

COPING WITH ANXIETY:

A SELF-HELP GUIDE



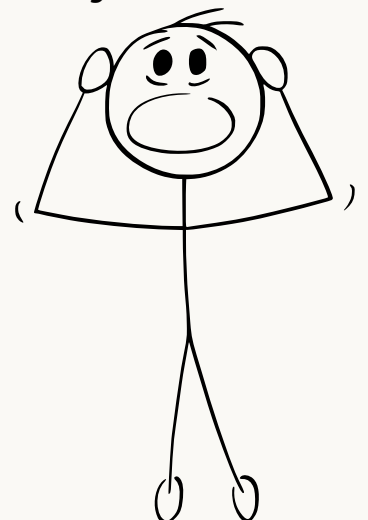
Self Help for Anxiety

- Do you find that you spend large periods of the day worrying?
 - Do you often feel nervous, apprehensive or on edge?
 - Do you feel that things are getting on top of you?
 - Do you find it hard to relax and 'switch off'?
 - Do you often experience unpleasant physical sensations such as 'butterflies' in your stomach, muscular tension, dizziness or breathlessness?
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If the answer to any of these questions is 'yes', you may be experiencing symptoms of anxiety and you may find this workbook helpful.

THIS WORKBOOK AIMS TO HELP YOU TO:

- Recognise whether you may be experiencing symptoms of anxiety.
- Understand what anxiety is, what causes it and what keeps it going.
- Find ways to understand, manage or overcome your anxiety.



1. Do I have symptoms of anxiety?

If you experience symptoms of anxiety it is likely that you will recognise many of the feelings, physical symptoms, thoughts and behaviour patterns described below.

Please tick the boxes which regularly apply to you.



Feelings

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| On edge | ☐ |
| Nervous | ☐ |
| Panicky | ☐ |
| Stressed | ☐ |
| Irritable/low patience threshold | ☐ |
| Uptight | ☐ |



Physical symptoms

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Tense body/Muscular pain | ☐ |
| Dizzy/Faint | ☐ |
| Chest tight or painful | ☐ |
| Stomach Churning | ☐ |
| Trembling or tingling sensations | ☐ |
| Heart racing/palpitations | ☐ |
| Breathing faster or slower than usual | ☐ |
| Concentration difficulties | ☐ |



Thinking patterns

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| You often worry 'what if' something bad happens | ☐ |
| Your mind jumps from worry to worry | ☐ |
| You often imagine the worst case scenarios | ☐ |
| You are always on the look out for danger | ☐ |



Behavioural patterns

- Avoid doing things you would like to ☐
 - Pace around/Find it hard to relax ☐
 - Snap at people too easily ☐
 - Get easily flustered ☐
 - Talk very quickly ☐
-

If you have ticked a number of these boxes you may be experiencing symptoms of anxiety.

However don't be alarmed, this is very common and there are things you can do to improve your situation. You will find some useful strategies in this workbook.

2. What is anxiety?



Anxiety is an unpleasant feeling that we all experience at times. It is a word often used to describe when we feel 'uptight', 'irritable', 'nervous', 'tense', or 'wound up'. When we are anxious we normally experience a variety of uncomfortable physical sensations. These include:

- **Increased heart rate**
- **Muscular tension**
- **Sweating**
- **Trembling**
- **Feelings of breathlessness**

As well as this, anxiety affects us mentally too. For example, when anxious, we often worry for large periods of time, so much so that our worry can feel out of control. These worries are often about a variety of issues and commonly our mind jumps quickly from one worry to another

Anxiety also influences how we behave. For instance, when we feel anxious, we often avoid doing things that we want to because we are worried about how they will turn out. Although short experiences of anxiety are part and parcel of daily life, it becomes challenging when anxiety begins to follow people around and is a regular feature in their lives

3. What keeps going anxiety?

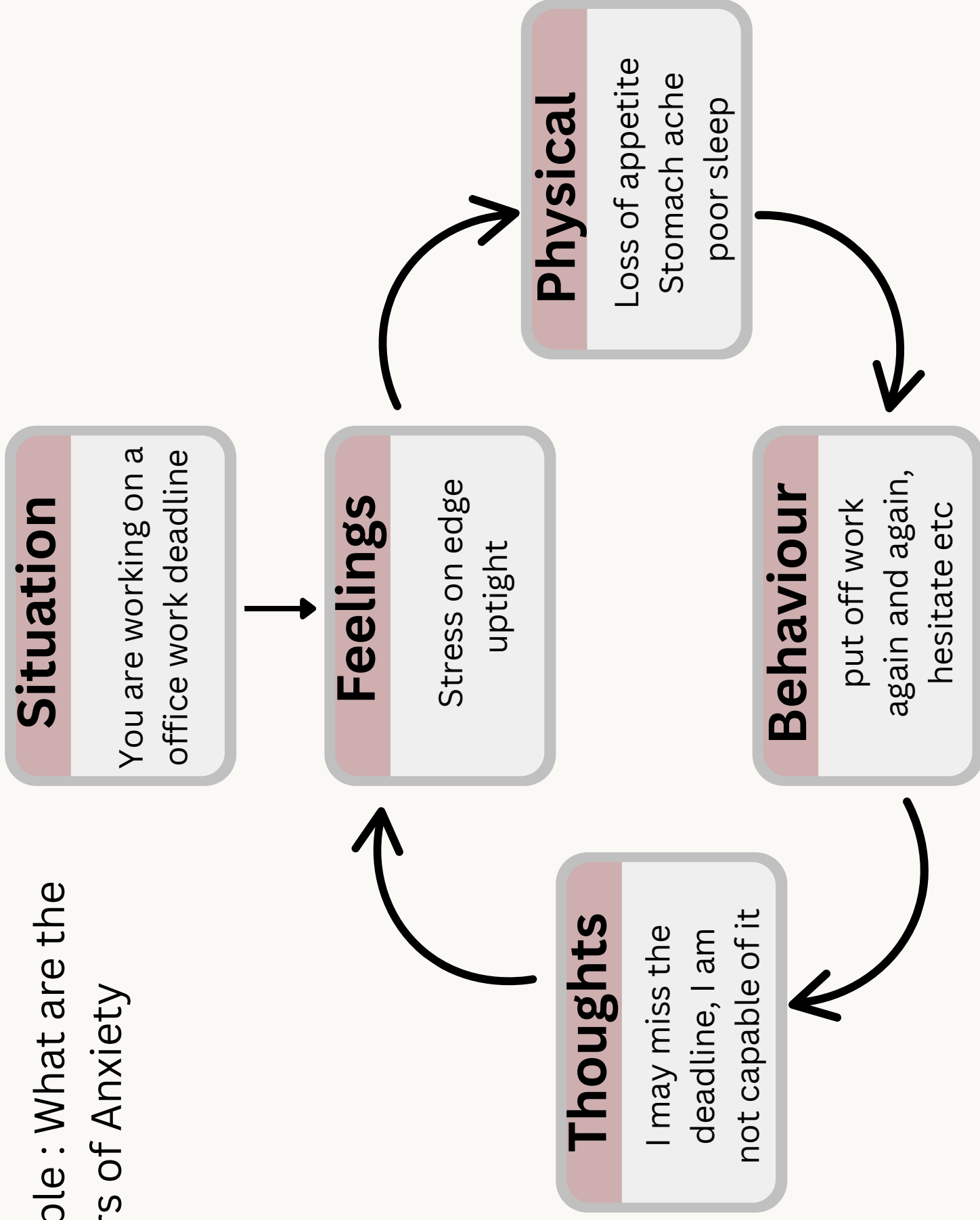
Some people have a style of thinking which lends itself to experiencing anxiety. For example, it appears that some people are more likely to overestimate the likelihood of bad things happening than others. It is easy to see how regularly presuming the worst in this way would make someone feel anxious. Unfortunately, when we do feel anxious, we become even less likely to think as clearly as we would like and a vicious cycle occurs.

Another way someone's thinking style can keep their anxiety going is because they become 'worried about worrying'. Here, people tend to worry that they are doing harm to themselves (e.g. going mad) by worrying so often (which is not the case) and a vicious cycle occurs. Similarly, people often worry about the physical symptoms they experience when they are anxious (e.g. breathlessness, rapid heart rate etc).

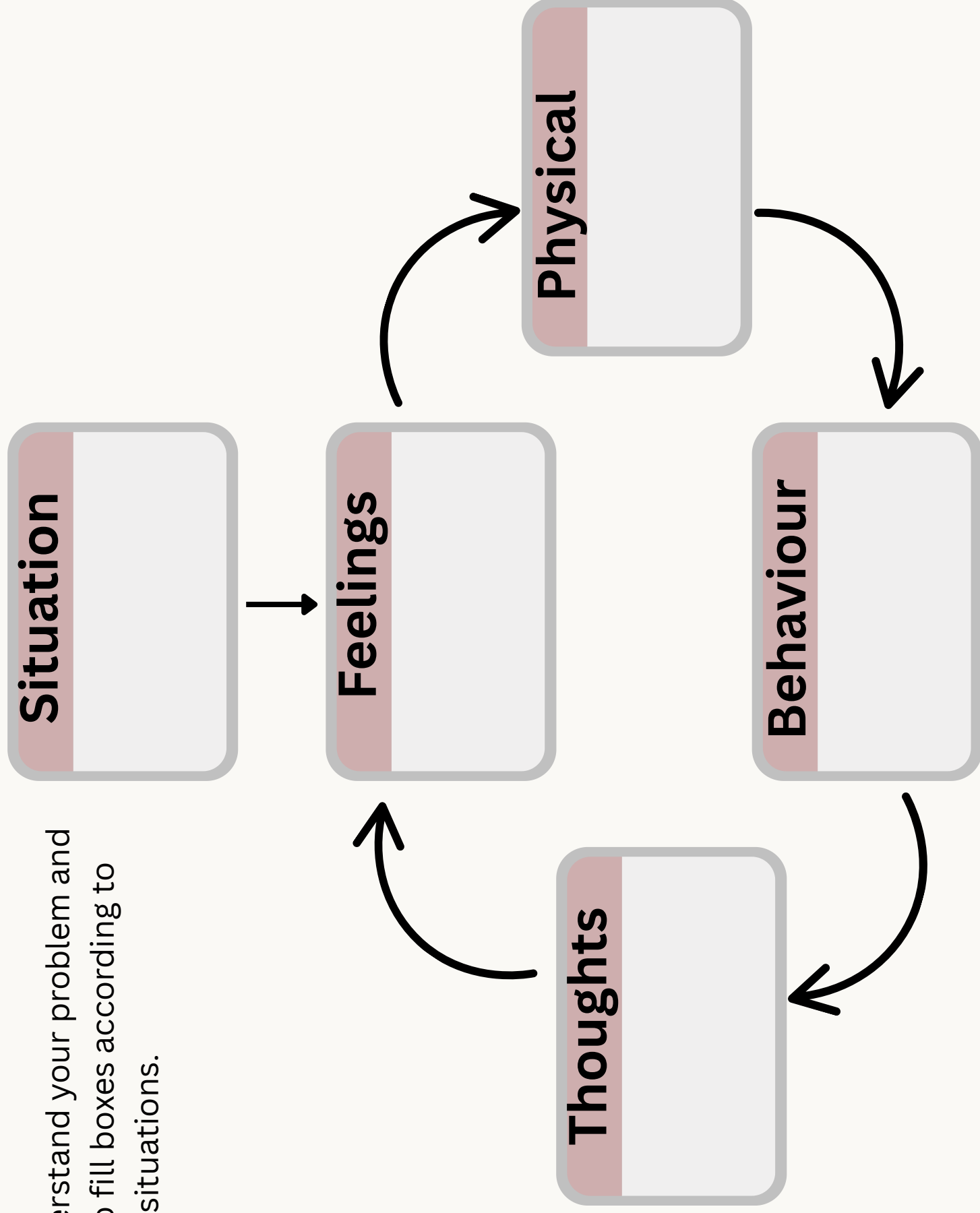
Unfortunately, worrying about these symptoms (which are perfectly safe and natural bodily reactions), only makes them feel worse, again creating a vicious cycle of anxiety

When looking more closely at anxiety, you can begin to see that our thoughts, feelings, behaviours and physical symptoms all interact and combine to keep our anxiety going. See the diagram overleaf.

Example : What are the factors of Anxiety



Understand your problem and try to fill boxes according to your situations.



4. How can I reduce my Anxiety?

Fortunately, there are a number of strategies that we can use to reduce our anxiety. These include:

1. Understanding more about anxiety.
2. Learning how to challenge your unhelpful thoughts and see things in a more realistic light.
3. Improving your problem solving skills.
4. Learning how to reduce the amount of time you spend worrying.
5. Learning how you can feel more relaxed (physically and mentally).
6. Learning how to stop avoiding the things that make you anxious.



5. Building healthy coping mechanisms

1. Feelings (Emotional Coping)

How to deal with emotional overwhelm:



Express your feelings

- Acknowledge emotions: Name what you feel (e.g., fear, worry, guilt).
- Journaling: Write down your emotions daily.

Practice gratitude

- Practice self-compassion: Speak to yourself like you'd speak to a friend.
- Limit emotional triggers: Reduce exposure to news or social media if it causes stress.

2. Thoughts (Cognitive Coping)

Managing anxious thoughts:



Give validity to thoughts

- Cognitive restructuring: Challenge irrational thoughts like “I can’t handle this” with facts.
- Positive affirmations: Repeat statements like “I am capable” or “This feeling will pass.”

Practice mindfulness

- Mindfulness/meditation: Stay in the present to reduce overthinking.
- Gratitude practice: Write 3 things you’re grateful for daily.

5. Building healthy coping mechanisms

3. Physical Reactions (Body Coping)

Helping your body feel safer:



Relaxation Techniques

- Deep breathing: Try box breathing (inhale-hold-exhale-hold for 4 seconds each).
- Progressive muscle relaxation: Tense and relax muscles from head to toe.

Regular exercises and sleep hygiene

- Exercise: Walking, yoga, or gym workouts release endorphins.
- Sleep hygiene: Consistent sleep schedule and no screens before bed.

4. Behaviors (Behavioral Coping)

Actions that promote well-being:

Structure your day

- Create a routine: Structure reduces uncertainty.
- Break tasks into steps: Prevents overwhelm.



Try to engage in social interaction

- Social support: Talk to someone you trust or join a support group.
- Limit avoidance: Face small anxiety-inducing situations gradually.

6. Environmental factors in coping techniques

1. Physical Environment

Creating a calming, supportive space:



- Declutter your space: A tidy room = a clearer mind.
- Natural light & ventilation: Sunlight boosts serotonin; fresh air calms the nervous system.
- Soothing colors: Blues, greens, and pastels reduce stress.
- Nature exposure: Parks, plants, or even nature wallpapers help ground you.

2. Social Environment

Surround yourself with people who uplift:



- Supportive relationships: Being around empathetic, non-judgmental people reduces anxiety.
- Safe communication: Environments where you can express emotions freely help in emotional release.
- Positive role models: Observing others cope well with stress can motivate you.

7. Managing anxiety in the moment

1. Grounding Techniques

Bring your focus back to the present.

- 5-4-3-2-1 technique:
 - 5 things you can see
 - 4 things you can touch
 - 3 things you can hear
 - 2 things you can smell
 - 1 thing you can taste
- Hold something cold like an ice cube – it shifts focus fast.
- Name details around you (colors, objects, sounds).



2. Breathing Exercises



Calm your nervous system.

- Box breathing: Inhale 4 sec → Hold 4 sec → Exhale 4 sec → Hold 4 sec.
- Double exhale breathing: Inhale 4 sec → Exhale 8 sec (longer exhale = more calm).
- Breath counting: Count each breath up to 10, then repeat.

7. Managing anxiety in the moment

3. Quick Body Tricks



Relax tension stored in the body.

- Progressive muscle relaxation: Tense & release muscles one by one.
- Stretching or standing up and moving around.
- Butterfly hug: Cross your arms, tap your shoulders alternately — calming for the brain.

4. Sensory Support



Use your senses to feel grounded.

- Listen to calming music or a favorite playlist.
- Use a calming scent like lavender oil or a stress-relief balm.
- Drink water slowly, focusing on the sensation.

8. Long term anxiety management

1. Cognitive Approaches (Mindset & Thoughts)

- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT): One of the most evidence-based approaches — helps reframe negative thought patterns.
 - Journaling regularly: Helps you recognize thought triggers and track progress.
 - Challenge cognitive distortions: e.g., all-or-nothing thinking, catastrophizing.
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2. Professional Support

- Therapy: CBT, ACT, mindfulness-based therapy, and psychodynamic approaches are all effective.
- Medication (if needed): SSRIs, SNRIs, or beta-blockers — prescribed by a psychiatrist.
- Workshops & courses: Learn skills like DBT (dialectical behavior therapy), relaxation, or assertiveness.

Conclusion

Managing anxiety is not about eliminating it completely, but learning to live alongside it with strength, awareness, and compassion. With consistent effort, healthy habits, and the right support, you can build a life where anxiety doesn't control you — you control how you respond to it. It's a journey of patience, progress, and self-discovery.

“You don't have to control your thoughts. You just have to stop letting them control you.”

— Dan Millman

Take a deep breath. You've got this. 