

## Dealing With Anxiety: Psychologist-Approved Tips to Manage Anxiety



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Not everyone has access to qualified counsellors and expert therapy. Whether due to financial or time constraints or simply not having an approved clinic in their area, thousands of people must still struggle with fears and anxieties despite effective treatments being readily available.

If you suffer from anxiety but cannot access the help you need, these 7 steps will make a great starting point for helping you recover. All of these points are based on the same thoroughly researched and tested principles I use during [anxiety treatment](#) of clients at my clinic in Sydney.

### 1 Learn to Spot Your Thoughts

The first step to overcoming anxiety is learning to identify your anxious thoughts as they occur. Paying attention to your own inner voice isn't something that's widely practised, but it's worth learning to see your thoughts objectively in order to notice when they are blowing things out of proportion.

Many people have great success using mindfulness exercises to become aware of their thoughts, sensations and emotions. Thought exercises and relaxation techniques are readily available online or in book stores.

### 2 Learn to Accept Anxiety

Spotting your anxious thoughts is one thing, but learning to live with them is another. For many people their anxiety is also a constant source of embarrassment and shame; they despise themselves for being so easily worried and dread other people finding out.

Instead of fighting an impossible and mentally draining battle against your own thoughts, learn to accept them. Study and observe them without judging or criticising yourself for feeling them. Being able to accept and confront your emotions means they will come and go far more easily, whereas trying to block them out can inadvertently cause them to linger on.

### 3 Challenge Your Beliefs

Anxiety revolves around being preoccupied with negative outcomes. If you spot yourself imagining the catastrophic future consequences of your actions, stop and challenge yourself. What's the worst thing that could realistically happen? What is the most likely outcome? How have you coped with this kind of situation before? Question your assumptions and learn to bring them back in line with reality.

### 4 Put Thoughts to the Test

Anxious predictions rarely survive direct experience to the contrary. If you fear the consequences of certain actions or choices but suspect your fears may not be grounded in truth, conduct "behavioural experiments" to find out first-hand. Talk to that person, send that email, make that phone call. See if the consequences are as bad as you're imagining. Chances are they won't be.

### 5 Don't Avoid Frightening Situations

If there are specific situations which cause you stress and worry, it might be tempting to try and cut them out of your life. Unfortunately this will stop you from ever learning that your fears are unjustified. Someone who avoids spiders due to severe arachnophobia will never get to see that most spiders are totally harmless. Likewise your fear of certain events, people or situations may be keeping you from developing the skills you need to face them.

Don't write off your ability to face scary situations by avoiding them totally. You might be surprised by just how well you cope.

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## 6 Find the Middle Ground

If you want to rid yourself of anxiety you needn't face your darkest fears all at once. In fact, regularly exposing yourself to a moderate level of fear is more than sufficient to see improvement. When faced with potential anxiety, imagine ranking each possible action you could take on a fear scale on 1 to 10. Whenever you take action, aim for something that evokes a 5 out of 10 or "middle ground" level of fear; something that takes you out of your comfort zone without causing you to totally panic.

Continually reaching this 5 out of 10 level of fear will soon lead to a significant rise in your ability to face anxiety.

## 7 Watch Your Self-Talk

The way you speak to yourself can have a big impact on your anxiety. Getting frustrated with yourself for worrying or being overly critical will only serve to sustain your fear and reduce your motivation to change.

Aim for a more compassionate way of addressing yourself- develop an internal voice that's supportive and encouraging rather than critical. You will only truly change when you feel you are safe and valued even when you fail.

## Conclusion

The above points all form the basis of anxiety therapy, but there's no reason you can't apply them yourself. This guide isn't meant to replace professional counselling, but if you can't access good mental health services for whatever reason, these principles will serve you well in identifying, accepting and challenging your anxiety.

## Key Points

- Identifying and accepting your anxious thoughts will help you recover from them more quickly
- Anxiety can be reduced by mentally challenging unrealistic thoughts and beliefs
- Direct experience of confronting your fears is one of the most powerful ways to get rid of them

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