

Managing Anxiety

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Managing Anxiety: The Basics

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[We're welcoming our local friend and Psychologist, Rachel Hagerty, as our guest blogger on *Managing Anxiety*, a common condition affecting many of us at some point in our lives. Rachel will share some useful, self-motivated techniques in managing the symptoms of anxiety. We'll be sharing these techniques in a 2-part series. Take it away, Rachel!]

In our lives we experience a multitude of events; some thrilling, others difficult, life altering and ordinary. From navigation through life changes, to finding balance between our home and personal life, or maintaining our sense of self while fulfilling many other roles our daily lives can be very challenging and demanding. So if you are finding yourself burning the candle at both ends and feeling like you're being pulled in too many directions at once, believe me when I say you're not alone.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health website, anxiety disorders affect 18.1% of the adult US population with the average age of onset at 11 years old.

Consistently dealing with large amount of stress can lead to symptoms of anxiety that could possibly lead to depression-like feelings as well. It's a rather slippery slope; one that many people tend to find themselves facing.

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The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th ed.; DSM–5; American Psychiatric

Association, 2013, p. 222) describes Generalized Anxiety Disorder using the following criteria:

- Excessive worry and apprehension about many events or activities

- Restlessness, feeling keyed up or on edge

- Being easily fatigued

- Difficulty concentrating or mind going blank
- Irritability
- Muscle tension
- Sleep disturbance (difficulty falling or staying asleep, or restless, unsatisfying sleep)

Ok, so now we know what anxiety looks like, how do we begin to manage it. Here are some simple strategies you can implement that can help to manage your stress and/or anxiety. Although all of these can be done at home, I also use them with my clients in my professional practice.

1. **Breathing:** Yes, breathing. Something as simple as breathing can help to reduce stress and anxiety. It's called Diaphragmatic Breathing (or deep belly breathing). It goes like this: take a huge breath in through your nose, hold briefly, and exhale through pursed lips (like you're blowing out a candle). Utilizing this breathing technique when feeling overwhelmed will turn focus to your breathing and away from your stressor to help decrease anxiety. The best part, the more you do it the better you get and the more natural it becomes. The Cleveland Clinic website has some great instructions to reference as well.

2. **Progressive muscle relaxation:** Essentially it's focusing on tensing and relaxing all muscle groups in the body. It's especially helpful when you're feeling panicky, when you aren't able to settle your mind, or just can't fall asleep. It can be read to you from a script, or you can listen to an audio version. Best part, it only takes about 15 minutes. The Internet is a great resource for free audio downloads; Dartmouth College has a great audio on their Student

Wellness webpage for this technique.

3. **Positive self-talk:** More often than not we are our own worst critics and the negative voice in our head is louder than the positive one. But we need to reverse that and become our cheerleader. Replace the negative with the positive, there is nothing wrong with patting yourself on the back. Praise yourself, acknowledge when you are proud of yourself. Compliment yourself. Be kind to yourself.

From @drsuzyhall: Rachel, thank you for part 1 of your article, *Managing Anxiety*. I love the technique of 'Positive self-talk', most of us can use more of that. We look forward to your upcoming post with more self-motivated, 'can-do' techniques to help relieve anxiety. As always, severe symptoms of anxiety should be addressed with your health care professional.

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