

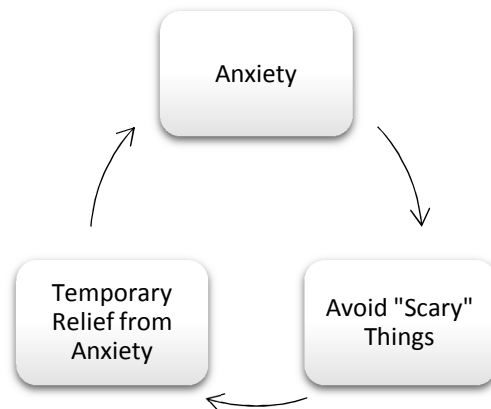
What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is a mental and physical reaction to perceived threats. In small doses, anxiety is helpful. It protects us from danger, and focuses our attention on problems. But when anxiety is too severe, or occurs too frequently, it can become debilitating. The experience of anxiety is very similar to the experience of fear – the main difference is that anxiety occurs in the absence of real danger. In other words, the individual may think that they are in danger, but the reality is that they are not.

Many people who experience symptoms of anxiety can begin to wonder if there is something really wrong with them or if they are going “crazy”. Although you might feel alone in your struggle, many people experience these moods from time to time. Anxiety can affect any kind of person at any stage of their life. Remember, you are not alone. Anxiety is the most common disorder in the United States. Even more common than depression. Up to one-fifth of all adults will experience symptoms of an anxiety disorder at some point in their lives.

How Does Anxiety Grow?

Anxiety drives people to avoid the things that scare them. When a “scary” thing is avoided, there is an immediate but short-lived sense of relief. However, the next time a similar threat arises, it feels even scarier. This creates a harmful cycle of avoidance and worsening anxiety.

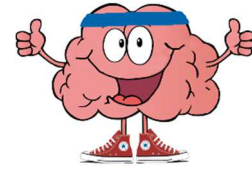


What Can I Do About Anxiety?

Living with anxiety can be a challenge and can make enjoying life difficult. The good news is that anxiety is the most studied of all the psychological problems which means we know the most about how to manage, control and even eliminate anxiety. Your brain also has the capacity to change through a process called *neuroplasticity*, which means *rewiring* your brain. In this group we are going to teach your brain new ways to respond to anxiety. We will also learn how to think differently to avoid bringing on unnecessary anxiety. Lastly, we will learn about ways to increase your body’s resistance to anxiety by increasing your overall health.

Getting to Know Your Brain

- * Your brain is capable of learning new things!
- * Your brain learns by having experiences.
 - So, you must give your brain experiences in order to learn. This means, the more you avoid anxiety, the less capable your brain is of learning how to handle the anxiety.
- * You CAN change the way the brain responds!



What Creates Anxiety in the Brain?

The Fight/ Flight/Freeze Response

When a person is in danger, or believes that they are in danger, a number of changes occur. This response is called the fight/flight/freeze response. The main purpose of the response is to protect the individual. So, it's important to remember the experience itself is not harmful. During this response the brain sends a message to our nervous system to activate the body by releasing adrenaline. This causes the body to:

<i>Body Response</i>	<i>Anxiety Symptom</i>
Increase heart rate	Heart pounding, feeling blood rushing in the head or ears
Move the blood towards the heart and lungs	Sensation of numbness or tingling in the hands/feet
Increase speed of breathing and reduced oxygen to the brain	Feeling breathless, choking or smothering feelings, tightness and pain in the chest, sighing/yawning, dizziness, light-headedness, blurred vision, confusion, feelings of unreality and hot flashes
Increased sweating	sweating
Widening of the pupils of the eyes	Blurred vision, seeing spots, sensitivity to light
Slows down digestion	Dry mouth, feelings of nausea, a heavy stomach, constipation
Increased blood flow and energy to muscles	Aches/pains, trembling or shaking, feeling exhausted
Cognitive response	Irritable, angry, agitated, desire to escape, feeling of danger close by, people may seem threatening, difficulty concentrating, racing thoughts.

Once the 'danger' is gone, the body begins the process of counteracting the fight/flight/freeze response. The restoration to a normal state in your body can be gradual and take some time.

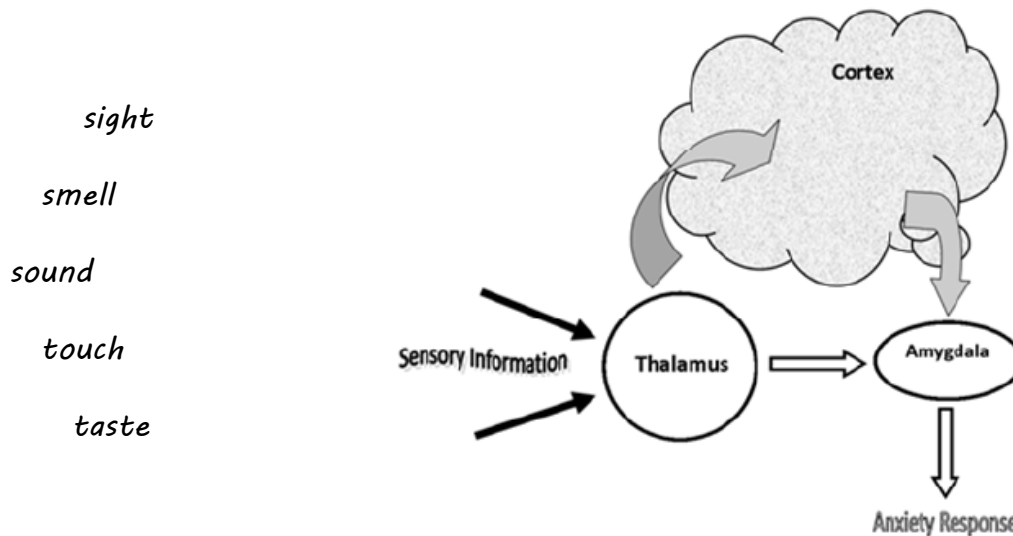


The tricky part of the fight/flight/freeze response is that once it is triggered it can't be "untriggered". The adrenaline has already been released and your body must go through the cycle of this response.

***** This response feels awful and terrible, but it is NOT dangerous!**

How Does the Anxiety Response Get Triggered?

There are Two Pathways to Anxiety – through the *amygdala* and through the *cortex*



The Amygdala = the “alarm system” that you feel instead of hear. Its job is to keep you safe.

- This pathway is much faster – it reacts before you can think
- It responds to potential harm so sometimes it overreacts
- It can literally turn off the thinking part of the brain (cortex) to “seize control” in times of danger

Fun Facts about the Amygdala

- It is more reactive when you are tired. Especially if you are not getting enough restorative sleep which happens most after 6-8 hours of sleep.
- It is not logical and can prevent you from thinking rationally. It can be triggered by situations or objects.
- It learns quickly from life experiences, especially when we are young. But it can re-learn.
- It attaches emotional reactions to experiences and memories.

The Cortex = the thinking, rational, detailed part of your brain

- This part of your brain tries to rationalize with the amygdala. It can provide more information and new interpretations
- With practice, it can convince your amygdala to interpret “danger” differently

Fun Facts about the Cortex

- Labeling emotions and taking action activates positive emotions in the cortex.
- Using social support helps the cortex experience less anxiety.
- Changing your interpretation of a situation can change how your brain responds to it.

Our Goal is to CALM and TRAIN the Amygdala and
Prevent the Cortex from FREAKING OUT the Amygdala!

How Can I Help to Reverse the Fight/Flight/Freeze Response?

Tips to help “turn off” the amygdala – many of these are short term solutions.

- ❖ Chew gum to reactivate digestion.
- ❖ Massage your stomach using a clockwise motion to speed up digestion.
- ❖ Take slow, deep breaths. Focus on slowing your breathing to 5 breaths per minute. (Diaphragmatic Breathing)
- ❖ Focus on relaxing your muscles. (Progressive Muscle Relaxation)
- ❖ Go for a run or a brisk walk – this acts like a “reset” button for the amygdala and completes the fight/flight/freeze circle. (Aerobic Exercise)
- ❖ Do some Yoga.

Ways to “calm down” the amygdala and help it respond more slowly to stress or triggers:

- ❖ Adequate sleep!
- ❖ Regular aerobic exercise
- ❖ Yoga - combines breathing, stretching and focusing
- ❖ Meditation

Interventions to rewire the amygdala and eliminate the anxiety triggers.

- ❖ Exposure – anxiety with a purpose!

Exposure can be a very scary concept for many people. However, if we want to rewire our brain, we have to provide it with *experiences*. Our amygdala cannot learn to respond differently if it doesn't have different experiences. There are many types of exposure that can be used. Several of these types will be introduced.

In the coming groups we will discuss some of the techniques listed above in more detail.

What Is Diaphragmatic Breathing?

Deep breathing (also known as diaphragmatic breathing, belly breathing, or abdominal breathing) is one of the most versatile and easy-to-use relaxation skills. Deep breathing involves using your diaphragm muscle to help bring about a state of physiological relaxation. The diaphragm is a large muscle that rests across the bottom of your rib cage. When you inhale, the diaphragm muscle drops, opening up space so air can come in. When watching someone do this it looks like your stomach is filling with air.

Why Deep Breathing Works

This type of breathing helps activate the part of your nervous system that controls relaxation. The fight-or-flight response triggers symptoms throughout the body, including rapid and shallow breathing. Deep breathing works by deliberately taking slow and deep breaths, which reverses this symptom, and triggers a relaxation response.

When taking deep breaths, our bodies are better able to exchange carbon dioxide for oxygen, which results in a slower heart rate, lower blood pressure, and, consequently, a feeling of relaxation.

In addition to altering the body's flow of oxygen, deep breathing acts as a form of distraction from the source of negative emotions. It's similar to the old idea of "counting to 10", with other helpful benefits thrown in.

How to Use Deep Breathing

1. Sit back in a comfortable position. You can close your eyes, but it isn't necessary. TIP: When learning to use deep breathing, try placing one hand on your abdomen so you can feel it rise and fall with each breath. This will get you in the habit of taking large breaths, filling your lungs.
2. Breathe in slowly. Time the inhalation to last 4 seconds. It's fine to go even slower, if you prefer.
3. Hold the air within your lungs, but not to the point of strain. 2-3 seconds is a good target to aim for.
4. Slowly exhale. Time the exhalation to last 6 seconds.
5. The goal is to slow your breathing to 5 breaths per minute.
6. Repeat the breathing cycle for at least 2 minutes. Practice for 5 to 10 minutes for greater benefits.

Deep Breathing Tips

Naturally, many people take fast and shallow breaths. It's easy to fall back into that habit, even in the middle of deep breathing practice. Stress the importance of timing every inhalation and exhalation. Try watching the second hand of a clock or listening to an audio relaxation tool if you have difficulty timing yourself.

Although deep breathing is often used to counter the fight-or-flight response in the moment, it should also be practiced during periods of relaxation. The positive effects of deep breathing can generalize, and reduce anxiety even hours later. Additionally, frequent practice will help you become better at the skill for when you really need it.

Fighting Worry & Catastrophizing

What is Worry?

Worry is thinking of a potential negative outcome; unpleasant thoughts that you can't get out of your head. They are like annoying bugs that keep buzzing around and won't leave you alone. It's normal to have worries—everyone has them from time to time. In fact, worrying has been evolutionarily adaptive. It's only a problem when your worries get in the way of other parts of your life, or if they make you unhappy. A good question to ask yourself: "Is my worrying motivating or preventative?"

Worry is only helpful if it leads to a plan and then stops. Worry without a plan is useless. If there is valid reason to be worried the best thing to do is make a plan, implement that plan and then move forward. Don't hang out in worry because then the worry itself becomes the problem.

What do you worry about?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

How likely are your worries to actually happen?

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____
5. _____

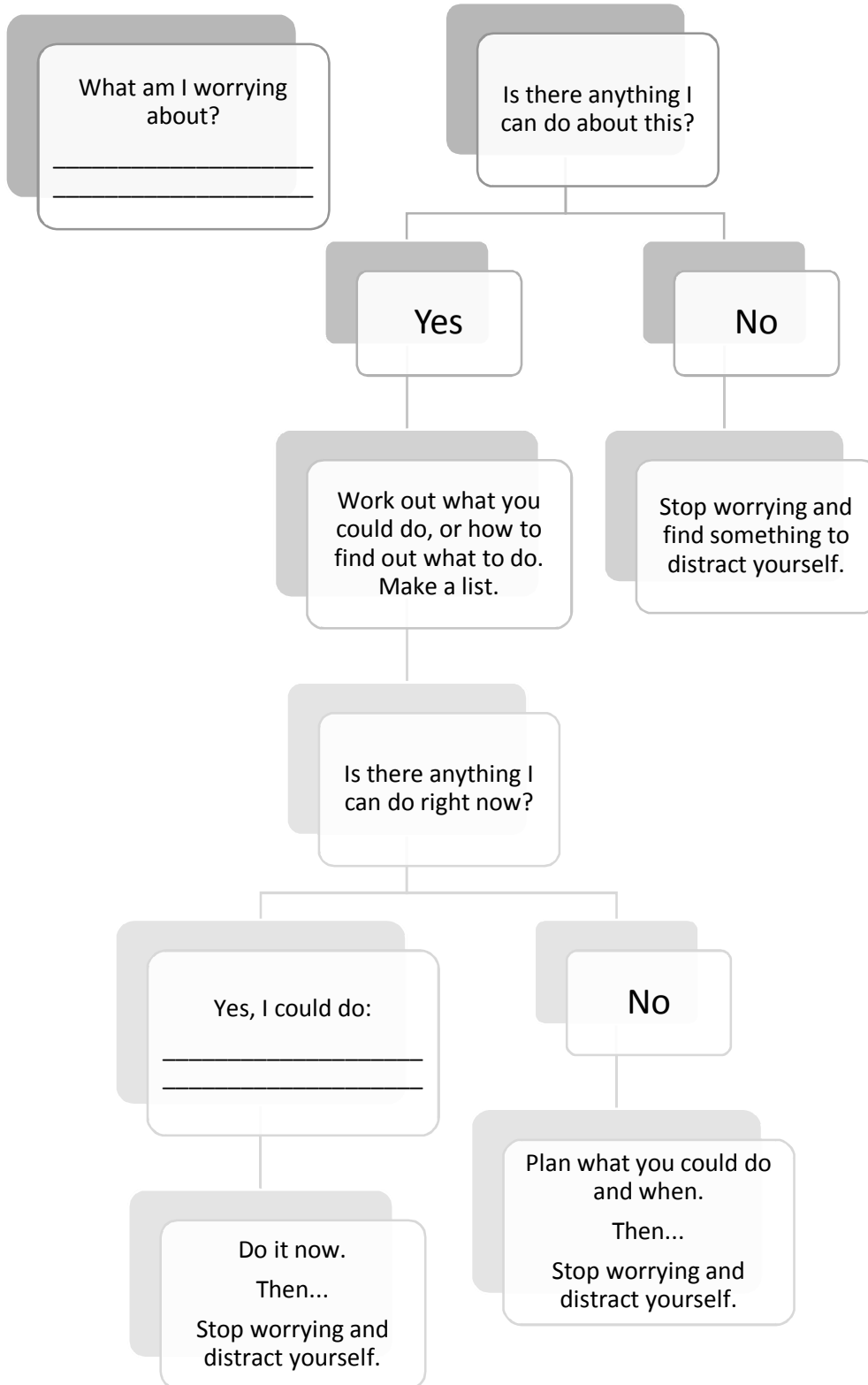
What is the most likely scenario?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

How can you plan for the most likely scenario?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Worry Decision Tree



Worry Management

Other ways to work with persistent worries are through worry management. These strategies can be used to deal with your worries when you feel that they are becoming overwhelming or just don't want to go away.

Schedule a Time and Place to Worry

Set a 15-30 minute worry period that will take place at the same time and same place each day. The best strategy is to make this designated time at the most inconvenient time of day possible. Then, during this time worry about the things on your mind as much as possible. Don't think of anything else during this time, but your worries.

Your worry place and time will be:

During your designated worry time, one option is to write down all your worries and then even take time to categorize the worries. You can choose categories that are helpful for you. You might organize them by "Big Concerns," "Medium Concerns," and "Small Concerns." Another option would be to categorize them by content area, such as "Work Concerns," "Family Concerns," "Financial Concerns," and "Relationship Concerns." Any means of categorizing can be used; however, it is important not to use too many categories; usually between three and seven work best. You could then write how you will manage the concern or whether it is something you have no control over.

Another option during this worry time is to journal about your worries. Get a notebook to use specifically for this and during this designated time, write whatever comes into your mind about your worries. Don't edit yourself, write freely about your concerns.

A good way to end your worry time is with some movement. Take a walk around the house, run in place, or do some jumping jacks. Stretching is also a good option.

If you notice you are worrying outside of your scheduled worry time, tell yourself, "I have plenty of time to focus on this later. Right now I'm just going to be in the moment and notice what I'm doing, what others are doing, the environment, and other things I see, hear, or smell." Purposely focus on something else to distract yourself. Assure yourself that you will start to worry again at the next designated worry time.

Worry Jar/Box

A worry jar or box is a good way to get worries out of your head and "store them" until your designated time to worry. When using this tool, write down on a piece of paper any worries that come into your mind. Then put it in your jar/box. Remind yourself, "Now is not the time to worry about this. I will worry about this during my designated worry time". Then, during your next scheduled time to worry, dump out all the papers in the jar and review each to worry about. If you no longer feel worried about them at that time, feel free to discard that worry. When your worry time is over, put them back in the jar to worry about the next time.

When you get rid of worry then you have time in your life to do other things! What would you like to do in your new free time?

Herbal Options for Anxiety: Adaptogens

DISCLAIMER: *I am not a licensed practitioner of herbal or homeopathic medicine. This information is not intended to diagnose or treat any illness or condition. Please do your own research. It is a good idea to consult your doctor and/or a doctor of naturopathic medicine before taking supplements. Especially if you are taking prescription medications for mood, anxiety, heart, lungs, pain, cholesterol, diabetes, or any other chronic condition. Just because something is natural does not mean it will not cause side effects or drug interactions.*

This is a good website you can use to check for interactions between herbs or between prescription medication and herbs. <https://www.webmd.com/interaction-checker/default.htm>

I have attempted to include any common interactions, cautions, and contraindications for the naturopathics discussed here. ANY NATUROPATHIC TREATMENT SHOULD BE USED WITH EXTREME CAUTION DURING PREGNANCY AS SOME CAN CAUSE MISCARRIAGE OR DAMAGE TO THE FETUS. CLEAR ANY TYPE OF TREATMENT WITH YOUR DOCTOR PRIOR TO USE.

The Importance of Nurturing the Nervous System

Our nervous system is the most important system in our body. It is our link to interacting and connecting with the world. Therefore, it should be one of the systems that we strive to take the best care of. When nurturing the nervous system we need to focus, not just on symptoms, but on what is causing the symptoms. When we experience stress and anxiety it causes the adrenal gland to become tired and depleted from constantly pumping out the stress hormone, cortisol. Long term cortisol exposure to the cells of our body and brain can begin to cause damage. Using herbs to strength and build the health of the nervous system overall can be very helpful in reducing the negative effects of long term stress on the body. Herbs can do this by serving as a source of energy and vitality for the body. Caring for the whole body benefits the nervous system.

Herbs for Stress and Anxiety

Adaptogens

The type of herbs used to help with long term stress are called Adaptogens and can have long term benefits when used over an extended period of time. Keep in mind that with most forms of natural healing, consistency is the key.

American ginseng (*Panax quinquefolius*): Roots are used. One of the best known adaptogen herbs. It balances the entire body and helps restore energy if used over a period of time. It enhances mental clarity and helps with exhaustion related to stress.

Asian ginseng (*Panax ginseng*): Roots are used. Considered one of the best herbs and has been called a “cure-all”. Helps to increase energy and revitalize the system when used over a period of time. Helps to regenerate frayed and over taxed nerves and discourages mood swings. Helpful when used consistently over a 3-4 month period. ***Can be too stimulating for individuals with hypertension and may be counterproductive for Type A personalities. ***

Siberian ginseng/“Eleuthero” (*Eleutherococcus senticosus*): Roots and bark are used. A cousin to Asian ginseng with a large range of health benefits. One of the best herbs for increasing endurance and stamina and for building and enhancing our resistance to stress factors whether emotional, physical or psychological. Best results come from use over a period of several weeks to a few months. Take 100-300 mg capsule daily to improve adrenal gland function. ***Use with caution if you have hypertension or a history of heart palpitations.

Rhodiola (*Rhodiola rosea*): Roots are used. Helps the body adapt to stress. Also treats anxiety, fatigue, and depression. Can usually be used in conjunction with anti-depressants. Take 300 mg capsule daily to support normal adrenal function.

Ashwaganda (*Withania somnifera*): Roots of this plant are used. An excellent adaptogen herb which increases the body's overall ability to adapt to and resist stress. It is both energizing and soothing. It promotes grounding endurance and calm energy. It is very helpful to nervous system, anxiety and stress. It has been shown to lower cortisol levels in scientific studies. This is a slow acting herb which needs to be used for a minimum of 15 days in order to notice an improvement. Use for 30-60 days for full strength to develop. Can be used as a tea, tincture, or capsule. Take 250 mg standardized extract 1-2 times a day or 600-800mg capsule daily.

Schisandra (*Schisandra chinensis*): Berries of the plant are used. This raises the body's ability to resist all kinds of stress and disease. Helps to increase endurance and stamina.

Good sources for purchasing herbs include:

Mountain Rose Herbs – www.mountainroseherbs.com

Starwest Botanicals – www.starwest-botanicals.com

Bulk Apothecary – www.bulkapothecary.com

Coffman, S. (2014). *The Herbal Medic*. Bookdesigntemplates.com

Gladstar, R. (2008). *Rosemary Gladstar's Herbal Recipes for Vibrant Health*. Storey Publishing. North Adams, MA.

Stengler, M., Balch, J., Balch, R. Y., (2016). *Prescription for Natural Cures 3rd Ed*. Turner Publishing Company. Nashville, TN.

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<https://www.mindbodygreen.com/0-13215/3-ancient-herbs-to-reduce-stress-anxiety.html>