

For better or for worse, I know a lot about anxiety.

It was a long time before I recognized it as such, but I would now say, in retrospect, that I had my first panic attack when I was 18.

My heart felt like it was climbing up my chest into my throat. I could taste blood. I couldn't breathe and I crumpled to the floor, gasping, crying, a shaking snotty mess.

I didn't know what was happening to me. I thought I might be dying and the one thought that occurred to me was that if I died, at least I wouldn't feel that way, ever again.

I would say I got anxiety and panic attacks for roughly 10 years.

Panic attacks were the thunderclouds that suddenly broke over me, paralyzing me and shutting everything else down; the anxiety was more pernicious—a flutter in my chest that wouldn't go away. Sometimes, too, it was a warning: [the canary in the coal mine](#)—if I could head off anxiety in a timely and efficient manner, I might be able to avoid the panic attack that was coming.

In the decade (or so) that I was on full alert, I tried absolutely everything I could think of to “fix myself.”

I went to therapy, I—begrudgingly—went on several medications at different times, even though I hated the feeling of being on them.

(If anyone is currently taking medication for panic/anxiety/depression, please know that I am not judging someone else's decision. Whatever works for each of us should be honoured—but medication never really, fully, worked for me).

It was only through a slow blossoming into a healthier way of living (and it's still very much a learning curve), that I fully understood the necessary symbiosis between the [mind, spirit and body](#) for one's best health—mostly because, as long as I watched myself and was conscious of what I put into my body, my symptoms stayed under control.

Once my symptoms stayed under control, I was able to fully look at my life and dig into the foundations of my anxiety in order to learn from it and release it.

What bothered me was [the lack of real online resources](#) for people. A quick Google search will bring up posts and articles in mainly two types: either a checklist of very medical terms, or coping strategies that do work long term, but do nothing to help in the moment.

One of the first times I searched for help, I typed in “help with anxiety” and what came up—“learn what your triggers are”, “limit alcohol and caffeine”, “maintain a positive attitude”—made me almost scream in frustration. I mean, *yes*, those will help, but over time.

As a person who cannot breathe right now, [what are things that I can do](#) that will set me on the path out of here?

I have compiled a list that can help get us through the worst of our anxiety—each of these I have “tested”, as it were on myself.

I have included tips, initially at least, for their ease-of-use (so that if we are at home, we can use things that could be already in our cupboards; if we are out in the world, they can be done without much fanfare).

Anxiety being such a full-body experience, each of these suggestions is meant to support and enhance all of our senses.

1. Colour.

Gazing at something doesn't necessarily slow down or quell an anxiety attack, but it's no secret that blue and green are calming—depending on the type of anxiety, yellow might also be beneficial. Those of us who are more visually motivated can find a great deal of peace in searching out and surrounding ourselves with large blocks of colour—looking up at the sky, looking in the window of a flower store, looking at the ground.

I think there is most likely a reason why the most calming colours are those of the earth—being outside is healing in so many ways, but it might take us time to get there. First things first.

2. Earthy scents.

Not everyone has lavender in their house (nor does everyone want to), but there are other household items that have an immediate calming effect. Some of [these scents include](#): orange, cardamom, rose, vanilla, patchouli—anything sort of earthy and musky. Also, dried rosemary is particularly effective if burned as an incense.

If this won't exacerbate the problem, opening the windows helps. Changing the air (it doesn't have to be for a long time) tends to promote deep breathing and our way out of anxiety follows the path of the breath.

3. Nourishment.

Tea is a really effective way of calming down; I'm pretty sure part of it has to do with how it forces us to have a ritual with ourselves.

[Rosemary](#) is a wonderful herb to use: to make tea with it, steep a teaspoon's worth in boiling water for 10 minutes.

Chamomile—but that won't surprise anyone, there's a reason why it's used in "Sleepytime" teas the world over.

Peppermint calms the digestive tract, and is soothing to take in small doses, but I would advocate caution, simply because it can also be very stimulating.

A reason I recommend tea is that by drinking (most) tea, we're also drinking water. Anxiety stresses our system out, and by stressing our systems out, we are getting more and more dehydrated.

Drinking water replenishes us and takes some of the pressure off our bodies.

For a racing heart due to anxiety, drink a cup of orange juice with some nutmeg and a tablespoon of honey in it. (I have gone vegan since using this recipe; I would not suggest using agave as a substitute only because in this case, the honey is used for its medicinal purposes—I would just use the nutmeg and orange juice).

Celery and onion might be beneficial to add to our diets long-term. Both of these have large amounts of potassium and folic acid, deficiencies of which cause nervousness.

4. Sound.

Water is soothing, so is that weird phenomenon called “white noise”, classical music—anything with a slow or gentle tempo has been shown to calm brain activity. I’ve found that cupping the hands over the ears so that the palms of the hands cover the ear drums works—maybe because it draws attention into the face, to the breath.

5. Pressure Point(s).

I don’t know enough about acupressure, but I can attest to the power of this one pressure point: Heart Seven, the Spirit Gate. One of the best things about this point is that it is just on our wrist, so it can be subtly performed anywhere.

To access the [Heart Seven Spirit Gate](#), look at the palm of the hand (either hand is fine). On the outer side of the hand, where the pinkie finger is located, look for the crease where hand meets wrist. One pinkie finger’s width in towards the centre of the wrist, we can feel a tendon there. Press down on that tendon, right at the crease of our hand.

We should feel calmer within a few moments. Our breath will stabilize and once our breath stabilizes, we will be able to think more clearly and make better decisions for ourselves.

(Bonus: oils. In a pinch, household oils—corn, sunflower, but sesame, [avocado](#) or coconut oils work well, too—can be warmed up and massaged into the skin for an instant calming effect).

6. [“Legs up the Wall”](#) pose.

This pose is obviously trickier to do in public, and requires a little more time, but is infinitely worth it. It is beneficial because it helps our bodies invert the typical actions of when we sit and stand—if our lower backs are supported, then our lymphatic system is able to drain more freely. This pose also supports blood flow in the chest and core, which slows down our heart rate.

7. Four/Seven/Eight Breath.

While breathing can be difficult initially, it is necessary, once we have grounded a little bit, to deliver oxygen to ourselves. My favourite calming breathing cycle is a fairly classic, simple one: breathing in to the count of four, holding for the count of seven, and then exhaling to the count of eight. I’ve done a lot of breathing techniques in the past and this one definitely was the one that was the most rhythmic and the most relaxing.

8. Visualization.

Once I caught the wave of anxiety and was hanging 10 on it, rather than flailing about feeling like I was going to drown, visualizing was one of the key things I did for myself to fully relax. Lists of visualizations can be found anywhere, or we can make something up that suits who we are.

One of my most frequently-used visualizations involved me thinking of my worry as a stone set in a ring. I would gently pry the claws from around my worry and set it free.

While these pointers may help in alleviating some of the immediate symptoms of anxiety, I have to say that the only way I truly left it behind was through paying close attention to what I ate and how I moved—over a longer period of time.

May these tips give us all a bit more breathing room, so that we can all be healthy.