

100 Smart Ways to Calm Your Anxious Mind

1. Practice the 4-4-4 breathing technique. My favorite relaxation go-to: Inhale for a count of four, hold for a count of four, and exhale for a count of four. Pause. Repeat three times in succession. Remember to practice when calm too, so you develop a nice habit. Added benefit — the kid therapy client's love this one!

2. Ward off panic with belly-breathing. "I can't catch my breath!" is a common panic symptom. Here's the key to calm — remember to exhale. Before taking a breath, give one away:

Belly Breathing Exercise

- Place one hand on your abdomen, and the other on your chest
- Open your mouth and gently sigh (as if someone told you something annoying). Let your shoulders and upper body relax as you exhale
- Close your mouth and pause for a few seconds
- Keep your mouth closed and inhale slowly through your nose for a count of 4
- Pause for a count of 4
- Open your mouth. Exhale through your mouth for 4
- Pause
- Repeat

3. Start each day with a warm cup of water with lemon. Your body is dehydrated upon waking. Drinking water with lemon helps to rehydrate and replenish your mind + body, plus prime your liver to start producing bile.

4. Close your eyes when you're stressed out. This helps to block out stimulation and reset your calm clock.

5. Savor a positive scene or memory. Research shows that staring at a pleasant scene in nature or in your mind for up to 10 seconds, 3x per day

can rewire your brain to focus on the good things happening within and around you.

6. Keep your mobile devices charged. Think of the many wasted minutes when we stop what we're doing and hit 'dismiss' when the iPhone warns us our battery is low. Besides, not everyone has a land line, so fully charged is a safety issue, too.

7. Get a wall hook or a nail to hang your keys. The minute you enter your home your keys should have their very own resting place. *Gawd, I could have a PhD by now with all the time and energy spent searching for lost keys...*

8. Wake up 10 minutes earlier than normal. If you're rolling your eyes thinking there's nothing normal about that, consider this: How we start each morning sets up our day. If you oversleep and subsequently run around yelling at everyone in your wake while trying to get out the door, chances are your day will follow the same chaotic pattern. Practice + preparation are king and queen to finding your rhythm and groove.

9. Make sleep a priority. Life is lousy when you're drowsy. In addition to the negative effects to our mental and physical health, sleep deprivation is plain dangerous. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that 100,000 police-reported crashes are the direct result of driver fatigue each year. This results in an estimated 1,550 deaths, and 71,000 injuries.

10. Prime your bedroom for a good night's rest. Think cool temperature, and dark and uncluttered atmosphere.

11. Clear, file, and throw away all the papers accumulating on your kitchen counter. My declutter hack: While my morning coffee is brewing, I go through the paper trail in 5 minutes. That's 35 minutes per week and it makes a huge difference.

12. Get rid of the shit that's blocking your way. I am no expert when it comes to home design, but I can vouch for the extra energy I've accumulated by clearing out furniture, kitchen appliances, clothes, shoes, old dog leashes and collars, knick-knacks, and other non-essentials. Clean living, my friends — clean, simple, unfettered living is the way to make space for calming thoughts and feelings.

13. Smile at a stranger.

14. Resist the urge to flip off, honk your horn or yell at the gal who will cut you off today, tomorrow or next week. Some drivers are reckless and inconsiderate, but you never know who's rushing to the hospital to see their sick mom, or dashing to that second job.

15. Reduce or eliminate caffeine. (You have *no idea* how much it pains me to type 'eliminate') Caffeine is a huge culprit in anxiety and panic attacks. Not to mention the havoc it can wreak on your adrenal system. If you absolutely cannot forgo that afternoon beverage to get you through the rest of your work day, try switching to green tea. Less jumpy + more antioxidants.

16. Read Victor Frankl's, *Man's Search for Meaning*. Talk about a lesson in perspective and the power of positive thinking.

17. Make mental wellness an intentional plan daily. It's so easy to neglect that which we cannot see. Sadly, many wait to seek out therapy or social supports when they're in crisis. [Click here for an awesome resource you can access 24-7.](#)

18. Bookmark this article. There's lots of juicy links and I don't want you to click on an awesome resource and then get distracted by a bright, shiny object in your computer's open tabs and never come back.

19. Choose your thoughts wisely. Common misconceptions are that your feelings control you, or you can't help your feelings, but these are untrue. Your thoughts influence your feelings, which then influence your actions. [Click here for a monster article about cognitive-behavioral therapy](#) on changing your thoughts, once and for all.

20. Close out your computer's tabs when working. While your at it, turn off notifications, too. We're wired for single-tasking.

21. Eat a donut. Preferably, artisanal. There's something so satisfying about the smell, texture and beauty of a round, chocolate pastry bubbling with good quality custard that brings back fond childhood memories when you didn't worry about counting calories, cellulite or stressing about what other people thought of you. *Hell, make it a double.*

22. Eat, drink, frown, regret and feel sorry for yourself in moderation.

23. Visit an animal shelter and if possible, bring treats, toys or old blankets for the kenneled-creatures. Chances are that 12 year old German shepherd, traumatized pit bull or yapping chihuahua are scared as hell. Slipping your hand, or a little something between the bars will ease their pain and anxiety, and yours, too.

24. Remember this sequence the next time a panic attack threatens:

a. Acknowledge the panic symptoms. This may seem counterintuitive since we're programmed to avoid unpleasant situations. However, thought suppression — telling yourself over and again to stop thinking "I'm going to die!" only increases anxiety.

b. Stay in the fray. Because your brain's amygdala (the area which controls the fear response) sends rapidfire signals preparing you to fight or flee, you'll need to counteract these irrational impulses. Grounding strategies include feeling your feet on the ground, or your hands on the steering wheel, or bracing yourself against a wall.

c. Be "here." People do not have panic attacks in the present. In reality, you're reacting to a past action, or to a future event. Being mindful of the here-and-now will help you can take actions to calm down.

d. Act. Now that your mind and body are more calm and present, it's time to consider actions for riding out this unwelcome wave. Here are a few:

- Breathe slowly and deeply
- Close your eyes to block out overwhelming stimulation
- Drink water to cool down your body temperature
- Do jumping jacks to get rid of excess energy
- Challenge unhealthy thoughts
- Count to 10

e. Repeat steps 1-4. Because panic attacks vary in duration and frequency, you may find yourself starting to calm down, only to meet another episode. "Here I go again — this isn't working!" Practice is the only way to ensure calm habits.

f. Test-drive reality. As scary as panic attacks are, your track record for overcoming panic is 100%. There's always an end in sight, and you will reach the calm side eventually.

25. Take a mental health day. *Especially* if you're a social worker, therapist, teacher, or police officer.

26. Know what makes your anxiety spike. Is it work, family, school, or certain places, people, or relationships? Write in a journal when you're feeling anxious, and look for patterns.

27. Drink more water. We've all heard the skinny on the 8 glasses, but how many of us actually abide by the roughly 64-ounces of H₂O on the daily?

28. Forgive your mother, father, 4th grade bully and anyone who's wronged you. This doesn't mean you don't have a right to be upset, but resentment packs a powerful and toxic punch. *Along those same lines...*

29. Let go of your childhood. A huge factor in depression is the tendency to rewrite, relive or recreate your past. When I find myself stewing I think of the phrase, *'Don't look back, you're not going that way.'*

30. Manage fear by focusing on what's happening this moment. Anxiety's biggest culprit is worrying about what's going to happen next. Focus on the here-and-now and what you can accomplish today. Meditation is a great tool to establish and maintain attention to the present moment. For a beginner's tutorial, [click here](#).

31. Practice mindfulness. As tempting as it is to go back to the past or think about the future, doing so means present moments are passing you by. I shudder to think of all the parents who missed their child's first step because they were bowing in silent prayer to the mobile device that day at the park. Or how about the well-deserved compliment that flew right by you because you reverted back to childhood and insisted that you weren't worthy of taking in anything positive.

32. Get help online. Wired for Happy's online wellness library has got you covered with affordable digital programs (videos, audios, personal development plans, email support) like [Holistic Healing for Anxiety](#), and [Team Happy](#) and the [30-day Wellness Boot Camp](#) to help you turn healthy

anxiety management into a habit. And just because you've made it through 1/3 of this article, I'm thinking you're serious about your wellness. I like that!

33. Drink soothing tea. Chamomile tea contains compounds (Matricaria recutita) which bind to the same brain receptors like certain anti-anxiety drugs.

34. Try *lemon balm extract (sold as a tea, capsule, and tincture). Some people find it relieves anxiety, stress and sleep problems. **Always read labels and doses, and check with your doctor before using any natural or homeopathic remedy.*

35. Visit your doctor for an annual physical. Many health issues contribute to, mimic or cause anxiety, stress and nervousness.

36. Lay down next to and pet your dog, cat, rabbit, or sloth for five minutes. When you lower yourself to their level it engenders trust because you're not towering over them. Listen to the gentle rhythm of their breath as you caress their head. There's a reason therapy dogs are popular tools for bringing calm and relaxation in hospital settings.

37. Go out in nature at least once per week for a solo walk or hike with a companion. Nothing like the smell of fresh air and no technology to ground yourself. Grab your calendar and schedule an outing right now!

38. Check out Instagram for some fun and creative ways to exercise. Just search #workout or #wod and relish in the endorphin producing chemicals awaiting. This is an especially helpful motivator if you prefer to blow off the gym. While you're at it, [hit me up on the gram here](#). I post mental workouts via #therapy videos!

39. Plan a vacation or getaway. *Because hustle and bustle.*

40. Welcome humor. A good laugh goes a long way.

41. Recognize false alarms. The fear of your house burning down because you left the stove on has never come true. That tightening in your chest doesn't mean you're having a heart attack; it's your body's natural response to arousal. Many thoughts and sensations that we interpret as signals for concern—even panic—are just background noise. Think of each thought as a passing train with many stops along the way. You don't have to pay attention every single time the train stops — you've noticed the thoughts; now let them pass by.

42. Maintain a healthy skepticism about what people tell you. When I was a [rookie therapist](#) I learned this gem. Boy, oh boy, talk about a clinical lifesaver. It's not about being paranoid, but questioning someone's motives or truth, and reading between the lines.

43. Clean out your car's glove compartment. Most of us spend untold hours in our vehicles and they can get messy quick. Make a copy of your driver's license too, in case you forget your purse or wallet and you get pulled over.

44. Pay your bills as they come in. With online bill pay there's no excuse for paying late fees. While it's common to wait until the due date, this can increase the chance that you'll misplace bills and incur unnecessary charges.

45. Read your bank and credit statements. Knowing what's going in and what's going out is key to financial health and prosperity.

46. Negotiate with your cable, wireless, insurance and credit card companies. For example, I signed up for a VISA a while back for the 50,000 airline miles. There was an annual fee and I called the company and asked if it could be waived. Sure enough I was given a one-time credit for the same amount as the annual fee. \$95.00 saved!

47. Buy less. It's so easy to overspend when you feel bad about yourself or when you're hungry. One nice habit I've developed is to scan my shopping cart before going through the checkout. I ask myself if I need each item. Not surprisingly, a minute spent mental scanning means I usually re-shelf ankle socks or red lentils.

48. Write your future diary — here's a wonderful exercise from Positive Psychology:

- Write about your preferred future
- What will it look like?
- How will others respond to you in this positive future?
- What will you feel?
- How will your life change?
- How will your positive future benefit others?

49. Vow to trust more. Meaning trust yourself and your talents, skills and problem-solving abilities, as well as people, the weather, your financial potential, and opportunities. When you inherently believe the world is an inherently safe place where most people possess good will, your outlook and psychological heaviness improves drastically. If you struggle with trust, [here's a kickass article to help you.](#)

50. Set aside worry time. When stressful thoughts show up unannounced your whole day can be thrown off track. Reverse engineer this tendency by scheduling a block of time — say 10 minutes every day at 4:00 p.m. — to deal with worries. Doing so reduces the chance that you'll stop at every distraction to address your stress. When the afternoon rolls around, you just may forget many of your troubles.

51. Let the helicopters fly on by. Parenting trends come and go, but if you have a stressed out, sleep-deprived and running on fumes teenager, you may want to forgo the hovering and consider the following:

- Reduce the extracurriculars
- Say goodbye to exorbitant tutors

- No additional advanced-placement classes
- Preach social/emotional IQ above common-core standards

52. Reduce anger in your life. Believe it or not, anger is anxiety's underlying emotion. It seems counterintuitive because anxious people are often people pleasers who favor nice behavior. Be that as it may, hostility is an independent risk factor for coronary artery disease. Reducing anger and hostility will reduce your chances of heart disease.

53. Keep in mind that you are not your thoughts or feelings. When feeling scared, down or disappointed it's easy to go into self-loathe mode. When this happens, ask if your thoughts and feelings can be observed kindly and compassionately. Accepting uncomfortable sensations is crucial to living with fear, panic, and anxiety.

54. Get your lavender on. In a Florida study, students who inhaled lavender oil scent before an exam had less anxiety. Make sure to use essential oils however, as the synthetic ones can jack up your system.

55. Color. Adult coloring books are all the rage right now. Must be the soothing and childlike memories invoked by brightly colored crayons, markers and pencils that sketch away stress, while breathing in calm and relaxed focus. *And if I had an ounce of startup acumen, I'd have seized on this trend and marketed a book or two, myself.*

56. Eat well-balanced meals. Don't resort to drastic diets or skipping meals. Do keep healthy, energy-boosting snacks on hand.

57. Get your omega-3s. Fish oils are good for the heart, and may protect against anxiety and depression. Experts generally recommend that you get your omega-3s from food whenever possible. Oily, cold-water fishes like salmon are the best sources of the fatty acids; a six-ounce piece of grilled wild salmon contains about 3.75 grams. Supplements work, too.

58. Stretch your comfort zone. Eat in a restaurant alone, book a solo trip, wear your pajamas to the ice cream shop, or sing in public. Introducing spontaneity and whimsy to your routine is a great stress buster. Adults need play, too!

59. Resist complaining for a week. Every time you catch yourself whining, commit to donating a dollar to an organization or cause you absolutely loathe.

60. Stop catastrophizing. This is when your default thinking goes straight to the worst-case scenario. Take a deep breath, walk around the block to clear your head, and befriend logistical, rational thinking. Or just tape this awesome quote to your fridge:

“P.S. You’re not going to die. Here’s the white-hot truth: if you go bankrupt, you’ll still be okay. If you lose the gig, the lover, the house, you’ll still be okay. If you sing off-key, get beat by the competition, have your heart shattered, get fired...it’s not going to kill you. Ask anyone who’s been through it.” ~Danielle LaPorte

61. Vibe your tribe. A wise therapist once told me to visualize the kind of people I wanted in my life. “In my experience, what you put out there is what you will attract.” At the time it seemed rather mystic or fated...now I know from my own experience that we have control over our relationships. Choose carefully + wisely when it comes to your precious mental energy!

62. Make peace with time. As the saying goes, ‘this too, shall pass.’ When you’re a worrier, everything can feel like an emergency. Use time as your guide. All previous so-called emergencies weren’t so urgent, right? Ask yourself if this situation is likely to bother you next week or next month...

63. Take a time-out. Do yoga, listen to music, meditate, get a massage, or

practice relaxation techniques. Physically distancing yourself from problems helps clear your head.

64. Do the 21-Minute cure: Many doctors recommend this remedy because 21-minutes is about how long it takes for exercise to reliably reduce anxiety, according to studies. The key is to get your heart rate up.

65. Give 15 extra minutes. I don't know where I learned this one, but it sure does help me stay atop of my responsibilities and feel good about the effort I put into (most) tasks. For example, it's hotter than hell in Los Angeles today and I wanted to quit writing and watch *Criminal Minds* on Netflix. Because nothing like watching sociopathic killers to soothe an anxious mind, right? Then I told myself, *nope — you gotta keep on. Think how much better you'll sleep tonight knowing you have less to do mañana.*

66. Create a schedule/rule for checking social media and email. Few activities zap productivity and creativity quite like mindless clicking and trolling (not that I know). Choose three times per day, say 8:00 a.m., 12:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. *Speaking of which...*

67. Unchain yourself from your digital leash. Make a mandatory rule that you will not respond to every text message or buzz, ringtone or alert on your mobile device. *Beating a dead horse...*

68. Be a better friend. Next time you go out to dinner, leave your phone at home. Constantly checking your device at the restaurant communicates: *"You're not as important as my next interruption."*

69. Grab a quick snack. "Almost universally, people get more anxious and irritable when they are hungry. When you get an anxiety attack, it may mean your blood sugar is dropping. The best thing to do is to have a quick sustaining snack, like a handful of walnuts, or a piece of dark chocolate, along with a glass of water or a nice cup of hot tea." ~Dr. Ramsey, author, *The Happiness Diet*

70. Celebrate the small wins. Anxious people are often BFF with the Inner Critic. That voice that says, 'you'll never make it,' or 'you're not good enough.' Blah. Blah. Blah. Why not recognize the good things you do each and every day. For instance, remember #65 — the 15-minute rule? Well, guess what, my friends? I'm now taking a well-deserved break from this literary piece of genius. #DerekMorgan

71. Break up your To-do in chunks. Analysis paralysis occurs when you see the mountain of work in front of you. Take it step by step, and focus on progress, not the end result.

72. Establish firm boundaries around your physical, mental, emotional, financial, sexual, and spiritual values. Nothing says calm, confident and in control like knowing who you are, where you're going, and with whom.

73. Work less, talk less, text less, stress less, eat less.

74. Take naps. Refresh and rejuvenate by resting for 15-20 minutes daily. If you're working in an office, try napping in the back seat of your car.

75. Surround your home or office with green plants. Houseplants give off oxygen and help remove chemicals like formaldehyde, a common indoor vapor that can cause respiratory and neurological problems.

76. Perfect the art of listening. It's amazing how quick we are to jump in and interrupt someone else. Focus on listening with the intent to gather information, learn something new and connect.

77. Own your 120-minutes. According to Dan Ariely, behavior economist: "It turns out that most people are productive in the first two hours of the morning. Not immediately after waking, but if you get up at 7 you'll be most productive from around from 8-10:30. One of the saddest mistakes in time management is the propensity of people to spend the two most productive

hours of their day on things that don't require high cognitive capacity, like social media."

78. Think faster. No, that's not a typo. Anxious people are famous for over-analysis, indecision, and procrastination, and this leads to wasted energy. In short, rewire your brain to do the following:

- Kick denial out of your house
- Befriend self-awareness
- Tell drama, "Go to hell!"
- Leave the future alone
- Divorce the past

79. Don't over explain yourself. You don't need to provide as many details, rationalizations or excuses as you think you do when communicating.

80. Think proactive vs reactive. Spending the first 10 minutes of each day checking and answering email primes your mind for a reactive state. Rather than go on the defensive each morning, take that time back and reframe it to "me time." When you see yourself as having an internal locus of control, you're less likely to reinforce anxious patterns of thinking.

81. Follow the everything-has-a-place rule. Okay, so this one's not an actual rule, but more of a way of life. I learned this from a school counselor who had the most immaculate, organized and efficient office ever. Her secret: "Everything has a place. Tidiness and mental clarity depend on it. We simply can't function when we can't find what we need." *Well, alright then.*

82. Leave your home even when you don't feel like it. Nothing good comes from holing yourself up and spending too much time in your head. Take a walk. Go for a hike. Visit a friend. Just. Get.Out.

83. Squeeze a stress ball. If you don't have one, a tennis ball works fine.

84. Distract your mind when the worry train rolls up. I'm all-in when it comes to meditation and mindfulness, but there comes a point when your anxiety is downright debilitating. When you've reached this point, do jumping jacks, chew gum, drink water, read a few pages of a book, call your mom, play with your dog, clean out a drawer, think of a joke, or smile.

85. Visit a therapist. Nobody deserves to live in emotional pain, and therapy is a great way to see your problems and solutions in a whole new light. Get a referral from a trusted source, or google therapists in your area and check out their profile.

86. Get twisted...in yoga class. This practice is one of the best ways to get comfortable with uncomfortable positions — just like life! Yoga also develops good breathing habits (the key to calming your anxious mind) while strengthening your mind + body.

87. Plan a get-together with a friend or a group of friends.

88. Exaggerate your greatest fear. As counterintuitive as that may seem, it actually works! Tell your fear to someone else, including all the dramatic details and worrisome emotions. When you've exhausted every last detail, start over again. Tell the entire, torrid tale again and try to get more elaborate and over-the-top. By the third or fourth time, your story becomes silly, or maybe even boring. For example: *I fear I'll lose my job, then the house, my wife will leave and I'll be homeless and sleeping in an alley. Then I get stabbed and die.*

89. Lighten up. Unless your life story is featured on the front page of today's newspaper, there's no need to be so serious. Studies show that adults need play time just like kids do.

90. Eat more salad. It's no coincidence I thought of this one near the end. I suck at eating greens, but they're essential to health and wellness.

91. Incorporate visual anchors. There's a reason social media sites like Pinterest and Instagram are so popular. We are visual creatures. Find a pleasant, calming scene and take it in. This could be while driving, walking about town, leafing through a magazine, or via technology. For me, it's travel pics on the gram. Or the mid-century modern interior design pics. I have no damn idea what mid-century modern actually means, I just know I feel more calm and relaxed when I see sleek lines and lots of clean, open space in my feed.

92. Tell the truth. Denial is one of the most common defense mechanisms because humans are programmed to avoid unpleasant situations. But all feelings go somewhere, and it's only a matter of time until they surface...

93. Steer clear of narcissists. Period.

94. Repeat a mantra. The simpler the better. For example, "I will be okay," "Things always work out," "Remember to slow down," or "I am a loving person."

95. Fire the negative committee in your brain. Habituating into pre-emptive worry mode does not make you calm! Neither does the mindset of "If I just worry myself sick, then maybe the Calm or Happy or Health Gods won't get to me or my family first." Btw, if you're a therapist, make sure to introduce this tendency in the therapy room. Client usually get a kick out of it!

96. Eliminate black and white or all-or-nothing language from your vernacular. For example: "I'll never find a job because I'm a total failure."

97. Remember that most people don't care if you flub a word during the presentation or you bring store bought cookies to the party. If they do, ask yourself why you continue to invite petty, gossip and mean to your house?

98. Do something. Anything. One small step is better than no steps at all when it comes to overcoming problems.

99. Return to the breath. Always.

100. Teach others your anxiety reduction techniques. Helping others is one of the best ways to stay connected, and master a skills.