Grounding Exercises

When people become overwhelmed with distressing thoughts or feelings, including intense anxiety, activities that keep your mind and body connected (called “grounding”) can be helpful in regaining a sense of stability and mental focus. The following are a number of grounding exercises to choose from to help firmly anchor you in the present moment and provide you with space to choose where to focus your energy. **You may need to try multiple different exercises to find one or two that work best for you.**

1. Remind yourself of who you are now. State your name, age and where you are right now.

2. Take ten slow deep breaths. Focus your attention on each breath on the way in and on the way out. Say the number of the breath to yourself as you exhale.

3. Splash water on your face or place a cool wet cloth on your face.

4. Pay purposeful attention as you hold a cold (non-alcoholic) beverage in your hands. Feel the coldness, and the wetness on the outside. Note the taste as you drink. You can also do this exercise with a warm beverage.

5. Find a “grounding object” to hold, look at, listen to, and/or smell. This could be a soft object such as a pillow or stuffed animal, a smooth stone you found on the beach, a picture of a beautiful scene or loved one, and/or any other object that represents safety or comfort.

6. Listen to music. Pay close attention and listen for something new or different.

7. If you wake up suddenly during the night and feel disoriented or distressed, remind yourself who you are and where you are. Look around the room and notice familiar objects and name them. Feel the bed you are lying on, the softness of the sheets or blankets, the warmth or coldness of the air, and notice any sounds you hear. Remind yourself that you are safe.
8. Feel the clothes on your body, whether your arms and legs are covered or not, and the sensation of your clothes as you move in them.

9. While sitting, feel the chair under you and the weight of your body and legs pressing down on it.

10. If you are lying down, feel the contact between your head, your body and your legs, as they touch the surface you are lying on. Starting from your head, notice how each part feels, all the way down to your feet, on the soft or hard surface.

11. Stop, look, and listen. Notice and name what you can see and hear nearby and in the distance.

12. Look around you, notice what is front of you and to each side, name first large objects and then smaller ones.

13. Get up, walk around, take your time to notice each step as you take one then another.

14. If you can, step outside, notice the temperature, the sounds around you, the ground under your feet, the smell in the air, etc.

15. “54321” Grounding Exercise:
   - Name 5 things you can see in the room with you.
   - Name 4 things you can feel (tactile; e.g. “chair on my back” or “feet on floor”)
   - Name 3 things you can hear right now
   - Name 2 things you can smell right now
   - Name 1 good thing about yourself

16. Write and/or say grounding statements
   - This situation won’t last forever
   - This too shall pass.
   - I can ride this out and not let it get me down.
   - My anxiety/fear/sadness won’t kill me; it just doesn’t feel good right now.
   - These are just my feelings and eventually they’ll go away.

Adapted from: http://www.livingwell.org.au/well-being/grounding-exercises/
Breathing Exercises

Belly (or Diaphragmatic) Breathing
You can do this exercise in any position, but it is helpful to do this exercise while lying down when first learning belly breathing.

1. Lie comfortably on your back, with a pillow under your head, your knees bent and your back flat. You can stretch your legs out if that’s more comfortable.
2. Place one hand on your belly and one hand on your upper chest.
3. Inhale slowly and expand your belly as you breathe so that your lower hand moves with your belly. The hand on your chest should remain as still as possible.
4. Slowly exhale, focusing on the movement of your belly and lower hand as it returns to its original position.
5. Repeat steps 3 & 4 for several minutes, always focusing on the movement of the belly as you breathe. If your mind wanders, gently bring your attention back to your breathing.

Breath-Counting Exercise
This exercise focuses on the use of counting with the rhythm of the breath. Start with a short period of time and gradually increase the time. Set a timer so that you do not have to worry about when to stop.

1. Find a comfortable position. Take several deep breaths and settle into yourself. You may either close your eyes or keep them open, depending on your own comfort. If you keep them open, fix them on an object or a spot on the floor about four feet in front of you. Your eyes may be either focused or unfocused.
2. Take deep, comfortable breaths. Notice your inhalation. The pause between inhaling and exhaling, your exhalation, and the pause before starting again.
3. As you inhale, count, “one...” As you exhale, count, “two...” Inhale, “three...” Exhale, “four...” Continue until you reach 10 then start over.
4. If you lose count, simply begin with “one” on your next inhalation.
5. If you notice your mind has wandered, gently notice this, and return your focus back to counting your breath.
6. If you notice any body sensations catching your attention, focus on that sensation until it fades. Then return your attention back to counting your breaths.
Online Resources

Cal Poly SLO Counseling Services - Guided Meditations https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI44jVzqiSNuYrPNPWHc6B TqrwBXthrS

Mayo Clinic Stress Reduction Website http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/mindfulness-exercises/MY02124

Meditation Oasis www.meditationoasis.com

Mindful www.mindful.org


UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center- Guided Medications http://marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=22

Apps for your Smartphone, Tablet, or Computer

ACT Coach Mindfulness Coach
Breathe2relax Mindshift
Breathing techniques by Hemalayaa T2 Mood Tracker
CBTi-Coach Take a break!

Books for Further Reading

The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook by Bourne (2011)
The Anxiety and Worry Workbook by Clark & Beck (2012)
Get Out of Your Mind and Into Your Life by Hayes & Smith (2005)
Self-Esteem by McKay and Fanning (2005)
The Mindful Way Workbook by Teasdale, Williams, Segal, & Kabat-Zinn (2014)