

# Grounding Techniques

Grounding techniques are based in a concept called mindfulness. This is a practice that encourages active awareness of one's reality.

It can be normal to experience flashbacks, anxiety, or other uncomfortable symptoms after trauma. Grounding techniques help control these symptoms by turning attention away from thoughts, memories, or worries, and refocusing on the present moment - whether by turning inward (focusing on your breath or body sensations), or turning outward and focusing on your surroundings or tactile stimuli (cold water, a stone in your palm etc.)

If you are unsure about how to practice any of these techniques, ask your counsellor for support. They can likely model or practice alongside you if you choose.

You are the expert in your own life and healing. These techniques are only suggestions. They are offered as tools in your toolbox, each one may serve a different use at a different time.

Take what works, leave what does not, and modify as needed to make them best work for you.

# 5-4-3-2-1 Technique

Using the 5-4-3-2-1 technique, you will purposefully take in the details of your surroundings using each of your senses. Strive to notice small details that your mind would usually tune out, such as distant sounds, or the texture of an ordinary object.

Relax your body, take a few deep breaths, and focus on the following...

## 5 things you can see

Look for small details such as a pattern on the ceiling, the way light reflects off a surface, or an object you never noticed.

## 4 things you can feel (or touch)

Notice the sensation of clothing on your body, the sun on your skin, or the feeling of the chair you are sitting in. Pick up an object and examine its weight, texture, and other physical qualities

## 3 things you can hear

Pay special attention to the sounds your mind has tuned out, such as a ticking clock, distant traffic, or trees blowing in the wind.

## 2 things you can smell

Try to notice smells in the air around you. You may also look around for something that has a scent, such as a flower or an unlit candle

## 1 thing you can taste

Carry gum, candy, or small snacks for this step. Pop one in your mouth and focus your attention closely on the flavors.

# Body Awareness

The body awareness technique will bring you into the here-and-now by directing your focus to sensations in the body. Pay special attention to the physical sensations created by each step

1. Take 5 long, deep breaths through your nose, and exhale through puckered lips.
2. Place both feet flat on the floor. Wiggle your toes. Curl and uncurl your toes several times. Spend a moment noticing the sensations in your feet.
3. Stomp your feet on the ground several times. Pay attention to the sensations in your feet and legs as you make contact with the ground.
4. Clench your hands into fists, then release the tension. Repeat this 10 times.
5. Press your palms together. Press them harder and hold this pose for 15 seconds. Pay attention to the feeling of tension in your hands and arms.
6. Rub your palms together briskly. Notice and sound and the feeling of warmth.
7. Reach your hands over your head like you're trying to reach the sky. Stretch like this for 5 seconds. Bring your arms down and let them relax at your sides.
8. Take 5 more deep breaths and notice the feeling of calm in your body.

# Deep Breathing

Your breath is a powerful tool to ease stress and make you feel less anxious. Breath work has been proven by science to have profound positive impacts on our physiology and health - but breath work isn't new, *pranayama* has been a part of yogic practice for 6000 years!

For starters, try this simple deep breathing exercise:



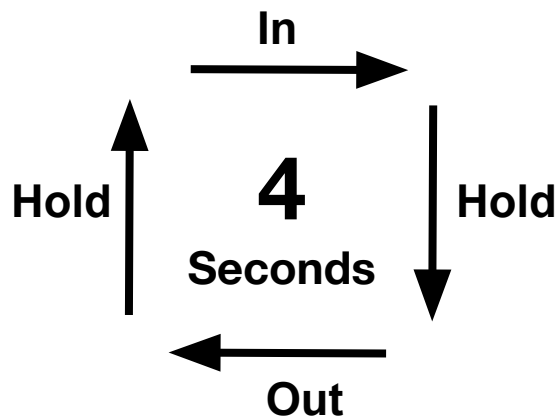
1. Sit comfortably and place one hand on your abdomen.
2. Breathe in through your nose, deeply enough that the hand on your abdomen rises.
3. Hold the air in your lungs, and then exhale slowly through your mouth, with your lips puckered as if you are blowing through a straw.
4. The secret is to go slow: Time the inhalation (4s), pause (4s), and exhalation (6s).
5. Practice for 3 to 5 minutes.

**If it feels too forced - modify it!**

**Don't force it as that can make you *more* anxious.**

Another technique is **Box Breathing**:

1. Breathe in for 4 seconds
2. Hold for 4 seconds
3. Breathe out for 4 seconds
4. Hold for 4 seconds



# Imagery

Your thoughts have the power to change how you feel. If you think of something sad, it's likely you'll start to feel sad. The opposite is also true: When you think of something positive and calming, you feel relaxed. The imagery technique harnesses this power to reduce anxiety.

**Think of a place that you find comforting. It could be a secluded beach, your bedroom, a quiet mountaintop, or even a loud concert.**

**For 5 to 10 minutes, use all your senses to imagine this setting in great detail. Don't just think fleetingly about this place - really imagine it.**



What do you see around you? What do you notice in the distance? Look all around to take in all your surroundings. Look for small details you would usually miss.



What sounds can you hear? Are they soft or loud? Listen closely to everything around you. Keep listening to see if you notice any distant sounds.



Are you eating or drinking something enjoyable? What is the flavor like? How does it taste? Savor all the tastes of the food or drink.



What can you feel? What is the temperature like? Think of how the air feels on your skin, and how your clothes feel on your body. Soak in all these sensations.



What scents are present? Are they strong or faint? What does the air smell like? Take some time to appreciate the scents.

# Mental Exercises

Use mental exercises to take your mind off uncomfortable thoughts and feelings. They are discreet and easy to use at nearly any time or place.

**Experiment to see which work best for you.**

Some examples are:

- Name all the objects you see.
- Describe the steps in performing an activity you know how to do well. For example, how to shoot a basketball, prepare your favorite meal, or tie a knot.
- Count backwards from 100 by 7.
- Pick up an object and describe it in detail. Describe its color, texture, size, weight, scent, and any other qualities you notice.
- Spell your full name, and the names of three other people, backwards.
- Name all your family members, their ages, and one of their favorite activities.
- Read something backwards, letter-by-letter. Practice for at least a few minutes.
- Think of an object and “draw” it in your mind, or in the air with your finger. Try drawing your home, a vehicle, or an animal.

# Mindful Meditation

The goal of mindfulness meditation is simple: to pay attention to the present moment, without judgement. However, as you practice, you'll find that this is easier said than done. During mindfulness meditation, you will focus on your breathing as a tool to ground yourself in the present moment. It's normal that your mind will wander. You'll simply bring yourself back into the moment by refocusing on your breathing, again and again.

## **Time & Place**

Aim to practice daily for 15-30 minutes. More frequent, consistent, and longer-term practice leads to the best results. However, some practice is better than no practice. Find a time and place where you are unlikely to be interrupted. Silence your phone and other devices, and set a timer for your desired practice length.

## **Posture**

Sit in a chair, or on the floor with a cushion for support.

Straighten your back, but not to the point of stiffness.

Let your chin drop slightly, and gaze downward at a point in front of you.

If in a chair, place the soles of your feet on the ground. If on the floor, cross your legs. Let your arms fall naturally to your sides, with your palms resting on your thighs. If your pose becomes too uncomfortable, feel free to take a break or adjust.

## **Awareness of Breathing**

Because the sensations of breathing are always present, they are useful as a tool to help you focus on the present moment. Whenever you become distracted during meditation, turn your focus back to breathing. Notice the sensation of air as it passes through your nose or mouth, the rise and fall of your belly, and the feeling of air being exhaled, back into the world. Notice the sounds that accompany each inhalation and exhalation.

## **Wandering Mind**

It's normal that your thoughts will wander during mindfulness meditation. At times, it might feel like a constant battle to maintain focus on your breathing. Don't worry—that's normal. Instead of struggling against your thoughts, simply notice them, without judgment. Acknowledge that your mind has wandered, and return your attention to breathing. Expect to repeat this process again and again.

# Progressive Muscle Relaxation

By tensing and relaxing the muscles throughout your body, you can achieve a powerful feeling of relaxation. Additionally, progressive muscle relaxation will help you spot anxiety by teaching you to recognize feelings of muscle tension.

Sit back or lie down in a comfortable position. For each area of the body listed below, you will tense your muscles tightly, but not to the point of strain. Hold the tension for 10 seconds, and pay close attention to how it feels. Then, release the tension, and notice how the feeling of relaxation differs from the feeling of tension.

**Feet** Curl your toes tightly into your feet, then release them.

**Calves** Point or flex your feet, then let them relax.

**Thighs** Squeeze your thighs together tightly, then let them relax.

**Torso** Suck in your abdomen, then release the tension and let it fall.

**Back** Squeeze your shoulder blades together, then release them.

**Shoulders** Lift and squeeze your shoulders toward your ears, then let them drop.

**Arms** Make fists and squeeze them toward your shoulders, then let them drop.

**Hands** Make a fist by curling your fingers into your palm, then relax your fingers.

**Face** Scrunch your facial features to the center of your face, then relax.

**Full Body** Squeeze all muscles together, then release all tension.