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## Easy Ways to Beat Anxiety Now

I'm halfway out the door in the morning with a heavy bag in one hand and a mug of coffee in the other. Then I wonder: Where did I put my keys? And so begins the 20-minute panicked reconnaissance mission for the keys I swore were on the coffee table. I start to feel flustered and irritable as I frantically search. My memory gets foggy as my heart starts to pound and my palms sweat. It's another anxious morning.

### Anxiety Alert—the Need-to-Know

Technically, anxiety is apprehension over an upcoming event. We anticipate the future with sometimes scary predictions that don't necessarily have any basis in truth. In everyday life, anxiety's physical and emotional symptoms can mean an increased heart rate (and even heart attack), poor concentration at work and school, sleeping problems, and just being a total Crankasaurus Rex to family, friends, and co-workers.

Anxiety and stress are physical and emotional responses to perceived dangers (that aren't always real). And since most of us aren't running from tigers or hunting and gathering in the woods, it's often the little things that put us over the edge: an over-loaded email inbox, morning rush hour, or losing those keys before running out the door. Luckily, it's easy to beat this kind of stress with just a few easy changes added throughout the day.

Note: If you feel like you might be dealing with a serious anxiety disorder, please talk to a medical professional about treatment. There are lots of options available to manage your symptoms. But if you're looking to reduce daily anxiety, these tips will get you on your way to being calm and collected in no time.

### Cool as a Cucumber: Your Action Plan

- 1. Get enough sleep.** Inconsistent sleep can have some serious consequences. Not only does it affect our physical health, but lack of sleep can also contribute to overall anxiety and stress. And sometimes it turns into a vicious cycle, since anxiety often leads to disruptions in sleep. Especially when feeling anxious, try to schedule a full seven to nine hours of snooze time and see what a few nights of sweet slumber do for those anxiety levels throughout the day.
- 2. Smile.** When work has got us down, it's a good idea to take a quick break to get some giggles on. Research suggests that laughter can reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety, so consider checking out a funny YouTube clip to calm those jittery nerves.
- 3. De-clutter the brain.** Physical clutter = mental clutter. A messy workspace can make it more difficult to relax and make it seem like our work is never-ending. So take 15 minutes or so to tidy up the living space or work area, and then make a habit of keeping things clean and anxiety-free. It'll help us think rationally, and there won't be as much room for anxiety.
- 4. Express gratitude.** Studies have found expressing gratitude helps reduce anxiety, especially when we're well-rested. Start a gratitude journal to get in the mindset of appreciation, and out of the mindset of being overwhelmed.
- 5. Eat right.** Anxiety can throw our bodies totally out of whack: Our appetite might change, or we might crave certain foods. But to give the body the support it needs, try eating more of foods that contain nutrients such as vitamin B and omega-3s, plus some healthy whole-grain carbohydrates. Studies have linked vitamin B with good mental health, and omega-3s may help reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety. Whole-grain carbs help regulate levels of serotonin, the "feel-good" neurotransmitter that helps us remain calm. And even though our cravings might be telling us otherwise, research suggests that eating sugary and processed foods can increase symptoms of anxiety.

**6. Learn to breathe.** A useful tool to prevent panic attacks, the breath is also a great marker of where your anxiety level is at throughout the day. Short, shallow breaths signify stress and anxiety in the brain and body. On the flip side, consciously breathing, plus lengthening and strengthening the breath helps send signals to the brain that it's okay to relax.

**7. Meditate.** By now most of us have heard that meditation is relaxing, but what scientists are also discovering is that meditation actually increases the amount of grey matter in the brain, essentially rewiring the body to stress less. A number of recent studies highlight the positive effects of meditation on anxiety, mood, and stress symptoms. Meditation is also a way to observe the brain, letting us figure out how our mind generates anxiety-provoking thoughts. And understanding the brain's thought patterns can help create distance from those thoughts.

**8. Play around.** Kids and animals seem to have an innate ability to play, without stressing about their overflowing inboxes. Until business offices give us recess breaks, we'll have to take responsibility for our own playtime. Offer to take a friend's dog out for a walk, or babysit for an afternoon to get out of your head and let the careless creatures lead by example.

**9. Be silent.** Plan for a time when you can completely disconnect. Start with increments of time that seem sustainable and doable for you, even if it's just five minutes. That means phone off, no emails, no TV, no news, nothing. Let other people know they won't be able to reach you so you can veg worry free. There's some evidence that too much noise can boost our stress levels, so schedule some sacred silent time among all the ruckus of daily life.