

## Practical Strategies

Often underestimated, practical coping strategies can ease both emotional and physical symptoms that the condition inflicts upon the sufferer. Think in terms of the churning stomach, the aches, pains, tiredness and fatigue.

### What are you eating?

The old saying 'you are what you eat' is true. What you eat affects your health, your mood, your energy levels and even your behaviour. The food you put into your body, quite literally, will influence how you feel both physically and emotionally. Making good food choices can help keep your body and your mind healthy.

Avoid reaching for the sugary snacks and processed foods, which lead to quick highs and lows in your blood sugar that create feelings of restlessness and fatigue.

Eating a diet high in vegetables, fruit, whole grains, and lean protein can help control stress levels.

### What do you do for exercise?

Getting up and moving around can be a great way to combat and manage stress. It doesn't matter what the exercise is, but getting moving will help relieve the tension and increase the release of endorphins. These are chemicals in the brain that act as natural painkillers and also boost the ability for quality sleep, which in turn will combat your stress levels.

Try to work out three or four times a week but don't overdo things, if in doubt, check with your GP. You could also try a massage or progressive muscle relaxation to help ease muscle tension.

### Progressive Muscle Relaxation

#### Step 1

Ensure you are comfortable. It isn't necessary to lie down; you can be seated, but do ensure you're somewhere free from distraction. If you feel more comfortable, close your eyes.

## Step 2

Breathe. Inhale deeply through your nose, feeling your abdomen rise as you fill your body with air. Hold for two then slowly exhale from your mouth, drawing your navel toward your spine. Repeat three to five times (see the section on breathing below).

## Step 3

Starting at your feet, squeeze and release your muscles. Clench your toes and press your heels toward the ground. Squeeze tightly for a few breaths and then release. Now flex your feet in, pointing your toes up towards your head. Hold for a few seconds and then release.

## Step 4

Continue to work your way up the body, squeezing and releasing each muscle group. Work your way up in the order below. Try to clench each muscle group for a few breaths and then slowly release. Repeat any areas that feel exceptionally stiff.

- Legs
- Buttocks
- Abdomen
- Back
- Hands
- Arms
- Shoulders
- Neck
- Face

## Step 5

Finish by taking a few deep breaths, noting how much calmer and more relaxed you feel.

## Are you getting quality sleep?

Only 1 in 3 adults in the UK get the recommended seven hours of sleep at night. Although it can be challenging to sleep when we experience anxiety, creating a regular night-time routine can help us relax and prepare for quality sleep. Things like progressive relaxation, reading, and turning off electronics at least one hour before bed can help you ready your mind and body for rest.

## How do you breathe?

Shortness of breath can be a common physical symptom of anxiety, along with a tightened chest and muscle tension. In those moments, we often forget to breathe and take rapid, shallow breaths. Practising how to do slow abdominal breathing can help.

## **Abdominal Breathing Exercise to help you relax.**

Next time you feel anxious, have a go at this simple technique:

### **Step 1**

Breathe in slowly, gently through your nose. Keeping your shoulders relaxed. Your belly should expand, and your chest should rise very little.

### **Step 2**

Hold for a count of three.

### **Step 3**

Exhale slowly through your mouth. As you blow air out, purse your lips slightly, but keep your jaw relaxed. You may hear a soft "whooshing" sound as you exhale.

### **Step 4**

Repeat this breathing exercise for several minutes.

You can perform this exercise as often as needed. It can be done standing up, sitting down, or lying down. It is best to practice the breathing technique before you feel signs of anxiety as some people with an anxiety disorder initially can feel a little anxious while doing the exercise.

## **Emotional Strategies**

Finding what works for you in terms of the strategies is key to combatting stress. Dealing with intrusive thoughts, continually worrying, the feelings of fear, uncertainty, apprehension, dread all take their toll. Here are some strategies you can utilise.

### **Are you familiar with mindfulness?**

Different types that help with anxiety. Using techniques like mindfulness, and deep breathing will help slow down your thoughts and emotions.

Slowing down allows us to learn to be more present in now rather than hyper-focused on trying to anticipate and prepare for the future. Focussing on the future can increase our levels of uncertainty, which in turn can and will increase the sensitivity of your fight/flight response leading to an increase in levels of anxiety.

## **What are your triggers?**

Practising and learning more mindfulness will be helpful for you in noticing the situations that appear to trigger your anxiety. Although it's not possible to avoid all of the triggers, just being aware of them can help you gain clarity and take steps toward managing stress in those specific situations.

Learning ways to challenge your anxiety will help, learning to diffuse anxious thoughts and calming the need to keep asking "what if."

## **Can you accept being anxious?**

Remember anxiety is not something you are experiencing because you are flawed stress is determined by a host of factors such as genetics, neurobiology, family history and life experiences. There is no one cause of GAD, and it is something that many people experience.

As impossible as it may seem, it can be helpful to learn to accept the journey and embrace it as an opportunity to learn and care for yourself in healthy ways. Being aware of your feelings will improve your overall mental and emotional health.

## **How positive are you?**

There is no need to lose hope. Many people with anxiety, such as generalised anxiety disorder do lead full, productive, and joyful lives.

The key is taking time to learn what strategies work well for you, stay connected to others, and remain positive.

Find inspiration through quotes, verses, music, nature, social connections, etc. Surround yourself with positive examples of hope and inspiration.

## **Social Strategies**

For some, social coping strategies help to manage symptoms, overcome fear, and even improve social life for overall better quality of life.

Credible options include the following.

## **Are you feeling isolated?**

When we feel anxious, it is common to want to pull away from others and disconnect. Anxiety leads us to feel removed from others, our family and our community.

Finding events to take part in can help cultivate a sense of belonging and allow us to feel purposeful.

Not only are we keeping our bodies busy, but our minds as well.

## **Do you feel alone?**

Anxiety leads us to believe that we are alone in our experience, and no one will be able to relate. Choosing someone in life, you trust to talk to about your challenges is essential. Share with people in your life the experiences you are struggling with and don't be afraid to open up a conversation.

Being open about your challenges can also allow other people the opportunity to share their struggles.

## **Does anybody understand?**

Finding a support system is essential when we are struggling with anxiety. There are a variety of resources available, both in-person options and online, that can be of great help. A community of people who not only understand but can offer tips and suggestions for helpful coping strategies can be valuable.

## **Have you forgotten how to laugh?**

Anxiety tends to rob us of joy and gets in the way of us being able to have fun. Remember to nurture your longing to have fun and laugh. You can find humour in books, on television, or online sources. Taking a moment to laugh and have fun can offer a gentle reminder that the anxiety is not in charge.

## **One last thing**

**Wake up every morning with the thought that  
something beautiful is about to happen.**

*I do not claim sole ownership for some of the advice that you read above but do recognise the validity of all.*

All of the strategies listed have value, find the approach that works for you and IF you still require support to cope with how you're feeling then please either:

- Contact your GP or
- Contact Genesis Therapy