# Tools for Dealing with Anxiety

**Learn progressive relaxation** by practicing progressive relaxation every day for at least 30 days. After 2 weeks, when you let the tension go and exhale, say a verbal cue to yourself, such as *relax, let it go, It’s OK, stay calm, this will pass.* Once you have learned progressive relaxation skills, apply these skills during a stressful situation using your verbal cue to trigger your body to relax. Progressive relaxation is also helpful when you have difficulty sleeping. You should consult with your physician before doing progressive relaxation techniques. Do not tense areas of physical pain, injury, or recent surgery. Remove contact lenses.

**Take a 2-minute break and breathe deeply 3 times** in through your nose and slowly out through pursed lips. Make sure you exhale completely and slowly. Anybody can wait for 2 minutes. Three deep breaths take no longer than 30 seconds. With the extra 90 seconds, visualize yourself in your favorite relaxing setting and focus on the details of this calming place as you continue to breathe slowly. If you have a difficult time picturing yourself in your favorite setting, bring a picture to work and look at it as you visualize yourself being in the picture. If you are in a panic and having difficulty taking a deep breath, exhale completely first, then take your deep breath. When you can’t catch your breath it is because you have too much air from taking quick short breaths, so you need to exhale first, then breathe.

**Become aware of your self talk and make it neutral/positive**. Everyone’s feelings contain thoughts, and these thoughts reinforce and feed your feelings. When you are anxious, you may be telling yourself, “*I can’t handle this.” “I have to get out of here.” “I’m not going to make it.”* You have probably told yourself these Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANT) over a thousand times. If you had a friend who said such negative things to you, you might decide to get a new friend. It is time to be your own best friend and make what you say to yourself positive and supportive. After you say your new more realistic and neutral/positive thought to yourself instead of your automatic negative thought, your new thought will become more automatic. To change what you say to yourself read Summary of ANT Species. Every thought impacts your biochemistry and therefore how you feel. This is also true of Exercise.

**Change your self-talk with a Mantra or sing an upbeat song.** A mantra can be 1-3 short statements. When you make 3 short statements, start with acknowledging your feeling…I have been in scary situations before. I know I can handle this. Keep your head up, be alert, and keep walking. As you say your mantra remember to breathe deeply and exhale slowly. An upbeat peppy song can have the same impact on your anxiety and fear.

**The purpose of fear is to alert you to danger so you can prepare yourself.** If you are taking a trip and are feeling anxious or scared, figure out what your fear is about and then prepare yourself. If you are doing a presentation and feel anxious, prepare, and practice.

**Journaling helps you sort out your feelings and reactions to daily life events.** Writing about your feelings and what is triggering these feelings helps clarify what you are feeling and thinking about a situation. As you read what you have written, you can see if what you are writing is really accurate. You can also discover themes about yourself, other people, and your beliefs imbedded in what you have written. If you notice a negative theme or belief, write out how you want to change those themes or beliefs. Visualize how you will respond to situations differently with your new themes and beliefs.

**Exercise 30 minutes** **a day to maintain your health and your emotional well-being.** Walking is the single most effective and cheapest (except perhaps in winter) form of exercise. You can divide your exercise into three 10-minute periods of brisk exercise. Build-in 10 minutes of exercise into your daily routine. Pick a parking spot 10 minutes from the building where you work. When you are walking briskly to your building, look up. When you look up, you improve your breathing and your mood. Now you have exercised for 20 minutes and just need to exercise for 10 more minutes. Maybe find some stairs to walk down.

**Make sure you take your breaks.** This is a good time to go outside (even in the cold) and walk around your building or walk in your building and focus on your breathing. If you work in an office, maybe you can shut your door and do some progressive relaxation.

**Counseling and Medication are both helpful tools.** Medications today tend to be more focused and cleaner so that they change your biochemistry just enough that you can begin learning the tools you need to manage and deal with your anxiety. To assist you in learning tools for dealing with your anxiety, a counselor is especially important. If you have any questions about finding a counselor, contact the NIU Employee Well-Being Program at 815-753-9191.

Written by Nancy Apperson, edited by Karen Smith

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