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Anxiety Institute
Measure (AIM)
Bookmark

How to Prevent Shutdown

10 Empowering Exercises To Break Free From The Grip of Anxiety

An In-Depth Guide to help you pinpoint the intensity of your anxiety to reclaim your life.



Sometimes just sensing an anxious thought can make you feel more anxious. Worry has a way of perpetuating itself, while also paralyzing you at the same time. Together, this can push your emotional well being into a downward spiral.

How can you break free from this vicious cycle?

It may sound simple, but one of the best things you can do when your anxiety spikes is to stop, step back and assess your situation.

In this guide, we share a simple system to help you address your anxiety in the moment it happens, teach you how to rate your level of anxiety using the Anxiety Institute Measure (AIM)* scale, and then provide 10 fast and effective exercises to help you overcome your anxiety.

*Based on the Subjective Unit of Distress Scale (SUDs).



Self Assessment

To improve your emotional state, you first need to conduct an accurate self-assessment. How am I feeling? Why am I feeling uncomfortable? What are the triggers that are making me feel this way?

Attempting to objectively understand why you are feeling the way you do may not come naturally. But the better you become at evaluating your emotional state, the quicker you can identify the appropriate steps to recovery.

The first step is to identify your symptoms. State the problem as clearly as possible. Allow yourself to feel your symptoms so you can process them. Instead of judging your symptoms, take a minute to simply acknowledge them.

Now that you have an understanding of the way you feel, you can begin to dig deeper into the four basic types of responses that coincide with your emotional state:

1. Cognitive

What type of specific thoughts do I have? Write them down.

2. Physical

How is my body reacting? How is my heart rate, temperature, muscle tension, breathing, chest pain, headache, etc.?

3. Behavioral

What do I normally do when I encounter this feeling? Do I try to escape, shut down, become agitated, or seek distraction?

4. Environmental

How does my location and my activity connect to how I feel? Do certain locations or spaces impact me? Who around me makes me feel better or worse?

After reflecting on the different responses to your anxiety, you are ready to rate the level of distress using the Anxiety Institute Measure (AIM). This tool is a 0 - 10 scale that helps you measure the intensity of your anxiety and see how different scenarios impact you. With proper use, it can also help you know which techniques are best to help you de-escalate anxiety in the moment.



Anxiety Institute Measure (AIM) Rate Your Own Anxiety

This measurement tool is a 0-10 scale that helps you assess the intensity of your anxiety. Through experimentation, you can identify which exercises best help you de-escalate your anxiety.

How are you feeling?

First, look at the scale on page 5 as you examine your cognitive, physical, behavioral, and environmental state. This introspection reflects how you feel about your distress, rather than how anyone else judges your worries. The scale is a broad gauge to prompt this self-reflection. The exact number is not as important as the exploration of your emotional state.

Practice exercise.

Next, try the exercises to help you conquer your anxiety. In times of distress, remember symptoms of anxiety and panic are temporary - they are opportunities to face and conquer your fears. If you need help in the future, you can refer back to the Anxiety Institute Measure when you feel your anxiety building.

Through daily practice of skills and strategies, my anxiety will return to serve its original purpose: to prepare and protect versus divert and dictate.

Excerpt from **AFFIRMATION STATEMENTS** by Dr. Dan Villiers

Anxiety Institute Measure (AIM)

Rate Your Own Anxiety

PINPOINT YOUR ANXIETY

How are you feeling?

0

Peaceful, serene, calm

1

Alert and focused

2

A bit stressed, beginning to feel anxious

3

Worried but able to function

4

Somewhat upset, moderate worry

5

Uncomfortable but mostly functioning

6

Wanting to change because you feel so badly

7

Preoccupied with anxiety, finding it difficult to function

8

Unfocused, overwhelmed by anxiety symptoms

9

Extremely anxious, helpless and unable to handle emotions

10

Unbearable anxiety, intolerable distress

SEE EXERCISES ON THE RIGHT

CONQUER DISTRESS

Practice exercises.

LEVELS 0-3

Self Affirmation

Repeat regularly "I believe in myself and my goals".

Muscle Relaxation

Tighten then release each muscle group from your head to your toes.

Breathing

Breath so your belly expands – inhale for 3 seconds and exhale for 4 seconds.

LEVELS 4-7

Escalate to De-Escalate

Run around the building until your physical responses outmatch your anxiety symptoms.

Timeout

Go for a walk, journal your thoughts, read a book to displace your worrying thoughts.

Guided Imagery

Listen to a guided imagery meditation.

Encourage a Friendly Discussion

Speak with someone you trust for support.

LEVELS 8-10

Deliberate Immersion

Dedicate time to facing your worry in small doses to gain power over it.

Self Hypnosis

Visualize your image of paradise and note what you can see, hear and smell.

Exposure Therapy

Lean into anxious thoughts and build resilience.

WE'RE HERE FOR YOU.

anxietyinstitute.com



Habits

No matter where you are on the scale, sleep, diet and physical activity are three foundational habits that influence your overall well being.

In fact, they are so crucial that if you do not prioritize healthy habits of sleeping, eating and physical activity - no remedy will be able to compensate for them. As a general practice, here are three reminders:

1. Diet

Eating healthy with plenty of vegetables, fruit, and unprocessed foods gives you the nutrients you need for an active lifestyle and the best chance for a good night's sleep. Avoid sugar and caffeine as much as you can.

2. Physical Activity

Regular physical activity can help ease depression and anxiety by releasing feel-good endorphins. Focusing on the activity will also take your mind off your worries. Even small amounts of daily activity — as little as 10 to 15 minutes at a time — can make a tremendous difference in your emotional well being.


3. Sleep

If you are not regularly sleeping 8 hours, you may want to reexamine your physical activity and dietary habits, prioritize getting to bed earlier each night, reduce device/screen time, and follow other basics in good sleep hygiene. A good night's sleep can help you think more clearly as you face the issues of the day.

Exercises

For each level of distress on the AIM scale, there is a corresponding exercise to help you lower your anxiety.

In this brochure you will find 10 exercises which help you intervene in the moment, and can even prevent the onset of anxiety in the future. The exercises build upon each other, so start at the beginning and work your way through them all, if necessary.



If your anxiety is mild: you fall between 0 and 3 on the scale.

1. Diaphragmatic breathing

Instead of just taking deep breaths, breathe so that your belly expands in and out (instead of your chest going up and down). Imagine that you are filling a balloon in your stomach. Inhale for three seconds and exhale for four.

2. Muscle relaxation

Tighten, then release each muscle group in your body. Start at your toes and work your way up, taking turns tensing one muscle group for 5 seconds, then relaxing it for 30 seconds. Move through each muscle group until you've worked your way to the top of your head.

3. Self-affirmation

Anxiety makes you feel as if there is a real, imminent threat, but that is a misperception that should not control you. You can use positive affirmations to remind yourself that you can manage the situation. Using the below affirmations as a guide, you can personalize the three statements to your specific needs.

- I've survived this before - I am strong and can overcome this.
- I know that I am not my anxiety.
- Anxiety is an opportunity to nurture more courage and resilience.

Vocalize these statements aloud and rehearse them in your mind. Repeat them daily as a way to reprogram your unconscious thought patterns. Write them on a card and place them where you can access them regularly - reminding yourself throughout the day or whenever your anxiety is triggered. Your goal is to proactively replace harsh, negative thoughts with positive, realistic self-talk.

The way I feel now (whether anxiety or depression) is not a predictor of how I will feel later.

Excerpt from **AFFIRMATION STATEMENTS** by Dr. Dan Villiers



If your anxiety is significant: you fall between 4 and 7 on the scale.

1. Guided imagery recordings

Guided imagery is a form of relaxation training that is freely available online. You can listen to an audio recording and quickly relax without having to learn the actual technique. Search “guided imagery meditation for anxiety” on YouTube and listen when you need to inject a sense of calm into your life.

2. Timeout

Intentionally shifting your attention away from your worries to something else can be an effective, short-term solution to reduce anxiety. Pick your favorite type of relaxation or entertainment like reading a good book, making cookies, going on a walk or taking a few minutes to write down a short diary entry as an effective way to manage challenging emotions.

3. Escalate to de-escalate

This is a counterintuitive exercise that works surprisingly well. If your anxiety level is at the 6 mark, try to increase your anxiety from 6 to an 8. Most times it will eventually go down to 3. A good example of this is running around the building to increase your physical exertion which then helps justify the physical symptoms of anxiety you are experiencing. You want to actively embrace a posture of courage.

*I choose to ride the wave and face
the fear, for I know what few others
do: the only way around
is through.*

Excerpt from **AFFIRMATION STATEMENTS** by Dr. Dan Villiers



If you are experiencing intense anxiety or panic attacks: you fall between 8 and 10 on the scale.

1. Call a friend or loved one

Speak to someone that you know and trust to fully listen to you. A friend can help you realize you have experienced this before, and they can reassure you that it is temporary - despite how horrible it may feel. Having someone to speak with can help ground you. They can remind you that you will be okay.

2. Deliberate immersion

This is another counterintuitive technique where you intentionally spend time embracing your actual fears. Your objective is to turn up the volume on your worries. Embrace the fact that you are suffering from an anxiety or panic attack and let it engulf you. This type of 'self-induced flooding' is an effective way of extinguishing the fear response and replacing it with a feeling of relaxation. In other words, you can eliminate the phobia by directly facing it in small doses.

3. Self hypnosis

Start by closing your eyes and focus on your breathing. Create a mental image of a place where you feel calm, safe, and in control. This could be a real place, such as a favorite vacation spot, or a fantasy destination. Start by mentally listing all the things you can see in the scene. Move on to explore all the other senses you can link to this dream location - what can you hear, touch, taste, and smell? Sink into the space as a relaxing immersion.

4. Exposure therapy

Intentionally remain in the situation that is causing your anxiety. Stay for a longer period of time than you would normally. Your goal is to gradually increase the duration of time spent facing the symptoms. Instead of attempting to immediately escape, this technique trains your mind and body that the situation is not, in fact, as dangerous as you might think. By increasing the frequency and duration of exposure to your worries, you can empower your resilience in the short and long term. The more you resist, the less power that anxiety has over you. You effectively "unlearn" unhealthy thought patterns and behaviors and turn these new skills into habits.

*I am not defined by my anxiety,
but by my response to it.*

Excerpt from **AFFIRMATION STATEMENTS** by Dr. Dan Villiers

Conclusion

All of the techniques in this guide encourage you to realize one thing: symptoms of anxiety are not premonitions of doom. Instead, they are opportunities to face your fears to diminish their hold over you. They are invitations to transcend your anxiety, and foster courage in the face of adversity.

When you suffer from debilitating anxiety, it is helpful to be prepared to counter balance your emotions by having accessible and effective exercises to intervene in the moment. But more importantly, you want to move toward becoming less controlled by anxiety in the long run. Every time you begin to feel hopeless, you want to actively embrace a posture of courage.

The longer you practice intentional exposure, the more you engage with your anxiety instead of shrinking from it. This is how you claim a life freed from the grip of anxiety. Anxious thoughts may always lurk nearby, but with the right tools and perspective, you need not be their victim.

If you're wondering whether you or a loved one is right for our program, please contact us for a free consultation.

(844) 881-1846

Learn more about Anxiety Institute and why we're passionate about empowering individuals to overcome anxiety.

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Pinpoint Anxiety and Conquer Distress with the Anxiety Institute Measure (AIM)

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Next, try the exercises to help you conquer your anxiety. In times of distress, remember symptoms of anxiety and panic are temporary - they are opportunities to face and conquer your fears. If you need help in the future, you can refer back to the Anxiety Institute Measure (AIM)* so it is accessible when you feel your anxiety building.

**Based on the Subjective Unit of Distress Scale (SUDs).*

Fold along the dotted lines on the right to create a quick reference AIM bookmark.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT:

www.anxietyinstitute.com

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- 8**
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- 9**
Extremely anxious, helpless and unable to handle emotions
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Unbearable anxiety, intolerable distress

▲ FOLD ALONG LINES

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