  
PREVENTION**



## JOURNALING

Journaling is a great way of getting thoughts and ideas out of your head and onto paper, so you can physically see. One - it helps with the ability to identify your negative thinking and emotional patterns. This gives you a framework to work from.

Try and capture detail and specifics. When you feel a negative emotion, describe that emotion and write down why you feel that way. Write down why you believe this to be true? This way you can identify cognitive distortions.

Like a 'thoughts & moods' diary. Try and put this on your daily to-do list.

**PRACTICE TIME:** Consider and write down at least two negative thoughts you know yourself to think on a regular basis. Next, write down why you believe these thoughts to be true? Try and work this exercise into your routine on a regular basis. Keeping a daily journal and writing about your days can also be useful in identifying unhelpful thoughts and behaviors you can work on.

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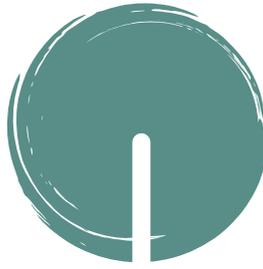
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### NIGHTMARE EXPOSURE & RESCRIPTING

Nightmares are not pleasant. Though sometimes it's just our brain's way of processing unpleasant or traumatic events.

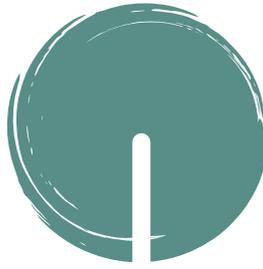
Nightmare exposure and rescripting is a technique used to take a nightmare, then rescript it to resemble something more pleasant or positive. This way neutralising the anxiety or fear connected to the nightmare.

**PRACTICE TIME:** This takes some practice, so be patient with yourself. If it feels too overwhelming, come back to this exercise another day. Follow the instructions below.

#### STEP 1:

Practice some relaxation techniques first to make sure you are calm and relaxed before you start working on changing your nightmares. Here are some examples:

- Progressive muscle relaxation - Find a quiet place where you won't be interrupted. Sit comfortably in a chair with your back straight. Close your eyes and focus on your breathing. Breathing in through your nose, all the way into your belly, and slowly out through your mouth. Do this three times. Next, you're going to focus on tensing certain muscle groups as you are breathing in, and relaxing them as you are breathing out. Start with your feet and work your way up. Tense your feet as tight as you can whilst you're slowly breathing in, then relax as you slowly breathe out. Then your calves, quads & hamstrings, buttocks etc.
- Paced breathing - There are many different techniques for practicing paced breathing. I'll share my favorite technique with you. It's very simple. (*This also works very well for calming yourself when experiencing an anxiety or panic attack*). So, you breathe in for 5 counts, hold for 5 counts, breathe out for 5 counts. Then repeat 5 times. I like this technique because it's super easy to remember.
- Practice meditating for a few minutes - You can do this with your eyes open or closed. Again, there are many ways to practice meditation. Though our focus here is to practice mindfulness. Make sure you're seated in a comfortable position, either in a chair, on a couch, or even on the floor. Slowly breathe in through your nose and notice your chest expanding. Then out through your mouth, noticing how your chest is contracting. When your mind gets distracted, gently bring it back to just focusing on your breathing. You can do this for as long or short a period as you want.



## **STEP 2:**

Choose a recurring nightmare you want to work on. Try and choose a nightmare that you can manage NOW, that is not too overwhelming. You can work on trauma related nightmares later on when you've had more practice.

## **STEP 3:**

Write down your target nightmare. Be as descriptive as possible. Describe the imagery, sights, sounds, smells, tastes. Write down any thoughts, feelings or assumptions about yourself in the nightmare.

## **STEP 4:**

Now that you have it all written down. Choose a different outcome for the nightmare. You want to choose a change that happens BEFORE the trauma in the nightmare. For example: Let's say your recurring nightmare is being run over by a bus. Let's say that in this nightmare it's night time. You're lost in a city that is unfamiliar to you. It's raining. It's cold. You feel frightened. As you look up at the tall buildings that surround you, you wander into the street and BAM, a bus runs you over.

The change in this case can be that as you step off the curb, looking up at the buildings that surround you, a stranger grabs you by the arm and pulls you back onto the sidewalk. (This really is just a made up example)

## **STEP 5:**

Write down the full nightmare with the changes.

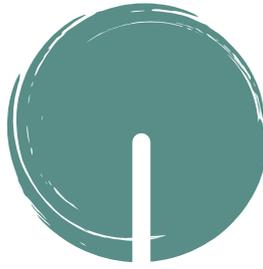
## **STEP 6:**

Rehearse this new nightmare scenario and relaxation techniques each night before you go to sleep.

## **STEP 6:**

Rehearse this new nightmare scenario and relaxation techniques during the day. (Maybe not on a bus)





## RELAXED BREATHING

We've already covered one technique for practicing relaxed breathing. Though perhaps that one doesn't really work for you. Here are a few more examples you can try on for size.

### **The Long Exhale**

Inhaling slowly is sometimes much easier for some people than exhaling slowly. With this exercise you want to push the air out of your lungs first. A thorough exhale, then slowly inhale. Now try and exhale slower than your inhale. Ex. Inhale for 4 counts, exhale for 5 counts. Try and practice this for 5 minutes.

### **Breathing From Your Diaphragm**

Either lie on the floor with a pillow beneath your head and knees for comfort. Or sit comfortably in a chair with your arms, shoulders and neck relaxed.

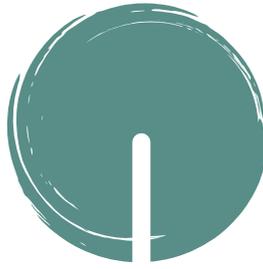
Next: put one hand under your rib cage and the other over your heart. You want to practice breathing deeply and have your stomach move, instead of your only your chest rising when you breathe in.

### **Resonant Breathing**

Lie down with your eyes closed. Now slowly breath in through your nose with your mouth closed. Don't breathe in too quickly. Do it slowly, try to inhale for 6 seconds. Then slowly exhale through your mouth. Try to imagine the air entering and exiting your body as you inhale and exhale.

### **Lion's Breath**

- Sit on the floor with your legs crossed.
- Place your hands on your knees, stretching out your arms.
- Take a deep breath in through your nose.
- Breath out through your mouth and make the sound "HA"
- During exhale, open your mouth as wide as you can and stick your tongue out as far as you can, towards your chin.
- Relax your face as you inhale again.
- Repeat 6 times.



**PLAY THE SCRIPT  
UNTIL THE END**

This technique can be especially helpful for people who suffer from intense phobias and anxiety. Have you ever experienced how being anxious about something can be far worse in your head, than when whatever you were anxious about actually comes to pass?

You imagine a fear that you have. Then you ask yourself: what would it look like if that fear became a reality? You keep asking yourself: "What would happen next" and "What else" until you're out of answers.

This sometimes helps to paint irrational fears in a more realistic light. It can also help dim the fear or anxiety that you feel, pertaining to a specific fear.

**PRACTICE TIME**

Start small. You don't want to completely overwhelm yourself on the first go.

Identify a fear that you have. Now imagine what it would look like if that fear was to become a reality and actually happen? Write down your answer. Then ask yourself: "What would happen next", and keep asking that question.

**Example:** Let's say my fear or anxiety is around not having enough money to pay my rent next month. So what would it look like if that happened? I might get evicted. What would happen next? I'd have to find a new place to stay. What would happen next? I could maybe look for a cheaper place. What else? I could try find a better job or a second job. What else? I could write down all my monthly expenses and see where I can make some cuts. Etc...

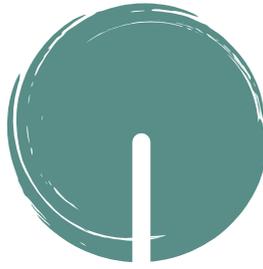
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### **UNRAVELLING COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS**

This technique focuses on the main goal of CBT. You want to make yourself aware of cognitive distortions you might be vulnerable to. It can be any of the 15 listed on page 18 & 19.

This involves identifying and challenging negative and harmful thoughts. Here are the steps involved:

#### **STEP 1:**

##### **Identify the Cognitive Distortions:**

Write down and list troublesome thoughts throughout the day. You need to identify and track your distorted thoughts first before you can start working on changing them.

#### **STEP 2:**

##### **Examine the Evidence:**

Are these thoughts you hold based on opinion or facts? Thinking that 'Karen didn't greet me this morning when she came into the office. She always greets me back. I must've done something wrong'.

This, of course, is an opinion you have based on making an assumption. Bet if you asked Karen about it, she's probably going through some tough issues at home and was just distracted and didn't even realise she didn't greet you'.

#### **STEP 3:**

##### **Double Standard Method:**

We tend to be our own harshest critics and far harder on ourselves than on anyone else in our circle. You'd probably never even think of speaking to a close friend the same way you speak to yourself in your own mind.

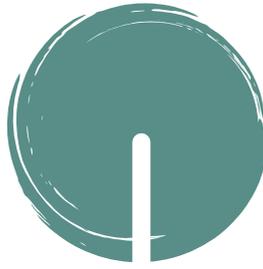
Imagine your friend telling you he's fallen in love with someone and you say to him: "You're going to screw this up, just like you screw up everything else in your life".



Try a little more caring and supportive self talk. Whenever you catch yourself thinking something negative about yourself - immediately state the opposite.

PS: I put positive and affirming messages on sticky notes all over my bathroom.





### PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

We covered this technique on page 22.

**Progressive muscle relaxation** - Find a quiet place where you won't be interrupted. Sit comfortably in a chair with your back straight. Close your eyes and focus on your breathing. Breathing in through your nose, all the way into your belly, and slowly out through your mouth. Do this three times. Next, you're going to focus on tensing certain muscle groups as you are breathing in, and relaxing them as you are breathing out. Start with your feet and work your way up. Tense your feet as tight as you can whilst you're slowly breathing in, then relax as you slowly breathe out. Then your calves, quads & hamstrings, buttocks etc.



### COGNITIVE RECONSTRUCTING

Once you are able to identify your cognitive distortions, you are able to start working on reconstructing those negative or harmful thoughts.

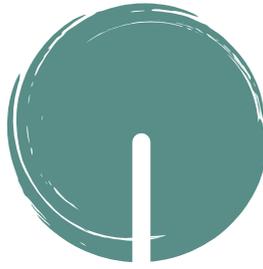
We've gone through the process of writing down and identifying harmful, destructive or negative thoughts. With this method you want to take that thought, and take it apart. Like a mechanic would with an engine to find the fault.

Example: Let's say you believe that getting that promotion at work is what will make you a successful person. Not getting the promotion will mean that you are a failure.

Now let's challenge this thinking: What is your definition of failure? Do you believe your definition of failure to be rational? Or factual even? Does not getting that promotion REALLY make you a failure?

Instead of believing this kind of thinking, you can make use of this opportunity to think about 'what really makes a person successful'? This could be something you might not have considered before.





### **INTEROCEPTIVE EXPOSURE**

Interoception is the perception of sensations from within your body. This technique aims to lessen the fear of physical sensations. It's a form of exposure therapy.

This is best done with a therapist.

You will be asked to partake in a number of exercises to elicit the feared response to certain bodily sensations. Like, hyperventilating for example. You are then able to stay with the exposure in a safe and controlled environment without distractions.

This allows you to look at the fear you hold from a different perspective and new learning of the sensations can take place.

For example: You can use some of the techniques you have learned here to calm yourself down when you start hyperventilating due to a panic attack. Knowing that you can control this sensation by applying one of these techniques during interoceptive exposure, helps lessen the fear.



### **EXPOSURE AND RESPONSE PREVENTION**

Exposing yourself and confronting your fear repeatedly, helps the fear to subside. This technique is especially useful in treating Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. And equally helpful in treating phobias and general anxiety.

For example: let's say a person with a phobia of confined spaces (claustrophobia) is exposed to standing in a closet with the door closed, for short periods of time. Then the time of exposure increases little by little. (I did this as a child so I could learn how to calm myself down when I felt such overwhelming anxiety and fear)

Another example could be joining a Toastmasters club if you have a fear of public speaking.

This helps to prevent such intense fear responses.



## Other Useful Tools

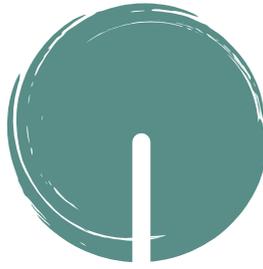


### Practicing Mindfulness

Practicing mindfulness. It's probably one of the highest trending phrases/ideologies at the moment. And with good reason. Mindfulness isn't just something reserved for ninja level yogi's or enlightened gurus. It is a practice that can truly change your life! It certainly has mine!

Mindfulness is the practice of being focused on the present moment. Not thinking about that job interview you're so nervous about tomorrow or feeling down due to the fight you had with your partner yesterday. It's a way to ground yourself in the present moment on a daily basis. It's also really effective in helping deal with general anxiety, anxiety attacks and panic attacks.

Mindfulness takes regular practice to be truly effective. Research has shown that regular meditation, as a form of practicing mindfulness, can actually physically change the structure of your brain.



# Mindfulness Techniques



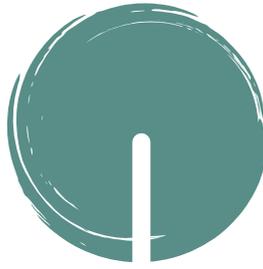
## MEDITATION



Meditation is a form of brain training. Most people think it's just sitting around doing nothing. When in actual fact, what you're doing is actively train your brain. Like a muscle. Meditating is gym for your brain. Studies around meditation and its effects on the brain have been conducted for years now. Here are some of the interesting and more recent scientific findings in the meditation-brain connection arena.

- Studies conducted at Yale University have shown that regular meditation reduces activity in the "ME CENTER" of your brain. Also known as the Default Mode Network, or DMN.

The DMN is an area of your brain that is active when you have wandering thoughts. You're not thinking of anything in particular, you're just daydreaming or ruminating. Less activity in this area of your brain means you are better able to 'snap out of it' and not linger on negative or worrisome thoughts for as long as you may have, if you didn't practice meditating.



- Another interesting study conducted at Johns Hopkins University has found that regular meditation practice can be as effective for depression as antidepressant drugs. It's not a cure-all approach of course. There's no such thing. But the benefits are evidently very positive.
- Just eight weeks of regular meditation can help strengthen the Hippocampus. The area of the brain responsible for memory and learning.
- Just a few days' practice can improve concentration. This is especially helpful in individuals with ADD/ADHD.
- Meditation helps with all forms of anxiety. Again, by quieting down the area of your brain that makes your thoughts run wild.

I can go on and on about the benefits of meditation. As an over-thinker and someone who suffers with 'analysis-paralysis', I can personally attest to the benefits of meditation. It has absolutely changed my life in helping me quiet my mind and help with my anxiety.

There are different types of meditation as well, each with a different focus.



**Mindfulness  
Meditation**



**Spiritual  
Meditation**



**Focused  
Meditation**



**Movement  
Meditation**



**Mantra  
Meditation**



**Transcendental  
Meditation**



**Progressive  
Relaxation**

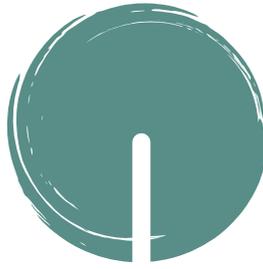


**Loving-Kindness  
Meditation**



**Zen  
Meditation**

For the purposes of this exercise we'll just be looking at Mindfulness Meditation. But I urge you to do some research on the other types of meditation as well, to find which techniques work best for you.



## **Mindfulness Meditation**

Here's a simple and fairly easy technique to start with.

### **Step 1:**

You can do this lying down or sitting comfortably in a chair or on the floor. I usually suggest sitting as I fall asleep when I try doing it lying down. You need to be comfortable and your back fairly straight. Hands resting in your lap. You can do this with your eyes open or closed.

### **Step 2:**

Start with your eyes open. Breathe in slowly through your nose and exhale slowly through your mouth. Notice your stomach expanding and retracting as you inhale and exhale. Try and breathe down all the way 'into your stomach'. Do this a few times whilst just maintaining a soft focus of your surroundings.

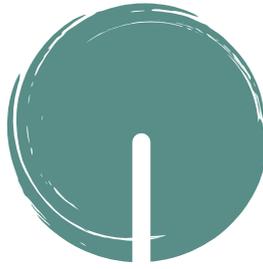
### **Step 3:**

Notice the sounds around you. Check in on your body and how it's feeling. Now close your eyes (if you want to) and keep focusing on slowly inhaling through your nose, and exhaling through your mouth. Inhale through your nose, exhale through your mouth.

### **Step 4:**

Your thoughts will start to wander at some point. Let it. Notice whatever thought comes along, and then gently bring your attention back to your breathing. Try and do this for 5 minutes. If you've never tried meditation before, your mind might want to wander a lot. But just keep gently bringing your focus back to your breathing. It will get easier over time and with more practice.

For more information and techniques, check out 'Headspace' on Netflix, or download the [Headspace](#) app. Another good app is '[Calm](#)'. Or simply do a Youtube search for guided meditations.



## GROUNDING TECHNIQUES



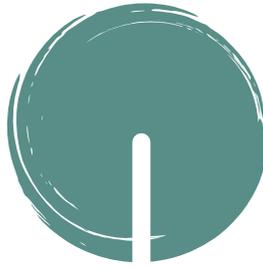
There are a number of grounding techniques that I have found especially helpful when dealing with anxiety- or panic attacks.

### BREATHING TECHNIQUES

As with meditation, there are many different grounding breathing techniques. I'll share my own breathing technique here as I find it simple and easy to remember:



I call it the 5-count technique. Close your eyes. Slowly breathe in through your nose for 5 counts. Hold your breath for 5 counts. Then slowly exhale through your mouth for 5 counts. Do this 5 times.



## USING THE SENSES

This is another way of practicing mindfulness and very useful when having an anxiety- or panic attack, using the 5 senses. We actually have 7 senses, but for the purpose of this exercise we'll only be focusing on sight, touch, hearing, smell and taste.

### The 5-4-3-2-1 Coping Technique:

Here's how it works. Look around you and try and identify **5 THINGS YOU CAN SEE**. Then **4 THINGS YOU CAN TOUCH**. (This can be your clothing, furniture, pet, paper, anything you can touch). Really focus on the texture of the things you touch. How does it feel? Next: **3 THINGS YOU CAN HEAR**. **2 THINGS YOU CAN SMELL**. And lastly **1 THING YOU CAN TASTE**. (Maybe a mint you have in your bag or anything edible nearby. Focus on taste and texture.



5 THINGS YOU CAN SEE



4 THINGS YOU CAN TOUCH



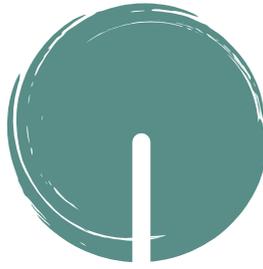
3 THINGS YOU CAN HEAR



2 THINGS YOU CAN SMELL



1 THING YOU CAN TASTE



### **SENSORY FIRST AID KIT**

For this, it helps to have a better understanding of your individual sensory profile. For example - I'm sensory sensitive to light and sound. I don't like noise or overly crowded places. It makes me feel very anxious. I also don't like bright light, so also wear my sunglasses and every single light bulb in my apartment are 'warm white' globes.

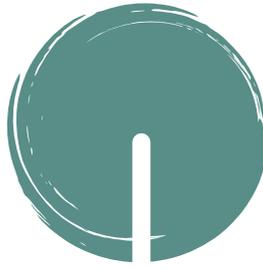
A sensory first aid kit is something you can have at home, in your car, at the office. I'd actually suggest you have one for each of those. It's something that can help distract you and calm you down when you have an anxiety or panic attack.

For instance, although I am sensory sensitive to light and sound, I'm sensory seeking when it comes to textures and smells. I love the smell of vanilla and frangipani and I'm always fidgeting with my hands.

So my sensory first aid kit is made up of a small vanilla candle. A small bottle of perfume. And a soft rubber spiky ball.

When I have an anxiety or panic attack, I can help distract myself and bring myself back to the present by using my sensory first aid kit. Smelling the fragrances I like and squeezing my rubber spiky ball.

I think you get the gist.



**QUICK RECAP:** TOOLS YOU CAN USE WHEN YOU'RE EXPERIENCING AN ANXIETY OR PANIC ATTACK

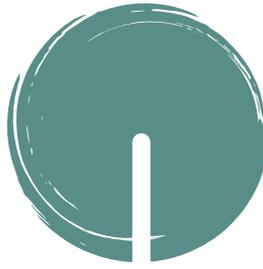
- **Progressive Muscle Relaxation**
- **Paced Breathing (5 in, hold for 5, 5 out, 5 times)**
- **Mindfulness Meditation**
- **Using the Senses (5,4,3,2,1)**
- **Sensory First Aid Kit**

**Then:**

- **Run Through the 9 Essential CBT Tools**

**Also:** remember to remind yourself that it is 'okay' to be experiencing an anxiety or panic attack as and when you experience it. Our brains freak out because we think it's abnormal and not okay. It's a perfectly normal response, it's just not happening when it's supposed to.

**If none of the above work** - try some strenuous exercise. Get all the good hormones and transmitters going.



Thank you so much for downloading this eBook. I really hope that you have enjoyed the material I've put together and that you find it useful.

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Sending love, from my heart to yours.

**Jo Rust**

