

Strategies to Cope with Anxiety/Panic Attacks

1. Talk to another person (to get your mind of your panic symptoms)
2. Move around or engage in physical activity. (lets you get rid of extra outside energy and adrenaline created by the fight-or-flight reaction; e.g., walk to the bathroom or outside for 10 minutes).
3. Stay in the present by focusing on concrete objects around you in your immediate environment (helps minimize attention to the troublesome physical symptoms).
4. Do a simple repetitive activity (to distract yourself)
 - unwrap and chew a piece of gum
 - count backward from 100 by 3s
 - count the number of people around you, how long it takes them to do a task, or count the money in your wallet
 - while driving, count the bumps on the steering wheel; count the number of red cars you see, time the length of the stoplight, add up numbers on license plates
 - feel the sharp edge of a key or the times of a comb
 - snap a rubber band against your wrist
 - place a wet towel on your face or run cold water over your wrists
 - sing!
 - pull out your “coping statement” sheet and give it a test drive
5. Do something that requires focused concentration (puzzle, knit, card game, calculate something, play musical instrument, draw, read).
6. Get mad at your panic (doesn't mean resist it)
 - “To heck with this – I don't care what other people think!”
 - “This reaction is ridiculous! I'm going in to this situation anyway!”
 - “I'm sick of these feelings telling me what to do! I'm doing it anyway!”
7. Experience something immediately pleasurable (pleasure and anxiety can't co-exist at the same time)
8. Practice thought stopping.
 - Take a deep breath and shout “Stop!” or “Get out!” (silently if necessary)
 - Repeat several times if necessary
 - Replace anxious thoughts with calming and supportive statements “This too will pass” or “I am calm and strong”
9. Practice abdominal breathing (to slow hyperventilation)
10. Practice muscle relaxation (do at the onset of panic)
11. Combine positive coping statements with relaxation.

(Example coping statements listed below)

Coping Statements

“This feeling isn’t comfortable or pleasant, but I can accept it.”

“I can be anxious and still deal with this situation.”

“I can handle these symptoms or sensations.”

“This isn’t an emergency. It’s O.K. to think slowly about what I need to do.”

“This isn’t the worst thing that could happen.”

“I’m going to go with this and wait for my anxiety to decrease.”

“I’ll just let my body do its thing. This will pass.”

“I’ll ride this through – I don’t need to let this get me.”

“I deserve to feel O.K. right now.”

“I can take all the time I need in order to let go and relax.”

“There’s no need to push myself. I can take as small a step forward as I choose.”

“I’ve survived this before and I’ll survive this time too.”

“I can do my coping strategies and allow this to pass.”

“This anxiety won’t hurt me – even if it doesn’t feel good.”

“This is just anxiety – I’m not going to let it get to me.”

“Nothing serious is going to happen to me.”

“Fighting and resisting isn’t going to help – so I’ll just let it pass.”

“These are thoughts – not reality.”

“I don’t need these thoughts – I can choose to think differently.”

“This isn’t dangerous.”

“So what.”

“Don’t worry – be happy.” (use this to inject an element of humor)

“This isn’t fun, but I won’t run.”