4 Steps to Help You Relax Your Mind

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How to Relax Your Mind and Ease Anxiety Symptoms

Learning how to relax your mind can be a very effective way to manage the symptoms of anxiety, but this is much easier said than done. By frequently practicing different relaxation techniques, you will be better equipped to deal with stressors as they appear and avoid being caught off-guard by your anxiety.

How Anxiety Makes it Hard to Relax

Anxiety can make it difficult to relax, as an anxious mind is often an active mind. Many of the common symptoms of anxiety are incompatible with relaxation, such as:

- Feeling nervous, restless, or tense.
- Having trouble sleeping.
- Inability to control worry or panic.
- Having issues concentrating.
- Increased heart rate.
- Hyperventilation.
- Having a sense of impending danger or doom.

Stress tends to build up over time, making it more difficult to deal with your anxiety if you try to ignore this tension in the hopes that it may disappear. Practicing relaxation techniques with small stressors can make it easier for you to utilize these tools when more looming issues are weighing on your mind.

Signs That Anxiety is Preventing Relaxation

If the symptoms of anxiety are preventing you from relaxing, you may begin to feel tension in both your body and your mind. Often, feeling psychological or emotional tension can lead to physical tension, and vice versa.

The body and mind are connected in many ways, which is why relaxing your body can often relax your mind. Learning to relax your mind will also help you to relieve your body of the physical symptoms of anxiety.

The interconnected nature of the body and mind is why it is important to try both physical and mental coping mechanisms when practicing relaxation techniques to manage the symptoms of anxiety.

How to Relax Your Mind and Reduce Anxiety

It is important to practice both mental and physical relaxation techniques to combat your anxiety in a holistic manner.

1. Exercise

Exercise is a physical activity that is effective in relieving tension in your body. By engaging in something that is physically exhausting or challenging in some way, you can greatly reduce the tension in your body.

Scientifically speaking, exercise decreases stress hormones (like cortisol) and increases endorphins, uplifting your mood with feel-good chemicals. Physical activity may also provide you with a natural buffer against tension, allowing you to become less affected by the stressors in your life.

Any physical exercise can result in relaxation, including yoga, sports, weightlifting, running, or walking. Start with something that seems most enjoyable to you and practice exercising until it becomes a habit.

Exercise comes in many forms, allowing you to try a variety of options to find the one that works best for you. Be careful not to push yourself too hard or overdo it in the beginning, as this can lead to injury or prevent you from continuing to practice.

2. Meditation

Meditation is a series of techniques used to relax the mind by teaching you how to be in the moment. Practicing meditation over time will not only reduce stress but will teach you how to better handle new stressors as they happen.

Meditation will calm your mind by focusing your thinking on the now, rather than worrying about the past or the future. Learning how to experience every moment, let it go, then experience the next will reduce the amount of time you spend ruminating on things that you cannot control.

With practice, your thoughts will not be as rapid or overwhelming, allowing you to relax your mind and focus on the now. Meditation may also lead to increased activity in the areas of your brain responsible for happiness, as well as positive thoughts and emotions.

3. Gratitude Journaling

Similar to meditation, journaling helps you to shift your focus from your stressors to what you are grateful for. When you are stressed, it is common to focus on the negative, which can lead to more feelings of stress and anxiety.

Try to focus on the positives within your life and write down specific things that you are grateful for. This will help you to re-shift your thinking out of the negative and into the more positive elements of your life.

In addition to gratitude journaling, simply getting things off your mind by writing them down may also help you to relax.

Focus on getting your thoughts on paper without judgement. There is no need for perfect grammar or spelling here!

4. Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) is a way to release physical tension within your body. This technique teaches you how to tense and relax all of the major muscles within your body, starting with your head and ending with your feet.

By purposefully tensing your muscles before allowing them to relax, you can achieve a greater level of relaxation when you finally do let go; you enable your body to relax more thoroughly and rid yourself of physical tension.

With continued practice, you can move to a shortened version of PMR known as deep muscle relaxation (DMR), where you rapidly relax your whole body.

As with anything, all of these relaxation techniques take time and patience to master. Exercise, meditation, gratitude journaling and PMR can be used together to relax your mind and rid you of tension.

With continued practice, each of these coping mechanisms will become easier, giving you the tools to better cope with new stressors and allowing you to relax when the tension becomes too much.