

Mindful Approaches to overcoming
ANXIETY and GAD
Generalised Anxiety Disorder

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Including written and audio resources

Introduction

Surviving Covid -19 has been an immense task. Across the world the pandemic has disrupted our lives and our relationships. The organising, planning, processing the and in some cases the training of staff has created pressure and anxiety for us all. This new environment, the pressures of adjustment to a different ways of working, the introduction of new technology for communication at times has become overwhelming. Most of us, at sometime will have some level of anxiety. This guide is designed to help us deal with this.

What is anxiety?

Anxiety is not uncommon, at some point we will all experience it. For some people it is something that simply comes and goes though for others it can become a continuing problem if not dealt with appropriately.

There are several forms of anxiety, which we will look at, however, they all have one thing in common. People that sufferer anxiety are not living in their present moment. They are worrying about what *will happen* not what *is happening*. In modern psychology the ability to live in the now, to live in the present moment, and not worry about what will happen next is called **Mindfulness**.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness teaches us how we can take control of our experience. How we can take control of our feelings and our responses. A Greek philosopher Epictetus, over 2000 years ago said...

...we are not effected by events. We are effected by how we respond to those events

We may not be able to change what is happening to us but we can change how we respond to it. In mindful psychology we would say...

...thoughts become things

The thing's that we think a out we bring about

In this sense mindfulness represents a choice. The choice is do we rehearse and build on our negative thoughts and feelings or do we decide to focus on the positive. What we know from mindful psychology is that...

What you feed grows and what you starve dies

First we need to learn to observe what is happening in our mind and emotions and change any habits or patterns that we have developed that do not serve us well.

The unattended mind creates monkey business

The unattended mind will always wander. It may wander to hopes, desires, dreams, ideas, worries or concerns. The mind is often described as a monkey that, if not controlled, will run off and throw bananas at you. When this happens it is because you are not living in the present moment and your mind has gone off to wherever the monkey decides to take it. Unless you take control of your monkey your mind becomes a rudderless ship washed around in the currents with no clear direction or purpose. Mindfulness is the psychological process of bringing our attention back from the wandering mind to paying attention to what is happening in your present moment. Mindfulness is not allowing ourself to run off with the monkey, it is observing the the monkey, letting it go, and allowing it to return to it's cage.

Living in the now

In the present moment, in the now, there is rarely any problem. In anyone moment, in the present, we are usually safe, secure, nothing is harming us and nothing is hurting us. We only have an anxiety problem when our mind tells us differently. In many ways both anxiety and depression are monkey business as our fears are played out as the mind wanders into the unresolved past or the feared future.

Rumination

When our mind wanders and we repeatedly worry about something we call it rumination. When we ruminate on unresolved **past** issues, people or events and relive those experiences in the present moment we can create feelings of **depression**. On the other hand if we ruminate on **future** events, that may never happen. and we live our worries, fears and concerns in the present we can create feelings of **anxiety**. And if we are really clever we can do both and create a state of anxious depression as our mind wanders to the past and the future. Which is exactly what most of us do when we feel that the pressure is on us

FOCUS -	PAST	PRESENT	FUTURE
<i>Feeling -</i>	<i>Depression</i>	<i>Happiness</i>	<i>Anxiety</i>

Rumination of past events or worrying about future events, can contribute to poor mental health and mental illness such as depression and anxiety disorder. Mindfulness exercises and mindful interventions, teach us to live in the present and have been shown to lessen levels of depression, worry and anxiety.

Stress/pressure reduction

Reducing stress and pressure improves your mental health and maintains our wellbeing. The recordings and techniques used in this guide are part of the Mindfulness Based Self Coaching Programme, MBSC. The aim of MBSC is to enable you to develop skills and techniques that will enable you to become your own life coach. Through the process of mindful observation and practice you can learn to take control your mental and emotional system rather than allowing your system to take control of you.

Learning to be Mindful, the ability to focus into the present and not the past or the future leads to happiness. Learning to be mindful requires consistent and persistent practice.

(practice, practice, practice.)

Below is the first mindfulness exercise for you to practice.



Recording one: Mindful breath focus

In this recording you begin your mindful journey with a simple breath focus exercise. The recordings in this programme can be accessed through the Occupational Health Intranet Page. This exercise lasts for about five minutes. As you practice the exercise your mind will wander to both past or future events and become distracted by thoughts, feelings, sounds or physical sensations. This is normal. When it happens observe the distraction, don't fight it, then let go of the distraction as you gently bring your attention back to your breath and the present moment.

The point of this exercise is not to create a still mind, the mind will always be churning out thoughts and feelings. In this exercise you are becoming aware as your mind wanders and each time you observe the distraction and return your attention to your breath you have just practised mindfulness. You are remembering to be mindful, to be in the moment. When the mind wanders you forget, when you observe the distraction you remember to be mindful, to be in the present moment.

The more you can remember to be mindful throughout your day the more you are living mindfully. It can take a long time to learn the art of living mindfully. Be patient with yourself. Observe your wandering mind without negative self criticism.

Practice: Ideally you would start with a five minute mindful breath focus practice once everyday and gradually increase the length of time that you are able to practice. When you can sit for thirty minutes everyday your mindfulness practice has become therapeutic and you are becoming your own self coach.

Normal anxiety is helpful

Mindful exercises as described above will help anybody in any situation take better control of who they are and to adapt or change their responses to what they are experiencing. It may surprise you to know that anxiety is completely normal and is can even be helpful. It may seem strange to think of anxiety as our friend. Anxiety is really our natural awareness of potential threat and danger. Anxiety has kept us safe over thousands of years throughout our evolution.

Normal anxiety is when you have the feeling or you know that something is not right and you respond with the increased alertness and awareness that keeps you safe, secure and able to respond. This process and responses are **normal anxiety**. Any anxious response has both physiological and psychological effects. It will effect what we think, what we feel and what we do.

Examples of normal anxiety

You might expect to have heightened levels of awareness and alertness if you were admitted to hospital, if you were going to sit an examination, or take your driving test, doing a presentation or a performance in front of other people. In these types of situation normal anxiety helps to keep you sharp, alert and attentive and enables you to perform well and to survive.

Helpful anxiety

There are many times when you might feel grateful for the natural raised awareness of normal anxiety. When a surgeon is about to operate on you or a pilot is about to fly your plane you would want them to be alert and aware, you want them to feel a level of normal anxiety and awareness, to keep you safe.

Many people that compete in sport can be in dangerous situations requiring their absolute awareness and alertness, the motorcyclist on a tight bend or the skydiver jumping from a plane, a tight rope walker above the Grand Canyon. There are many people who need to have a healthy natural anxiety. Think about the health and safety issues of industries such building. When workers are on top of those huge towers a simple lapse of awareness could result in a fall to their death. Over all, normal anxiety can be seen as a good and helpful thing.

When anxiety becomes a problem

Ok, so anxiety can also become a problem. The main effect of problem anxiety is that you have the anxious response when there is no need, when there is no threat and you are completely safe.

Stress hormones

In all forms of anxiety you develop stress hormone to prepare you for the potential threat. This includes raised blood pressure, faster respiration and heart rate, sweating and raised awareness as your system prepares for 'fight or flight'. The greater the threat, or the longer that you take to deal with threat, the greater the level of stress hormone in your system.

Fight, flight or freeze?

In a normal situation you would act out your anxiety by either fighting, fleeing or freezing. You would either hit it, run away from it or become immobile. In the process of fight or flight you use up, or burn off, the stress hormones in your blood stream, eliminating them from your body allowing your system to return to normal.

Anxiety and emotional health

When you exercise you have a high level of cardio vascular arousal. Your physical health is measure by the time it takes for your heart rate and respiration to return to normal. The quicker it returns to normal the healthier you are. Your emotional health can be seen in the same way. After an emotional arousal how long does it take for your system to return to normal? This is your emotional health. After an anxious situation you will normally need to take some action to enable your system to return to normal.

Fight or flight

In both fight and flight modes, as a response to a threat or other anxious situation, you prepare to either attack and defend or to run away. The effect of an incident on your system is similar in both cases. The first effect is to increase the level of stress hormones such as adrenalin. Next the blood vessels in your muscles dilate to increase the flow of oxygen and nutrients in preparation for action. Because the blood is being concentrated into the muscles some of your organs may cease to function normally. This may have the effect of loosening both your bowels and bladder as your body prepares for action. Respiration increases to facilitate your increased need for oxygen in your muscles. Mentally you become hyper-alert though both cognitive and emotional reactions maybe diminished or depleted.

Fight and flight in modern life

All that is described above is the body preparing for action. For this natural body system to work effectively the chemistry produced by the body needs to be used up or burned off after the event. What happens if we are unable to do this?

For example, if the threat that you are experiencing is in the workplace you might not be able to fight or flight and your body maybe left full of stress hormones in an activated state. Perhaps the source of the threat is a manager or a patient and you might even need to smile and remain polite even when inside you are feeling anxious, angry or upset. If you hold onto these unresolved feelings and the unused chemistry in your system is not used it can lead to digestive and gastric disorder, heightened blood pressure and so on. Prolonged periods of unreleased or unexpressed anxiety can lead to a variety of stress related illnesses.

When you fail to burn off stress hormone the levels left in your system may disturb your sleep, affect your appetite, make you irritable and can leave your muscles feeling heavy and dense so that you feel fatigued.

Freeze

The freeze response in anxious situations is often seen as silly or pathetic. Something awful is happening and you can't move, it is as though you have become paralysed.

However, the ability freeze or become immobile, may have once been a part of our helpful normal anxiety. Perhaps it enabled us to hide from a predator, or the source of the threat and enabled us to remain hidden and undetected and therefore we remained safe until the danger had passed. When we were sure that the situation was safe we could run away and use up the stress hormone that way.

Freeze in modern life

In modern life the most common form of Freeze anxiety is when you feel unable to express what you are feeling. This is different to the unexpressed fight or flight response. Perhaps you are being bullied or mistreated in a professional or personal relationship but are unable to, or fear to, express your feelings. When this happens the stress hormones that you develop are not used up and remain in your system and can negatively effect your physical and mental health.

The following mindfulness exercise will reduce the levels of stress hormone in your system. It is particularly useful if you feel the onset of an anxiety or panic attack. Once you feel the anxiety rising within you just a minute or two of seven eleven breathing can reduce or eliminate the stress chemistry in your system completely.

Recording two: Seven, eleven breathing

You may have noticed the connection between your emotional state and your breath both in rate and depth. When you are relaxed and calm your breath will be deep and in your abdomen. As tension and anxiety grow the breath moves upwards to 'top breath' and becomes shallow and faster.

Your breathing mechanism is connected to the two sides of your nervous system, the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems. In practical terms this means that when you breathe in your adrenal system opens and Adrenalin is released into your bloodstream. When you breathe out your adrenal system shuts down and the level of Adrenalin decreases. If your in-breaths become shallow and fast the level of adrenalin, stress hormones, increase with every breath that you take. This can build into tension, anxiety or a panic attack.

If you breathe out for longer than you breathe in the level of stress hormones in your system will reduce every time you breathe out.

Practice: This exercise can be done either sitting, standing or lying down. However, some people may feel a little woozy or faint so be aware of this if you are standing up. If you feel tension, anxiety or experience feelings of panic just two minutes of seven eleven breath can reduce the level of stress hormones in your system to normal.

Anxious physical/body reactions

Your body is an emotional barometer that is continually feeding back what is happening in your mind and emotions. If you are tense in your body then you are tense in your mind and your emotions. What is inside shows on the outside. The physical effects of anxiety will effect different people in different ways creating different symptoms. Go through the check list below. When you feel anxious which of these symptoms apply to you?

- 1: Butterflies or a churning feeling in your stomach
- 2: Feeling faint dizzy or light-headed
- 3: The sensation pins and needles in your arms or legs
- 4: Being restless or unable to sit still for any length of time
- 5: General aches and pains, headaches, backache and so on
- 6: Raise respiration, top breathing or shallow breathing
- 7: Raised or irregular heart rate
- 8: Disturbed sleep pattern, over dreaming, teeth grinding
- 9: Jaw clenching, aching jaw muscles
- 10: Feelings of nausea or actual vomiting
- 11: Increase us of the toilet
- 12: Changes is libido, intimacy and sex drive

Anxious mental/emotional reactions

Emotions effect the body and the body effects the emotions. They are are either end of a feedback loop. So the exercises that relax the body will also relax the mind and emotions. Exercises that relax your emotions and mind will also relax your body. Either way the more that you practice then the more you are reprogramming your current anxious habitual response to create new habits and responses that serve you better. Go through the check list below. When you feel anxious which of these symptoms apply to you?

- 1: Unexplained fear
- 2: Apprehension and dread
- 3: Mentally restless, unwanted thoughts
- 4: Heightened emotions, tears, crying
- 5: Generally irritable maybe for no good reason
- 6: Agitated, tense, snappy or reactive
- 7: Catastrophising, experiencing things as worse than they are
- 8: Hyper alertness to potential threats and dangers
- 9: Withdrawal from social situations, general isolation
- 10: Panic

The exercise below exercise can be used to reduce muscle and body tension and reduce the pressure on your joints and ligaments. As you let go of the tension in your body your will also be letting go of the tension in your mind and emotions. It can be beneficial when you are unable to sleep or are feeling overwhelmed.

Progressive relaxation is a good way of teaching your body mind system to respond differently. Reprogramming your current habitual response to new habits that serve you better.

Recording three: Progressive relaxation

In specific anxiety or generalised anxiety responses it can feel as though anxiety is taking over your entire body. You may develop aches and pains and feel sore or tense.

In this exercise you deliberately tense and relax each part of your body. As you do so, you mindfully observe the difference between the feeling and sensation in the difference between tensions and relaxation. Often in this exercise you discover that you are actually tense when you thought you were relaxed. As you progress you learn the art of relaxation and you teach your muscles new ways to be.

Practice: Relaxation is a progressive thing and is a learned skill. It is good to practice progressive relaxation when you get into bed to prepare your body for sleep. You can also practice it at any time of day, either sitting or lying, when you feel tense or anxious.

Anxiety disorder - AD

Generalised anxiety disorder - GAD

When you repeatedly develop physiological and psychological symptoms, as listed above, to a particular stressor, even when there is nothing to be anxious about, it is described as '**Anxiety Disorder**' or AD. Anxiety disorder is what people usually mean when they say that they have an anxiety problem. Normally it is related to a particular issue stressor or cause such as performance anxiety, separation anxiety and so on. When anxiety begins to take over your entire experience so that everything and anything can make you feel anxious it is described as **Generalise Anxiety Disorder** of GAD

People use many phrases to describe their experience of anxiety...

"I live on my nerves"

"I am a bundle of nerves"

"I just can't settle"

"I am a worrier"

"I am tense all the time"

"I feel like a cat on hot bricks"

"I am on the edge of my seat"

"my heart is in my mouth"

"I get the heebie-jeebies"

"I've got the Colly wobbles"

"I get butterflies in my stomach"

"I'm afraid of my own shadow"

"I am going mental"

and so on.

All these phrases indicate a high level of stress hormone in the person who is experiencing anxiety disorder, AD or generalised anxiety disorder GAD.

What phrase would you use?

Forms of anxiety

Sometimes it is easier to label anxiety. Naming things can give them form and make them easier to deal with. However, creating labels can also create limitations. If I say clearly “I have a flying anxiety” I have just given myself permission to be anxious every time that I fly, and to feel anxious and to rehearse my anxiety prior to the actual event. Anxiety may express itself in many ways and each has been given it’s own name. If you suffer from anxiety which type is it? Does it fit in the list below or would you add more categories to the list?

- Hyperchondria** or Health anxiety,
- Cyberchonia,** obsession with self diagnosis on the internet or Google (Google-itis)
- Performance,** often the fear of failure or humiliation in a public or exposed setting
- Social,** fear of groups or fear of interactions and talking/conversation
- Panic disorder,** heightened symptoms of panic and distress for no apparent reason
- Reactive panic** panic response to known stressor
- Phobic responses,** irrational fear specific, object, people or events
- Agoraphobia,** fear of leaving the home or place of safety, fear of open space, shops, concerts and so on
- PTSD,** Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, ongoing response to past trauma, may include flashbacks and panic attacks, disturbed sleep and dreams
- OCD** Obsessive compulsive disorder - OCD, the need to repeat an action several times or even continually, checking locked doors or windows, unable to let go of thoughts or ideas and general obsessive rumination
- GAD,** Generalised Anxiety Disorder -this is when most things in life have become the source of anxiety, so that feelings of fear and worry become constant
- Specific anxiety** Once we have attached to a specific trigger the anxiety may have a specific name such as sexual anxiety, travel anxiety, flying anxiety, school attendance anxiety and so on.

Overcoming Anxiety

If your anxiety is considered clinical your physician may prescribe medication. Clinical means that the hormones in your endocrine system are out of balance and need some help to return to normal. This is the same as taking insulin for diabetes. Medication for anxiety can be confusing because anti-anxiety medications are often called anti-depressants. They generally fall into the following treatments for the following categories.

Enzodiazepines - GAD, phobias and social anxiety

Beta Blockers - social anxiety

Tricyclics - panic, depression, GAD, PTSD

MAOIs - Monoamine Oxidase Inhibitors - Panic social anxiety, GAD, PTSD, OCD

SSRIs - Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors - OCD, depression, social anxiety, PTSD, GAD

Mild Traquilizers - anxiety and panic

Whichever route you choose to follow in overcoming your anxiety disorder it is useful to discuss your situation with your physician even if you choose to take the medical route. Your physician may have access to psychological service where you may be referred for advice, help or therapy.

The Psychological Route

Psychological approaches for overcoming anxiety should, and often do, run alongside medication. In some cases medication is useful as an emotional prop while you develop the psychological skills to deal with your anxiety. In most cases you will need to see a therapist. Many therapists are skilled in helping people deal with anxiety including, mindfulness therapists, counsellors, psychotherapists, psychologists and CBT practitioners. Once you have developed the skills required to deal with your anxiety the need for medication may well diminish and, perhaps be eliminated altogether.

Often Mindfulness and mindful psychotherapy may be all that you need to overcome depression, anxiety and to maintain a healthy state of wellbeing.

Mindfulness and Self Help

Mindfulness and mindful psychotherapy are quickest and often the most effective ways to deal with anxiety disorders. Regular mindfulness practice is the best way to 'future proof' yourself against both anxiety and depression by keeping yourself mentally fit. By practicing mindfulness you learn to live in the present and dissociate with depressive emotional connections to the past and fearful anxiety about the future. In mindfulness we learn to live in the present, we learn to be here now.

Changing your anxious disorder (AD) mindset

You were not born with AD. You did not come out of the womb AD. AD is a skill that you have learned. AD is a habit. Your system is a habit forming system. It has been creating habits since the moment of your birth. The problem is that the system is neutral and does not care if the habits that you have created are positive or negative, whether they serve you well or poorly. Many AD habits are learned from observation. For example...

If I observe my mother being scared of spiders. I then develop an emotional template so that when I see a spider I also have the same response as my mother. The more I experience and play out the anxious response the more embedded it becomes in my system as a habit.

When an anxious response is learned in this sort of way you may have no idea of where it came from and simply think **“this is just the way that I am”**, this is never true it is always **“this is the way I have learned to be”**. All habits are learned through repetition. The repetition may be that of the visualised imagination rather than a repeated situation. For example...

If I have a bad plane flight involving fearful turbulence so that each time I think of flying I go over the same fearful situation again and again and each time I relive it I have the same fearful emotional response, then I now have the habit so that as soon as I think of plane flight I have the same anxious response.

Dealing with the anxiety

You may know the cause of your anxiety is or it may be hidden, lost in past memory. Your first question needs to be ‘do I need help from someone else to overcome this?’ If your answer is ‘yes’ then finding a Psychotherapist or a CBT practitioner will help you. This can be accessed through occupational health though you may choose to see someone privately.

If you take the self help route into changing your mental and emotional habits the following will be helpful.

1: Can you identify the cause

Being able to see where your anxiety came from can often, help, dilute Ro desensitise and anxiety. If you can see that your flying anxiety came from a particular flight which was one in a thousand and that the chances of having such a bad flight again are very small it can begin to change your experience. Using the recordings, seven eleven, breath focus and the beach may be of particular use.

The more that you focus into the present moment the less anxiety you will feel

2: Solving the problem

If you can see the cause but you are not doing anything about it, you may have something that you should be worrying about. Perhaps you are in debt, have or suspect that you have a serious illness, or know that something bad or difficult is about to happen then you do need to act, to do something about it.

You might need to write it all down so that you can begin to see it. You might need a problem solving session, like having a brain storm. You may need to include other people in your brain storm to get some other ideas to help you change your situation. Create a list of possible actions and solutions and then act. The general mindful breath focus recording will help.

A lot of anxiety comes from not acting. When you fail to act you live with uncertainty.

3: Dealing with physical symptoms

As pointed out earlier when you are holding the effects of unresolved anxiety within you it has a direct effect on your body. Tiredness, fatigue, high blood pressure and so on. The two things that we know that help us deal with anxiety are both rest and action, exercise and relaxation. Developing an exercise regime increases the positive endorphins in your brains, it increases the happy hormones, that help in overcoming anxiety. If your heart rate is increased for around twenty minutes your system switches and produces positive endorphins such as serotonin. When you undertake a mindfulness exercise or a deep relaxation exercise you will reduce the level of stress hormones in your system.

A balance of both exercise and relaxation will reduce the physical effects of anxiety and help you to deal with the changes that are required for you to overcome it. Recordings seven eleven and the progressive relaxation will be of particular benefit.

If you do things in the same way you always get the same results. What do you need to do differently to create change?

4: Changing your breathing - emotional symptoms

Anxiety is emotional. The first indicator that something has changed emotionally is that the breath has also changed. There are two main effects of anxiety on the breath but also the effects of the breath on anxiety. The first is the position or depth and the second is the rate of the breath. There are three lobes in the lung. When you are relaxed you are bottom breathing, or belly breathing, and using the bottom lobe. As we become anxious or upset the tension in the shoulders usually makes the shoulders rise so that we start to breath

with the top lobe. As this happens the breath becomes shallower increasing the rate of breaths and raising the level of stress hormone in the blood stream. Using the seven eleven recording will help reverse this effects.

4: Changing the way that you think

Thinking and feeling are different things and though they are distinct they both have an effect on each other. A feelings of either happiness or sadness can lead you to have happy or sad thoughts or to relive happy or sad memories. Equally happy or sad thoughts can lead you to have happy or sad feelings. When you create a relationship between a certain set of thoughts and a certain set of feelings one will trigger the other.

May be you are on a bus going to see a friend and you get a pain in your chest and start to play with the idea that you have lung cancer. Maybe you had a relative or a friend, or even someone that you knew, who died from lung cancer. The monkey in your head runs off with the idea and the seed is planted in your anxious self. Once you begin to create an anxious relationship like this it may take several forms. It could be that every time you think on your friend you worry about having lung cancer or when you have a pain and fear lung cancer you think of your friend. It might even be that when you get on a bus you can feel the anxiety of having lung cancer. On way to change an anxious association is reframing.

Reframing is when we deliberately stop the thoughts that do not serve us well and deliberately replace them with thoughts that serve us better. This might simply be that when the negative thoughts come into your mind that you stop them, deliberately dismiss them and replace them with something like “I know I am safe and secure, I know I have nothing to worry about or fear”.

Fake it to make it

Often when we begin reframing the inner conflict between thoughts and feelings leads us to doubt. So, I change the inner thought to “I know I am safe and secure, I know I have nothing to worry about or fear” and the next thought is “oh yes you do”. This is an important point in the reframing process when we refuse the negative feeling. All anxieties are habits, all habits are learned and the learning comes from repetition. How many times do I have to repeat something until it becomes the new habit as the old on fades and dies. Remember...

...what you feed grows and what you starve dies

5: Using distraction to starve a habit

Because we know that all forms of anxiety are habits and we know that habits only exist because we keep feeding them it follows clearly that if we starve a habit it will diminish and finally fade away. One way of starving a habit is using distraction so that you stop feeding the habit.

When using distraction as a strategy to overcome anxiety habits it is good to have a plan in place. Having something that you might use as an alternative to feeding unwanted habit of anxiety. Breath focus can work here, using a sound focussed meditation, perhaps finding a song to sing or do something more active, take a walk, have a bath, go for a run, phone a friend, watch the television, make a cake. Whatever your strategy work it out in advance and try not to think of it as avoiding the problem more of starving the negative habit.

Recording four: Sounds focus meditation

For some people focus on the breath does not allow them to let go thoughts easily. The introduction of a sound that works with the breath can create a stronger point of focus that is easier to stay with allowing thoughts to be left behind. Always remember that what we feed grows and what we starve dies. Focus on the sound means that the focus is taken away from the thoughts. The sound is repeated in your head you do not say it out loud

In this exercise you simply pick a sound to repeat inside your head, you do not say it out loud. The only requirement of the sound is that it can be split into two halves. Although sound based meditation has been with us for thousands of years the main proponents of sound or mantra meditation in the modern world are T.M., or transcendental meditation. Their sounds were mainly Ah Hum or Ay Ing. The sound is used by using the first half of the sound on the in breath and the second on the out breath. Originally the sound that was taught to me was Ananda split An Nanda. Ananda in Sanskrit means bliss so this was known as bliss meditation. The sound is actually unimportant though many will attempt to tell you that some sounds are mystic or have great power, it is simply a sound to focus on:

Breath	In	Out
Sound	Ah	Hum
	Ay	Ing
	An	Nanda
	Re	Lax
	Let	Go

Practice: Simply sit. Take an in breath and at whatever rate your breath is coming use the sound, half on the in breath and half on the out breath. As your rebate of breath slows allow the sound to elongate and become whatever it needs to.

6: Changing your behaviour - do something different

Because you are a habit forming mechanism you almost certainly do similar things each day and each week. Learning to be different is exercising parts of our system that empower personal change. Get into the habit of change, of doing things differently. This is not simply related to the behaviours related to your anxiety, experiment with change generally. Try driving to work using a different route, or take a different bus and walk a bit. Try shopping in a different store. Try's something new for dinner. The more that we realise that change is not only possible but might even be fun the easier it is to overcome the habit of anxiety disorder.

7: Creating a safe place in response to a real threat

There may come a time when the anxious response to a threat is very real. It could be that you do actually have a serious illness that may even be terminal. Or that a serious operation is about to take place. Perhaps someone else close to you is dying or very ill. The same principle of mindfulness still apply. If a potential disaster is imminent, it is not happening right now and if we are living in the now we are not with the disaster.

For many people in this situation the best thing to do is to create a safe place. Somewhere inside your self where you are able to go and be away from any fears or anxieties about the current situation so that, however bad it gets, there is always somewhere to go where it is all alright. The Beach recording is designed to do just that and is often used by oncology patients and their relatives.



Recording five: The beach - creating a safe place

A safe place means an internal visualised space that you can retreat to. A place where nobody wants anything and nobody needs anything. A place where you are completely safe and completely secure, where nothing can hurt you and nothing can harm. A place where you can face any issues, a place where you can deal with any issues.

In this recording you create your own beach in exactly the way that you need it to be. You develop a relationship with your beach so that when you are in anyway upset or overwhelmed, when symptoms or pain are becoming too difficult you have somewhere to go somewhere to be.

Practice: This exercise may be done lying or sitting, whichever is most comfortable. All you need to do is to settle down and follow the recording. This is visualisation where you are guided though you may get to the point where you are able to do the exercise without the recording.

8: Mindfulness Exercises - Practice

The common point of all states of anxiety, from mild to severe, is the habit of focussing on what will be rather than what is. In all cases overcoming anxiety is about being in the present moment, living in the now and not in the future. Mindfulness practise teaches us just that by using the breath as the immediate point of focus in the present moment. All the recordings in this guide are using mindfulness. However there are two sides to mindfulness. The first is the sitting breath focus practise that, to be effective in overcoming anxiety, needs to be at least thirty minutes everyday. The second is to live mindfully and that means to be aware of what you think, feel and do and to become responsible for who you are, what you do and the effects that you have on yourself and others, to reinforce those habits of mindfulness that serve you well and to change those that do not serve you well.

For the breath focus mindfulness exercise go back to...



Recording one: Mindful breath focus

Alongside this guide there are others and also a set of workshops on selected topic that will help you in your mindful development and your to self fulfilment, these include: