

worksheet

Observing and Accepting Your Worries

Objective: To begin managing your worries in healthier ways by observing and accepting them.

You Should Know

When you are worrying, it can feel impossible to think about anything else. You might seek out ways to avoid your worries or numb them with unhealthy or harmful behaviors. When you begin to recognize and accept your worries, you can identify healthier ways of managing your anxiety.

What to Do

When you are worrying, or your coping responses are causing even more anxiety, it is time to face those worries. The following visualization exercise will help you observe your worries, and any accompanying physical sensations, without analyzing them or becoming preoccupied by them. When you stop trying to fight or avoid your worries, the feelings become less intense, and it is easier to let them go.

Find a quiet, comfortable space to sit where you will not be disturbed or distracted, and set a timer for five minutes. As you become more comfortable sitting with your worries, you can set the timer for longer periods of time. Focus on your breath and your body's sensations throughout this exercise.

- Take several deep breaths and notice how your breath feels in your body.
- Notice your body's physical sensations, including any tightness in your neck or shoulders.
- Observe your worry as it arises. Describe the feeling to yourself, as well as the intensity of that worry.
- Notice whether the worry is increasing or decreasing in intensity as you continue your deep breathing.
- Observe any new worries that join or replace that worry.
- If you notice a need to push away the worry, or to act on a harmful urge, that is normal. Keep observing the worry a little longer.
- Observe how it feels to be aware of your worries, watching them come and go without acting on them.

- Remind yourself that worries are like waves that ebb and flow.
- Notice any judgments you have about yourself, other people, or the worry itself, and let them go.
- Keep watching your worry until it changes or decreases.
- Finish with a few intentional deep breaths.

Describe any physical sensations you noticed as you observed your worries.

Describe any urges or impulses that arose as you observed your worries.

Describe what it was like to observe your worries without acting on them.

Did this exercise change the way you regard your worries? Why or why not?

Did this exercise change the way you react to your worries? Why or why not?

Can you think of ways to cope with your worries in the future?

worksheet

Welcoming Mindfulness into Your Life

Objective: To bring mindfulness into your life by learning how to meditate.

You Should Know

Have you ever driven your car along a familiar route, going to school or work or to drop off your children at day care, only to arrive not remembering how you got there? Have you ever promised yourself just a few pretzels only to suddenly realize that somehow you ate the whole bag? This is what it means to be mindless—to travel through life on autopilot, never stopping to recognize what is really important to you.

Mindfulness means being aware of the thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations that are happening in your immediate environment. It means accepting all this information without judging it as right or wrong, good or bad. Being mindful allows you to function and grow along with the moment instead of flailing about in a past you cannot change or a future you cannot predict. People who are mindful take their time and allow themselves to appreciate every moment of their present.

You do not need to buy lots of fancy equipment or learn complicated words to meditate. You can sit, stand, or lie down, with or without a yoga mat or cushion. You just need to commit to a set amount of time every day. To introduce mindfulness meditation into your life:

- **Understand that your breath is important.** The focus is often on breath because the physical sensation of breathing is universal and natural to everyone. It is the center of life. Always come back to focusing on your breath, no matter what else your thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations tell you to do.
- **Know the goal is not relaxation.** Mindfulness meditation does not equal relaxation. The goal is not to escape or avoid your pain, but to observe it without attaching any meaning to it and move on from it by turning your attention to the present moment.
- **Return and repeat.** It is natural for your mind to wander at first. Simply recognize what is happening and return to your practice until you can focus for a longer period of time.
- **Be nice to yourself.** Avoid criticizing your abilities. This is not a contest, and you do not win or lose by being the best or the worst. You win by becoming one with yourself and leaning in to your world as it currently is.

What to Do

The 4-7-8 Method

This mindfulness meditation will help you focus on what is taking place around you instead of mindlessly rushing through life. It can help you better cope with the difficult thoughts and feelings that cause you stress and anxiety in your everyday life.

This practice suggests sitting because that is where many people feel most comfortable as a beginning step. However, you can also lie down. For best results, try to practice this exercise daily.

Sit restfully. Sit in a comfortable but firm chair that supports your arms and legs.

Observe your legs. Rest the bottoms of your feet on the floor. Feel the pressure of the floor pressing first against your heels and then your toes.

Straighten your upper body. Sit straight but naturally. Avoid forcing yourself into an unnatural position.

Observe your arms. Rest your hands and arms where they feel the most comfortable and stretch your hands out, feeling the stretch in each finger.

Rest your eyes. You can close your eyes, or if you do not feel comfortable doing that, simply allow them to wander where they want to without force.

Begin to breathe in and out.

- Inhale for four seconds through your nose.
- Hold your breath for seven seconds.
- Exhale through your mouth for eight seconds.
- Repeat this at least four times in a row.

When you are finished, slowly relax your focus and take a moment to notice your thoughts, your emotions, and any sounds in your environment.

How did it feel to integrate this mindful meditation into your life?

How can you continue to bring more mindfulness into your life?

worksheet

Calming Your Body with Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Objective: To reduce anxiety by learning and practicing progressive muscle relaxation.

You Should Know

Progressive muscle relaxation is a technique that involves tensing specific muscle groups and then relaxing them. We use the term “progressive” because you relax all the major muscle groups, starting with your head and working your way down to your feet, tensing and then relaxing them one at a time. In only 10 to 15 minutes, you can achieve total body relaxation.

This technique is particularly effective because it enables you to focus on your body tension. Although there are many other relaxation techniques that can help you reduce your anxiety, this technique may be most helpful for people who have body complaints that often accompany high levels of stress and anxiety, such as headaches, stomach problems, or muscle pain.

Relaxation techniques, such as progressive muscle relaxation, can be very effective in reducing anxiety, but only when practiced regularly. Engaging in an intentional relaxation practice for at least 10 minutes a day trains your brain and body to calm down on demand. As soon as you start to feel anxious, you can take a few deep breaths and think about how it feels to be calm, which automatically sends a message to your brain telling it to calm down, and to your body to release muscle tension.

Regularly practicing relaxation techniques not only helps you control your anxiety but may have other health benefits on the mind and body. For example, some research suggests that relaxation techniques can aid the body in the healing process and help in controlling high blood pressure and asthma, coping with chronic pain, and improving sleep problems. Many medical professionals also believe that daily relaxation exercises aid in preventing disease, reducing elevated levels of cortisol (the stress hormone), and bolstering the immune system.

What to Do

When you are ready to try this technique, find a place where you won't be disturbed or distracted for at least 15 minutes. You can use the following audio to help you learn this technique: https://www.betweenessions.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/BS_Calming_Your_Body_1-1.mp3. A transcript of the audio is also provided here.

In this exercise, you will travel up your entire body, from your feet to your head, bringing awareness to each muscle group—first tensing, then relaxing... tensing, and relaxing. As you tense your muscles, do not strain or exert yourself. Just notice the tension—gently squeezing, then harder, then hold, then release all the tension, letting go fully.

Find a comfortable, quiet place to sit or lie down, a place where you won't be interrupted and where you can relax completely. Turn off your phone. Lower the lights. You deserve this time—a time to calm your body and your mind. When you are ready, close your eyes.

Now allow yourself to come to a place of stillness, releasing any tension you are aware of. Let the floor or the seat support you fully.

Begin to notice the in-out rhythm of your breath. Notice your belly or chest rising and falling softly, as you gently inhale and exhale. In, out, in, out. No need to force or control your breathing. Just let it happen naturally.

When you are breathing in a steady rhythm, bring your attention to your feet and toes. Notice any tension. Now create more tension by gently scrunching your toes and contracting the soles of your feet. Now squeeze hard, as hard as you can without discomfort. Hold for a few seconds.

Now release. Breathe deeply, in and out. Notice the difference between the tension and relaxation. Enjoy the relaxation. Tense again. Now release. Notice the relaxation. Let go. Breathe.

Now bring your attention to your lower legs, your calf muscles. Notice any tension. Now create more tension by gently contracting the muscles in your lower legs. Now squeeze hard, as hard as you can without discomfort. Hold for a few seconds. Now release. Breathe deeply, in and out. Notice the difference between the tension and relaxation. Enjoy the relaxation. Tense again. Now release. Notice the relaxation. Let go. Breathe.

Now bring your attention to your thighs. Notice any tension. Now create more tension by gently contracting the muscles in your thighs. Now squeeze hard, as hard as you can without discomfort. Hold for a few seconds. Now release. Breathe deeply, in and out. Notice the difference between the tension and relaxation. Enjoy the relaxation. Tense again. Now release. Notice the relaxation. Let go. Breathe.

Now focus on the muscles in your buttocks. Again, notice any tension. Now create more tension by gently contracting the muscles in your buttocks. Now squeeze hard, as hard as you can without discomfort. Hold for a few seconds. Now release. Breathe deeply, in and out. Notice the difference between the tension and relaxation. Enjoy the relaxation. Tense again. Now release. Notice the relaxation. Let go. Breathe.

Next, bring your attention to the muscles in your abdomen. Once again, notice any tension. Now create more tension by gently contracting the muscles in your abdomen. Now squeeze hard, as if you're pushing your abdomen into the back of your chair or onto the surface of the

floor. Squeeze as hard as you can without discomfort. Hold for a few seconds. Now release. Breathe deeply, in and out. Notice the difference between the tension and the relaxation. Enjoy the relaxation. Tense again. Now release. Notice the relaxation. Let go. Breathe.

Now focus on the muscles in your back. Notice any tension. Now create more tension by gently contracting the muscles in your back—now you might want to arch gently and tighten your back muscles as hard as you can without discomfort. Hold for a few seconds. Now release. Breathe deeply, in and out. Notice the difference between the tension and relaxation. Enjoy the relaxation. Tense again. Now release. Notice the relaxation. Let go. Breathe.

Now focus on the muscles in your shoulders and neck. Notice any tension. Now create more tension by gently contracting the muscles in your shoulders and neck, perhaps lifting them up toward your ears. Now squeeze hard, as hard as you can without discomfort. Hold for a few seconds. Now release. Breathe deeply, in and out. Notice the difference between the tension and relaxation. Enjoy the relaxation. Tense again. Now release. Notice the relaxation. Let go. Breathe.

Relax. Take a few more deep breaths and feel the weight of your body against the floor or chair. See if you can let go even a little more. Good.

Now focus on the muscles in your hands and wrists. Notice any tension. Now create more tension by gently contracting the muscles in your hands and wrists, curling them into loose fists. Now squeeze hard, as hard as you can without discomfort. Hold for a few seconds. Now release. Breathe deeply, in and out. Notice the difference between the tension and relaxation. Enjoy the relaxation.

Now open your hands and extend your wrists in the opposite direction, without hyperextending them. Now tense them hard as you can without discomfort. Hold for a few seconds. Now release. Breathe deeply, in and out. Notice the difference between the tension and relaxation. Enjoy the relaxation. Tense again. Now release. Notice the relaxation. Let go. Breathe.

Now focus on the muscles in your arms. Notice any tension. Now create more tension by gently contracting the muscles in your arms. Now squeeze hard, as hard as you can without discomfort. Hold for a few seconds. Now release. Breathe deeply, in and out. Notice the difference between the tension and relaxation. Enjoy the relaxation. Tense again. Now release. Notice the relaxation. Let go. Breathe.

Now focus on the muscles in your face, starting with your eyes. Notice any tension. Now create more tension by gently contracting the muscles around your eyes. Now squeeze hard, as hard as you can without discomfort. Hold for a few seconds. Now release. Breathe deeply, in and out. Notice the difference between the tension and relaxation. Enjoy the relaxation. Tense again. Now release. Notice the relaxation. Let go. Breathe.

Now bring your attention to the muscles in your lips and mouth. Notice any tension. Now create more tension by gently contracting the muscles of your lips and mouth. Now squeeze hard, as hard as you can without discomfort. Hold for a few seconds. Now release. Breathe deeply, in and out. Notice the difference between the tension and relaxation. Enjoy the relaxation. Tense again. Now release. Notice the relaxation. Let go. Breathe.

Now bring your attention to the muscles in your jaw. So many of us carry a lot of tension in our jaw. Notice any tension. Now create more tension by gently contracting the muscles of your jaw, from the mouth and position of the teeth to the hinge near the ears. Squeeze hard, as hard as you can without discomfort. Hold for a few seconds. Now release. Now open your mouth and stretch out your jaw completely, creating tension. Hold for a few seconds and release. Breathe deeply, in and out. Notice the difference between the tension and relaxation. Enjoy the relaxation. Tense again. Now release. Notice the relaxation. Let go. Breathe.

When you are ready, slowly come back to the present moment. Wake up your feet and hands, shaking them out if you wish. Wiggle your body and move around slowly at whatever pace is comfortable for you. Before you resume regular activity, take a few moments just to rest and breathe. You may use this recording at any time to help bring awareness to your muscles and to release tension in a safe, mindful way.

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After listening to this recording a few times, you can practice this relaxation technique without the audio or script if you wish, but remember to relax for at least 10 minutes.

Make several copies of this chart, and keep a record of the time that you spend practicing this relaxation technique until it is truly a habit. You want it to become routine—something you do without thinking, like brushing your teeth. It is also useful to note your general mood, both before and after your daily relaxation exercise.

Day	Time	Mood Before	Mood After
Sunday			
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			