

# Coping Strategies in Times of Anxiety and Stress

## A. Deep Breathing Techniques

Your breathing is a reflection of your thoughts and feelings. Whenever you're feeling restless, scared, confused or otherwise stressed, your breathing will be rapid and shallow, each and every time. It's just an involuntary reaction and there's nothing you can do about it. But there is much you can do to reverse the process. Your goal should be breathing from your abdomen, deeply and slowly, not just when you're doing the following exercises but in your daily routine as well. Because when your breathing stabilizes, so does your mood. And that's when you feel calm, relaxed, easy-going, peaceful and content.

### Exercise 1: Stop panic by rebreathing back into your senses

**What is it good for:** This technique is especially useful for patients suffering from a panic attack, as well as patients who hyperventilate. If you have a tendency to get so agitated you can't even think straight let alone recall the more complex exercises in this article, you can still use rebreathing to quickly get back into your normal senses.

**How to do it:** You can do rebreathing either by cupping your hands over your mouth and breathing into them, or by breathing into a paper bag. You should feel improvements in as little as one minute.

### Exercise 2: Reduce anxiousness with deep breathing relaxation

**What is it good for:** Once you learn how to perform deep breathing relaxation, it will become one of your best allies in your ongoing struggle against anxiety. The best thing about this technique is that you can do it anywhere, anytime, without anyone really noticing. You should practice deep breathing regularly and actually make it a part of your daily routine!

**How it works:** When you induce deep breathing with this exercise, you will command your body to just let go of tension. Your heart rate will slow down, blood pressure will lower and sweating will be reduced. Your body processes will go back to normal levels, which will translate in improved digestion and stabilized energy levels. Isn't it amazing that so many benefits can be achieved just by focusing on your breath?

**How to do it:** To perform deep breathing relaxation, breathe in from your nose and out from your mouth. You want to make at least 10 breath cycles during this exercise, and each in/out cycle should be a little longer than the last. This isn't as much about controlling your breathing as it's about just watching it. If you try to force your breath to slow down, that will probably stress you out. But if you gently focus on your breathing and think of nothing else, it will naturally become deeper and slower. Try it!



## B. Thought Stopping

**What is it good for:** Thought stopping is a technique that, with little practice, can be effective in controlling worry, doubt and repetitive thoughts that contribute to anxiety and insomnia, among other things. Thought stopping can be effective in managing intrusive thoughts that contribute to depression, feelings of inadequacy or general feelings of unease.

**How to do it:** When unwanted, repetitive or negative thoughts enter your mind, say the word “stop” silently and allow your mind to clear of any disturbing thoughts. Substitute the unwanted thought with a stress-reducing belief or a positive statement. This can become a very effective tool when practiced conscientiously.

## C. Visualization

**What is it good for:** Visualization is a tool to control stress and tension in your body as you imagine a place of complete safety and peace and as you immerse yourself fully into that place. You can return to the here and now any time you choose.

**How to do it:** Think of somewhere you’ve been that stands out in your memory as a place of restfulness, peacefulness or beauty. Allow yourself to picture that place in all details and with all your senses. Allow yourself to be there completely, then breathe the peacefulness, the safety into your body with each breath and relax into that place. Affirm your safety by saying to yourself, “I am calm and relaxed.”

## D. Progressive Relaxation

**What is it good for:** Tension often accumulates in your muscles and throughout the body. Progressive relaxation is a technique in which various muscles are deliberately tightened, then released in order to experience the tension and lack of tension. Use in conjunction with deep breathing techniques.

**How to do it:** Become aware of your breathing, and with each exhalation let go of any stressful thoughts weighing you down. Turn your attention to your head and face, tighten all your muscles for three to five seconds, then release. Deeply inhale and exhale. Tighten your neck and shoulders for three to five seconds, then release. Do the same process with arms and hands, abdomen and buttocks, leg muscles and ankles. Always remember to inhale and exhale deeply between tension-release.

