



Grounding techniques to help with anxiety

This leaflet explains grounding techniques to help with anxiety in patients with breathing pattern disorders – such as hyperventilation (over-breathing) or dysfunctional breathing.

Why am I experiencing anxiety?

Most of the time people experience anxiety due to worrying about the future. Anxiety causes a variety of physical symptoms that can be very frightening. The most common symptom of an anxiety is feeling of being breathless. You may not be aware of this and may think your breathlessness is due to a lung or heart condition. This, in turn, increases anxiety, leading to more physical symptoms and more breathlessness. Thus, anxiety and a feeling of breathlessness can create a vicious circle.

What can help control the anxiety?

Many people find relaxed breathing control exercises and grounding techniques useful in controlling anxiety. Your respiratory physiotherapist will go through the breathing control exercises.

What is ‘grounding’?

Grounding is a technique that aims to return you back from negative, challenging emotions to the present. It distracts your mind from unwanted experiences to refocus on what is happening in the present/your surroundings.

You don't have to be in crisis mode to use grounding techniques, incorporating them into your daily routines can enhance your overall mental wellbeing.

Grounding techniques

1. Slow, relax breathing:

If possible, get yourself away from the situation that is making you stressful or anxious. If this is not doable, try to concentrate on your breathing. Sit upright. If you notice yourself breathing faster, then try to slow down your breathing. Take slow deep breaths through your nose and slowly exhale from the mouth. Make sure you are breathing from the diaphragm / tummy and not from upper chest. Concentrate on the air going in and out. Concentrate on every slow breath you inhale and exhale. Focus more on exhalation, which will give you a feeling of relief.

2. Distraction:

- Choose your favourite colour or any colour. Look around your environment and find your colour. Notice various objects with that colour. Repeat the process by picking a different colour.

- Another way of distracting yourself is counting backwards from 100 in sevens.

3. **The 5-4-3-2-1 technique:**

Again notice the place you are in. Now notice and observe:

- **Five** things you can **see**.
- **Four** things you can **touch** (it can be the floor, the chair you are sitting on, your clothes, bag and so on).
- **Three** things you can **hear** (radio, talking, sound made by objects or distant sounds / noises).
- **Two** things you can **smell** (perfume, food, coffee).
- **One** thing you can **taste** (or imagine the taste of your favourite food).

4. **Concentrate:**

Pick one item or an object such as keys, watch, purse, bracelet etc. You can also choose to carry one item with you all of the time. Once you have chosen the item, place it in your hand. Close your eyes and feel the texture, temperature, weight etc. of the object. You can look at the object or any other object in the room and notice its colour, features and any other qualities it has.

5. **Visualising and using affirmations:**

Visualise somewhere you feel calm, happy and secure e.g., childhood home, peaceful beach, or even a fictional place. Gentle reminder like "I am safe" or "This too shall pass" can help calm an anxiety attack, it's good to practice these type of affirmations regularly so that your mind is used to hearing them.

6. **Feel your feet on the ground and tense/release your fists:**

Whether you're sitting or standing, press your feet firmly and feel the ground beneath you for an immediate connection to the present moment and the space you're in. You can further the grounding effect by placing your feet on cool grass or the warm earth.

Type of progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) – this technique allows you to feel and the release tension physically.

7. **Give yourself a butterfly hug:**

Cross your arms over your chest so your hands are on your collarbones and your fingertips point towards your shoulders. Alternatively, tap each hand like the fluttering wings of a butterfly, taking deep breaths.

Stick at it...

You may find the above techniques difficult to do in the beginning. However, the more you practise, the more it will be easy to calm yourself down.

Where to get more help

If you are still struggling with your anxiety, speak with your GP or healthcare professional. You can also self-refer yourself to “Talking Therapies”.

For more information, visit <https://talkingtherapies.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk> or contact them on 03003652000 or email talkingtherapies@berkshire.nhs.uk.

There are also lots of apps available for both Android and Apple devices, such as “Calm” and “Headspace”, which can help relieve your anxiety.

References:

How to Cope With Anxiety Breathing Difficulties (calmclinic.com)

Grounding techniques for stress, anxiety and panic attacks – Counselling Directory (counselling-directory.org.uk)

NHS Talking Therapies Berkshire (berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk)

Contact numbers

For any queries about your breathing pattern disorder, please contact the Respiratory Medicine department on **Tel: 0118 322 6676**

Respiratory Physiotherapists: Frankie Knight and Beth Anderson

Tel: 0118 322 7560 Email: pulmonary.rehabilitation@royalberkshire.nhs.uk

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

<p>Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.</p>
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