

## Grounding & self-soothing tools

### *5:7 breathing*

There are lots of different breathing exercises that you can do to help with anxiety and grounding. The very simplest, and a good starting point if you haven't focused on your breathing before, is 5:7 breathing, which means that you breathe in for a count of 5 and breathe out for a count of 7.

Feelings of panic or anxiety are directly linked to evolutionary mechanisms, which are all about keeping us alive. They connect to automatic systems, which is why telling ourselves that, logically, we have nothing to fear, is rarely effective in making those feelings go away. Instead, with breathing, we directly engage with the automatic processes that tell us we're safe.

To put it simply, breathing is linked to the heart rate – when we breathe in, the heart rate increases, when we breathe out, the heart rate decreases. Elongating the out-breath indicates to the body that it is at less risk. The important thing is that the out-breath is longer than the in-breath, as this has a regulating effect on the nervous system.

### Steps

- Take a moment, stop whatever you're doing
- Breathe in while counting to 5
- Breathe out while counting to 7
- Carry on doing this for a minute or two
- That's it!

### Points to note

If 5:7 feels too long to start with, try 4:6 or even 3:4. The most important thing is to have a longer out-breath than in-breath.

Making a sound when breathing out engages the larynx which helps emphasise the safety message – i.e. we're more likely to make a sound when we're safe from predators. You could try this if you're comfortable doing so.

Breathing is most effective if you develop breathing habits through regular practice when you're not stressed, that you can draw upon at critical points. It's also more effective if you practice it for 10 minutes or more at a time. HOWEVER any slowed breathing is more effective than none, so I suggest doing it for 1 minute at a time, 4 times per day, to start with, and building it up from there.

## **5 4 3 2 1 grounding**

This is an exercise for bringing yourself into the present moment. When you're overwhelmed by anxiety, it's often characterised by thoughts about the future or the past – worrying about what might happen, or worrying about the outcome of what's already happened.

These thoughts aren't concretely real, even though it may feel as if there is a very real threat. The body, on the other hand, is in the present, therefore an exercise that brings our attention back to the body, brings us back to the present and is a reminder to the anxious part of us that, in this moment, we are safe. It uses the environment around us to bring us back to the now, and can be done anywhere.

## **Steps**

- Take a moment, stop whatever you're doing
- Become aware of your breathing, perhaps taking a few slower breaths
- **5:** look for five things that you can see (the glass of water beside you; the mark where you burned your hand on the oven; the leaves on the plant in the corner, etc). Really look at and acknowledge each one in turn.
- **4:** notice four things you can touch (the wool of your sweater; the feel of your toes against your sock; the smooth wood of your desk, etc). Touch them and notice the feel.
- **3:** become aware of 3 things you can hear (a bird singing outside; traffic noise on the road, etc).
- **2:** find two things you can smell (the paper in your book; the smell of your own skin, etc).
- **1:** sense for one thing you can taste (the coffee you had earlier still on your tongue; water in your bottle, etc).
- Notice how you feel after this exercise and repeat it if necessary

## **Other grounding and self-soothing resources**

Other breathing practices: [3 Effective Anxiety Breathing Exercises \(calmclinic.com\)](https://www.calmclinic.com/3-effective-anxiety-breathing-exercises)

Another grounding technique: [The Butterfly Hug - YouTube](#)