

Tips for Anxiety Treatment: *A new lens to see and feel anxiety*

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If you feel like anxiety *must* go away in order for you to function, then anxiety is the one in control—not you. Think of anxiety like an uninvited house guest: if your entire day depends on whether or not they leave, then they’re the one calling the shots. But if you can say, “Yes, I feel anxious—it’s uncomfortable, but I can still live my life,” then *you* are back in the driver’s seat. It’s absolutely okay to *prefer* feeling calm. But when we operate as though we *must* be calm to take action, we end up reinforcing anxiety’s power. Instead, we need to practice becoming a supportive *inner* coach. Imagine a child who is constantly told off by a teacher or coach every time they make a mistake—how do you think that child will feel? Likely anxious, self-critical, and afraid to try. That’s the impact of harsh self-talk. We often believe it will motivate us, but more often it just keeps us in a heightened state of stress. Negative internal dialogue functions like a bad coach—using fear and shame to dominate. A *good* coach, on the other hand, still challenges us, but does so with encouragement, kindness, and belief in our ability to grow. They normalise mistakes and see them as part of the learning process. When you start treating yourself like someone worth supporting, anxiety often begins to ease.

Let’s also consider what’s happening in the nervous system. Anxiety and calm are on opposite ends—one signals us to act (fight/flight), the other tells us to rest and restore. Trying to immediately leap from one to the other usually doesn’t work; it’s too drastic a shift. But here’s something important: anxiety and excitement are physiological *siblings*. They feel almost identical in the body—similar heart rate, energy, and intensity. The difference lies in focus: anxiety looks at risk, while excitement looks at potential reward.

So instead of trying to shut anxiety down, consider redirecting it. Ask yourself:

- What can I gain by facing this?
- What might I learn?
- How could this experience help me grow?

You don’t necessarily need to slow down—you need to point that energy in a more helpful direction.

One of anxiety's most powerful tricks is avoidance. The more we back away from discomfort, the smaller our world becomes. The antidote? Move toward what scares you—but do it gradually. One common mistake people make is trying to face their biggest fear all at once. Often, this overwhelms the nervous system and reinforces the belief that “I can't do this. So microdose the discomfort, feel a little bit of it first, you're the experimenter at the end of the day. Repeat this in small steps. It feels minimal, but you're actually building tolerance. You might be surprised by how far you've come—especially if you keep moving forward and then pause to look back. It's not about dwelling on the past but about recognising your growth. In that moment, you're not just looking back—you're actually seeing your future more clearly through the lens of how much you've already overcome.

That said, occasionally taking a bold leap can surprise you. Sometimes, what we imagine will be unbearable turns out to be far more manageable than our anxiety predicted. The key is this: anxiety doesn't have to disappear for you to live fully. You just need to shift your relationship with it—and treat yourself with the same patience, kindness, and belief you'd offer someone you truly care about.

One helpful reminder is this: *You are not anxious—you're a person who is currently experiencing anxiety.* That distinction really matters. When we *identify* with anxiety, when we see ourselves and the world only through its lens, it tends to grow stronger. But when we can say something like, “I'm noticing anxious thoughts,” or “I'm feeling sensations of fear in my body,” we create space between ourselves and the experience. In doing so, we reclaim our agency.

You are not the anxiety. You are the one *observing* it. Think of emotions as waves. They rise, crest, and eventually fall. Our job is not to control the ocean—but to learn how to ride it. Let's imagine for a moment you're in the water. If you're like me, maybe you prefer calm seas. So, when a big wave starts forming, your first instinct might be to panic—to tense up or even fight it. But what happens when we resist a wave? It overpowers us. It knocks us down and pulls us under. Now imagine instead that you have a surfboard. You feel the wave coming, and you *ride* it. You move with it rather than against it. Everything changes. Emotions are the same. Anxiety will come and go—it may swell in intensity, but if you allow yourself to observe it without judgment, it will eventually subside. No emotional state is permanent. When we stop resisting and start noticing—just watching how sensations shift in the body—we often find that we can ride out even the most difficult feelings with more ease

and confidence. So next time anxiety shows up, remind yourself: *This is just a wave. I can ride it.* You're not alone—we're in this together.

One of the most important shifts we can make in our relationship with anxiety is recognising that we can't wait for all fear, uncertainty, or risk to disappear before we act. If we do, we may end up waiting forever. Life doesn't come with guarantees—and that's not a flaw in the system; that's part of being human.

Often, the things that actually go wrong are *not* the things we've been bracing ourselves for. You can prepare endlessly, try to predict every outcome, and still be caught off guard. The truth is, trying to eliminate all risk before taking action will only keep your world small. Instead, the real work lies in learning how to move forward *with* uncertainty—how to stay grounded even when the path ahead feels shaky. This doesn't mean being reckless. It means being willing to act without perfect conditions and learning to sit with the discomfort that may arise when things don't go as planned. You can spend your life waiting until it “feels safe enough,” but full certainty rarely, if ever, comes. Rather than letting that stop you, you can start to use uncertainty as fuel—a sign that you're stretching toward growth, toward something meaningful. Even with the best plans, the challenges we face are often the ones we didn't anticipate. So instead of trying to eliminate risk, focus on building the resilience to act *anyway*. That's what real courage looks like—not the absence of fear but choosing forward motion in its presence. So, show up before you're ready!

Stop Putting Out Fires That Aren't Burning. What does this mean? It means letting go of worry about things that haven't happened—or may never happen. Worry drains your energy, time, and peace of mind. In fact, most of what we fear never actually comes to pass. And when real challenges do arise, you can trust your future self to handle them. So, save your resources—your mental and emotional energy—for the fires that truly need your attention. It's important to accept that uncertainty is a natural part of life. Much of anxiety arises from trying to control the unknown—to eliminate doubt, risk, or unpredictability. But absolute certainty is simply not something any of us get to have. Instead, cultivating a mindset that says, “I don't know exactly what will happen. I hope for the best, but if things go differently, I will find a way to cope and grow stronger”—that is where real confidence lives. It's about building your own inner resilience and sense of control.

Anxiety often has deep roots in past experiences, sometimes stretching back to childhood. If you have a sensitive nervous system, that's not your fault. Your body learned to stay alert

and on guard because it needed to keep you safe in the environment you grew up in. That heightened awareness likely helped you survive difficult circumstances. The challenge now is that your nervous system hasn't fully adapted to the safety of your present life. It still operates as if you're in that old, challenging environment. Rather than being frustrated or critical of yourself for this, try gently guiding your nervous system to update its understanding. Remind yourself that life is different now—you are different now. You are stronger, more mature, and equipped with new tools and experiences that help you navigate the world safely.

A central message about anxiety is this: we don't need to fight it. In fact, resisting or battling anxiety often amplifies it. Instead, we can learn to relate to anxiety differently—by allowing it to be there or even developing a kind of compassionate relationship with it. When anxiety arises, there are generally three ways we might respond. Two of them are helpful, and one tends to make things worse. The first helpful response is to simply acknowledge its presence—“Ah, anxiety is here”—and gently let it take a back seat while continuing with your day. This approach treats anxiety like an unwanted but harmless passenger, not something that needs to dictate your actions. The second helpful response is to turn toward the anxiety with curiosity and compassion. Instead of trying to push it away, you gently explore it: What is this sensation trying to tell me? What might I need right now? This kind, open stance helps soothe the nervous system over time.

The unhelpful response is to fight it—to try to suppress, ignore, or battle with the anxious thoughts and sensations. This tends to fuel the cycle and make anxiety more intense and persistent. Healing often begins when we stop viewing anxiety as the enemy. Instead, we recognize it as part of the human experience—part of us that doesn't need to be feared or eradicated. You don't have to wait until anxiety disappears to live your life. In fact, that moment may never come. What matters is learning to move forward even while anxiety is present. You can feel tension in your body, racing thoughts in your mind, and still take meaningful action. Anxiety only becomes a problem when it stops you from doing what matters. So instead of stopping, consider bringing it with you.

Just as we wouldn't expect our bodies to stay healthy if we consumed harmful substances daily, we need to be mindful of what we regularly expose our minds to. Many of us unintentionally “feed” our brains a steady diet of fear-based or anxiety-inducing content, and then wonder why we feel so overwhelmed. Anxiety is relatively easy to trigger and much

harder to calm. Once the system is activated, it tends to stay in motion. That's why it's important to be intentional about the information and stimuli we take in. Your brain is always learning what's dangerous and how to react, so we need to stop reinforcing those fear pathways. Choose to nourish your mind with calm, grounded, and balanced input. In short: anxiety doesn't need to go away before you live your life. Don't wait. Take it with you—and be gentle with what you allow into your internal world.

It's important to recognize that the people we surround ourselves with have a profound impact on our emotional well-being and our capacity to grow. Supportive, emotionally safe relationships help us feel grounded, open, and more like our true selves. In contrast, being around people who keep us on edge—even if they seem fun or validating in the moment—can take a long-term toll on both our emotional and neurological health. Sometimes, the cost isn't obvious right away. But over time, your nervous system feels the effects. If you're constantly bracing, second-guessing, or shrinking around someone, your brain registers that environment as unsafe—even if you're telling yourself otherwise. This brings us to a powerful metaphor: the “insecurity guards” in your mind.

Imagine your internal world has security guards—mental filters that are supposed to protect your sense of self. Their job should be to let in helpful feedback and affirming experiences while keeping out what's unhelpful or unfair. But for many people, these “guards” have become overly critical and biased. Instead of protecting your self-worth, they reinforce your insecurities. Here's how they operate: when someone offers genuine praise or kindness, these guards say things like, “They don't really know you,” or “Just wait until they see the real you.” But when criticism or rejection comes, they roll out the red carpet—“See? I knew it. This confirms everything I feared.” These internal filters are not protecting you; they are keeping you small, anxious, and disconnected from your strengths. So, it's time to reassess who's guarding the gate. You don't need harsher internal critics—you need fair and compassionate protectors. Inner voices that can hold complexity, acknowledge both your growth and your struggles, and still treat you with kindness. Let yourself absorb the good. Let positive, affirming experiences in. You need that nourishment to grow. And when it comes to your relationships, trust that it's okay to let people filter themselves in or out. Not everyone will be a fit, and that's not a failure—it's part of creating a life with integrity and safety. When someone shows you they're not aligned with who you are or what you need, you can respond internally with calm clarity: *“Thank you for showing me. I appreciate the time we shared, and I'm letting you go.”* This isn't about exclusion or judgment. It's about

discernment. You don't have to accept everyone into your inner circle. Protecting your emotional energy allows you to be more fully present with the people who truly support and uplift you.

We often associate strength with silence—keeping things to ourselves, holding it all in. But in many cases, that silence is rooted not in strength, but in fear. Fear of judgment. Fear of being misunderstood. Fear of rejection. However, research consistently shows that suppressing emotions doesn't protect us—it harms us. Emotional suppression can lead to increased stress responses, elevated blood pressure, and a deeper sense of isolation. It keeps us from receiving the support we truly need.

Real emotional strength involves vulnerability. It means allowing others in—not indiscriminately, but selectively. The key is to choose people who have earned your trust, those who have shown they can hold space for you with empathy and care. Then, give them the opportunity to show up for you. Human connection is not a luxury—it's a biological necessity. Social connection is deeply wired into our nervous systems; it plays a crucial role in regulation, resilience, and overall mental health. When someone listens—really listens—it can shift something inside us. It reminds us that we are not alone, and that we are worthy of being seen and supported, people *can meet you* where you need to be met.

So, social interactions are something primal, someone biological, a deep force within us all. We need to awaken that force constantly so we can grow and create our future.