



FREE GUIDE • THE ANXIETY TOOLKIT

When your mind won't slow down. *Five ways to steady it.*

*Five evidence-based strategies for calming an
anxious mind, the same tools our therapists teach
in session. Practical, printable, and yours to keep.*

PREPARED BY

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Anxiety is exhausting. *Start here.*

When your mind won't stop racing and your body feels on high alert, it's hard to imagine feeling calm again. There are tools that can help. Not quick fixes, but skills you can build into ordinary days.

This toolkit holds five techniques drawn from the same evidence-based approaches our therapists use in session. Each one is simple enough to learn in a few minutes. Each one gets stronger with practice.

One thing before you start: these tools work best when you practise them regularly, not just in anxious moments. A calm rehearsal today makes the skill easier to reach for tomorrow.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Don't try all five at once. Pick the one that draws you, practise it daily for a week, and notice what shifts. Then add another. Small and steady beats ambitious and abandoned.

IF YOU NEED SUPPORT RIGHT NOW

This guide is for everyday anxiety, not emergencies. If you're in crisis, please reach out now:

9-8-8 · Suicide Crisis Helpline, call or text, any time

ConnexOntario · 1-866-531-2600, free and confidential, 24/7

9-1-1 · for any emergency

01

COME BACK TO THE ROOM

The 5-4-3-2-1 *grounding technique.*

Anxiety pulls you into your head, into the next hour, the next worry, the worst case. Grounding brings you back to the present moment using the one thing that is always here: your senses.

Wherever you are, pause and slowly name:

THE COUNTDOWN

5 things you can **see**

4 things you can **touch**

3 things you can **hear**

2 things you can **smell**

1 thing you can **taste**

Take your time with each sense. The goal isn't to rush through the list, it's to genuinely notice. The texture of your sleeve. The hum of the fridge. By the time you reach one, many people find the spiral has lost its grip.

WHY IT WORKS

Your attention can't be fully in an imagined future and fully in the present room at the same time. Naming sensory details gives your mind a concrete job, here and now.

02

SLOW THE BODY FIRST

Box *breathing*.

An anxious mind usually rides on an anxious body: shallow breath, tight chest, racing heart. Box breathing speaks to your nervous system directly, activating the "rest and digest" response that counters the alarm.

Picture a square. Each side takes four slow seconds:

- i. **Inhale** through your nose for a slow count of four.
- ii. **Hold** gently for four. No straining, just a pause.
- iii. **Exhale** through your mouth for four, letting your shoulders drop.
- iv. **Hold** empty for four, then begin again.

Repeat the square four to six times. If four seconds feels like too long at first, start with three and work up. The exact count matters less than the slow, even rhythm.

MAKE IT AUTOMATIC

Practise box breathing when you're calm: in the car before work, in line at the grocery store. A skill rehearsed in calm moments is far easier to reach for in anxious ones.

03

QUESTION THE STORY

Thought *challenging*.

*Anxious thoughts arrive dressed as facts. "I'm going to fail."
"They're upset with me." "Something is wrong." This
technique, borrowed from cognitive behavioural therapy,
helps you look at the thought instead of through it.*

Grab a pen, or just walk through these four questions slowly:

- i. **What exactly am I worried about?** Write the specific thought down. Vague dread shrinks when it has to commit to words.
- ii. **What evidence supports this thought?** Facts only, not feelings. "I feel certain" is not evidence.
- iii. **What evidence contradicts it?** Times this prediction wasn't true. Times you coped when you thought you couldn't.
- iv. **What's a more balanced perspective?** Not forced positivity, just a realistic middle ground you could say to a friend.

A GENTLE NOTE

The goal isn't to argue yourself out of every worry. It's to treat anxious thoughts as guesses rather than verdicts, and many people find the guesses get quieter once they're examined.

04

CONTAIN IT, DON'T FIGHT IT

The worry *window*.

Fighting worries all day is a losing game. Every "stop thinking about it" just hands the worry a microphone. The worry window takes a different approach: instead of banning worry, you give it an appointment.

- i. **Schedule fifteen to twenty minutes daily** as your worry time. Same time, same place, ideally not right before bed.
- ii. **When worries surface outside the window**, jot them down on a list. You're not dismissing them, you're filing them for later.
- iii. **During worry time, review your list** and worry on purpose. Some items will deserve real problem-solving. Others, you'll notice, have already lost their urgency.
- iv. **When the window closes**, stop and return to your day. The worries can wait for tomorrow's appointment.

It sounds almost too simple. But it works because it breaks the cycle of constant, scattered worry while still taking your concerns seriously. Your mind learns there is a time for this, and it isn't every waking minute.

Most people find the strangest part is rereading the list: a worry that felt enormous at 10 a.m. often looks much smaller by the time its appointment arrives.

05

WHERE ANXIETY HIDES

Progressive muscle *relaxation*.

Anxiety doesn't just live in your thoughts. It settles into your body: clenched jaw, raised shoulders, a stomach in knots. Progressive muscle relaxation releases tension you may not even realize you're holding.

Find a quiet spot, sitting or lying down. For each muscle group:

- i. **Tense the muscles** firmly, but not painfully, for five seconds.
- ii. **Release all at once** and let the muscles go soft for ten seconds.
- iii. **Notice the difference** between tension and relaxation. That contrast is the whole lesson.

Work your way through the body in order: feet, calves, thighs, stomach, hands, arms, shoulders, face. The full pass takes about ten minutes.

WHEN TO USE IT

Many people find this most helpful at the end of the day, especially if anxiety interferes with sleep. Done regularly, it also teaches you to catch tension earlier, before it builds into something bigger.

When self-help *isn't enough*.

These five strategies can genuinely help with everyday anxiety. But tools have limits, and pretending otherwise wouldn't be honest. Some signs suggest it's time to work through this with a therapist:

- ☐ Anxiety interferes with work, relationships, or daily activities
- ☐ You're avoiding situations, people, or places because of fear or worry
- ☐ Physical symptoms persist: racing heart, trouble sleeping, digestive issues
- ☐ You've practised strategies like these, and they aren't providing enough relief

None of these mean something is wrong with you. They mean the anxiety has roots worth understanding, and that's exactly what therapy is for. A therapist can help you see what's driving the anxiety, not just manage its symptoms.

WORTH KNOWING

At Graceway Wellness, every new client starts with a free 15-minute consultation. You can hear how a therapist would approach your situation before deciding anything, and before a single dollar is involved.

Notes & *a small plan.*

Before you close this guide, take a moment. Jot down what stood out, then choose one small thing to try. A plan you can actually keep beats a perfect one you can't.

What I want to remember

My small plan

One small step I'll try first

When I'll start

What might get in the way

Someone or something that could help

A GENTLE REMINDER

You don't have to act on all of this. Pick one thing, give it a real week, and let that be enough to start.

YOUR NEXT STEP

The first conversation *costs nothing.*

You've taken anxiety seriously enough to learn real tools, and that matters. If you'd like support that goes deeper than a worksheet, the next step is a free 15-minute consultation. Answer a few questions, get matched with the therapist who fits your situation, and pick a time that works. No obligation, no pressure, and nothing to pay.

Get matched & book your free consultation

gracewaywellness.com/book/free-consultation · about 90 seconds

Meet our therapists first

gracewaywellness.com/our-team

Prefer to reach out directly?

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