

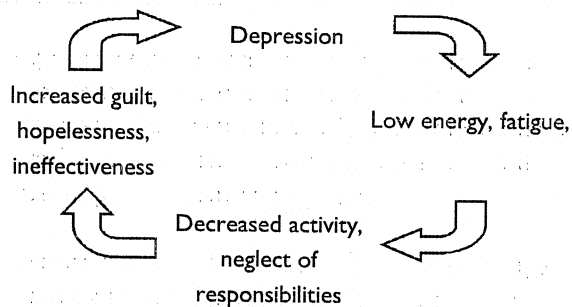
# the vicious cycle of depression

The symptoms of depression can bring about some drastic changes in a depressed person's life, daily routines, and their behaviour. Often it is these changes that makes the depression worse and prevents the depressed person from getting better.

For example, a lack of motivation or a lack of energy can result in a depressed person cutting back on their activities, neglecting their daily tasks and responsibilities, and leaving decision-making to others. Have you noticed these changes in yourself when you are depressed?

You may find that you have become less and less active, don't go out much anymore, avoid hanging out with friends, and stopped engaging in your favourite activity. When this happens, you have become locked in the vicious cycle of depression, which might look like this:

## The Vicious Cycle of Depression



When your activity level decreases, you may become even less motivated and more lethargic. When you stop doing the things you used to love, you miss out on experiencing pleasant feelings and positive experiences. Your depression could get worse.

Similarly, when one begins neglecting a few tasks and responsibilities at work or at home, the list may begin to pile up. As such, when a depressed person thinks about the things they have to do, they may feel overwhelmed by the pile of things they have put off doing. This may result in them feeling guilty or thinking that they are ineffective or even, a failure. This will also worsen the depression.

## Reversing the Vicious Cycle of Depression

One of the ways of breaking the vicious cycle of is through the use of medication. Medication such as antidepressants can help change your energy level and improve sleep. Another way is to simply increase your activity level, especially in pleasurable activities and

tackling your list of tasks and responsibilities, but doing it in a realistic and achievable way, so that you set yourself up to succeed.

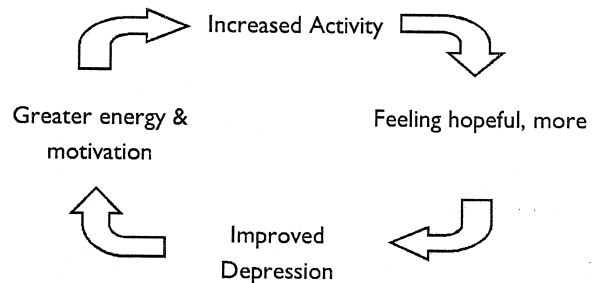
Becoming more active has a number of advantages:

- Activity helps you to feel better
- Activity helps you to feel less tired
- Activity can help you think more clearly



When the depression cycle is broken, it will look like this:

## Reversing The Vicious Cycle of Depression



Here's a list of possible fun things to do. You can add your own to this list.

1. Soaking in the bathtub
2. Collecting things (coins, shells, etc.)
3. Going for a day trip
4. Going to see a comedy at the movies
5. Going to the beach
6. Playing squash/tennis/badminton
7. Having a barbecue at the park
8. Going for a walk, jog, or hike
9. Listening to uplifting music
10. Gardening

Try some of them out and evaluate how you feel before and after the activity. Chances are, you'll find that you'll feel a little better. The important thing is to persist – keeping your activity levels up is the first step to breaking out of that vicious cycle!

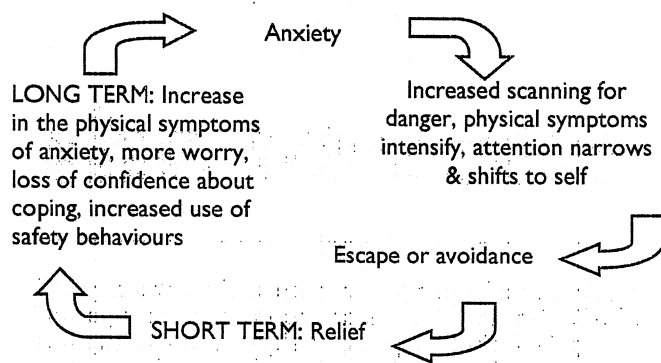
The second step is to look at how *thinking patterns* contribute to the vicious cycle of depression. The "Improving how you feel" information sheet starts to look more closely at this.

# the vicious cycle of anxiety

The symptoms of anxiety can have a significant impact on how a person behaves and goes about their daily life. For example, anxious people might try to avoid feeling anxious and escape from distressing experiences.

The essence of anxiety is worrying about some *potential* threat. It is trying to cope with a future event that you think will be negative. You do this by paying more attention to possible signs of potential threat, and looking internally to see whether you will be able to cope with that threat. When you notice your anxious symptoms, you think that you can't cope with the situation, and therefore become more anxious.

## The Vicious Cycle of Anxiety



## How Avoidance Contributes to Anxiety

As your anxiety increases, you try to reduce the anxiety and prevent what you think might happen by avoiding the situation. If you cannot avoid the situation, then you use *subtle avoidance* to reduce the anxiety.

For example, you may use certain rituals, like standing close to a door to make a quick escape. In some way, you might feel less anxious when you engage in avoidance behaviours. You may take tranquillisers to deal with distressing situations.

However, when you have to deal with the situation the next time, you are less confident that you can cope with it because you avoided it the last time or become dependent on safety behaviours. So you feel more anxious.

As a result, you avoid the situation or engage in subtle avoidance. And so it continues. This cycle can go on until you feel very anxious and avoid going into different types of situations.

## Safety Behaviours and Anxiety

If you feel anxious, or anticipate feeling anxious, it makes sense that you will do things to reduce your anxiety. In addition to avoidance and subtle avoidance, many people use "safety behaviours" to help cope with anxiety. These may include relying on medication, always having an exit plan for potentially-anxious situations, or making sure you have someone else with you. These safety behaviours also play a part in the vicious cycle of anxiety. When you become dependent on them, it can be more distressing if one day they are not available to you.

## Reversing the Vicious Cycle of Anxiety

Vicious cycles play an important role in maintaining anxiety. However, like the vicious cycle of depression, you can turn around this cycle to create a **positive cycle** that will help you overcome anxiety. One important step in this cycle is gradually confronting feared situations. This will lead to an improved sense of confidence, which will help reduce your anxiety and allow you to go into situations that are important to you.

Some people might encourage you to tackle your biggest fear first – to "jump in the deep end" and get it over and done with. However, many people prefer to take it "step-by-step". We call this "**graded exposure**". You start with situations that are easier for you to handle, then work your way up to more challenging tasks. This allows you to build your confidence slowly, to use other skills you have learned, to get used to the situations, and to challenge your fears about each situational exposure exercise. By doing this in a structured and repeated way, you have a good chance of reducing your anxiety about those situations.



## Coping Skills: Breathing & Thinking Better

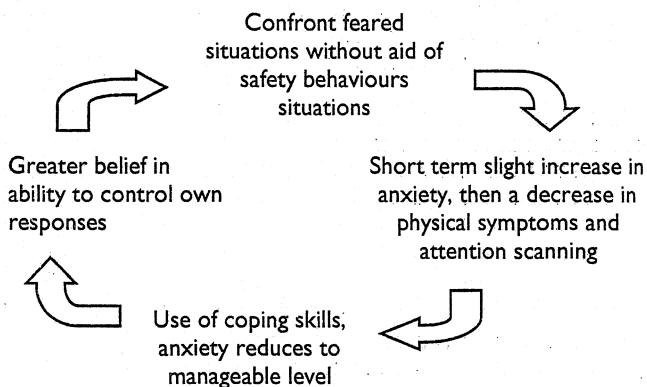
When you are gradually confronting feared situations, there will be a short term increase in anxiety. This is normal—everyone feels anxious about doing things they fear. The important thing to remember is that you can learn other skills as alternatives to avoidance and safety behaviours. There are other information sheets available which explain these coping skills in more detail, but here they are briefly:

**Breathing:** Anxiety is often associated with fast, shallow breathing, which contributes to the physical sensation of anxiety. By slowing down your breathing and using calming and relaxation techniques, you can reduce your anxiety.

**Thinking:** There are many types of negative thoughts which are associated with anxiety, such as "I will not be able to cope" or "I must avoid this situation." Learning to challenge these thoughts with more balanced ones can help to reduce the experience of anxiety.

When the anxiety cycle is broken, it will look like this:

## Reversing the Vicious Cycle of Anxiety



# progressive muscle relaxation

One of the body's reactions to fear and anxiety is muscle tension. This can result in feeling "tense", or can lead to muscle aches and pains, as well as leaving some people feeling exhausted. Think about how you respond to anxiety. Do you "tense up" when you're feeling anxious? Muscle relaxation can be particularly helpful in cases where anxiety is especially associated to muscle tension. This information sheet will guide you through a common form of relaxation designed to reduce muscle tension.

## Muscle tension

Muscle tension is commonly associated with stress, anxiety and fear as part of a process that helps our bodies prepare for potentially dangerous situations. Even though some of those situations may not actually be dangerous, our bodies respond in the same way. Sometimes we don't even notice how our muscles become tense, but perhaps you clench your teeth slightly so your jaw feels tight, or maybe your shoulders become. Muscle tension can also be associated with backaches and tension headaches.

## Progressive Muscle Relaxation

One method of reducing muscle tension that people have found helpful is through a technique called Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR). In progressive muscle relaxation exercises, you tense up particular muscles and then relax them, and then you practise this technique consistently.

### preparing for relaxation

When you are beginning to practice progressive muscle relaxation exercises keep in mind the following points.

- **Physical injuries.** If you have any injuries, or a history of physical problems that may cause muscle pain, always consult your doctor before you start.
- **Select your surroundings.** Minimise the distraction to your five senses. Such as turning off the TV and radio, and using soft lighting.
- **Make yourself comfortable.** Use a chair that comfortably seats your body, including your head. Wear loose clothing, and take off your shoes.
- **Internal mechanics.** Avoid practicing after big, heavy meals, and do not practice after consuming any intoxicants, such as alcohol.

### general procedure

1. Once you've set aside the time and place for relaxation, slow down your breathing and give yourself permission to relax.
2. When you are ready to begin, tense the muscle group described. Make sure you can feel the tension, but not so much that you feel a great deal of pain. Keep the muscle tensed for approximately 5 seconds.
3. Relax the muscles and keep it relaxed for approximately 10 seconds. It may be helpful to say something like "Relax" as you relax the muscle.
4. When you have finished the relaxation procedure, remain seated for a few moments allowing yourself to become alert.

## Relaxation sequence

1. **Right hand and forearm.** Make a fist with your right hand.
2. **Right upper arm.** Bring your right forearm up to your shoulder to "make a muscle".
3. **Left hand and forearm.**
4. **Left upper arm.**
5. **Forehead.** Raise your eyebrows as high as they will go, as though you were surprised by something.
6. **Eyes and cheeks.** Squeeze your eyes tight shut.
7. **Mouth and jaw.** Open your mouth as wide as you can, as you might when you're yawning.
8. **Neck. !!!** Be careful as you tense these muscles. Face forward and then pull your head back slowly, as though you are looking up to the ceiling.
9. **Shoulders.** Tense the muscles in your shoulders as you bring your shoulders up towards your ears.
10. **Shoulder blades/Back.** Push your shoulder blades back, trying to almost touch them together, so that your chest is pushed forward.
11. **Chest and stomach.** Breathe in deeply, filling up your lungs and chest with air.
12. **Hips and buttocks.** Squeeze your buttock muscles
13. **Right upper leg.** Tighten your right thigh.
14. **Right lower leg. !!!** Do this slowly and carefully to avoid cramps. Pull your toes towards you to stretch the calf muscle.
15. **Right foot.** Curl your toes downwards.
16. **Left upper leg.** Repeat as for right upper leg.
17. **Left lower leg.** Repeat as for right lower leg.
18. **Left foot.** Repeat as for right foot.

**Practice means progress.** Only through practice can you become more aware of your muscles, how they respond with tension, and how you can relax them. Training your body to respond differently to stress is like any training – practising consistently is the key.

# calming technique

Everyone knows that breathing is an essential part of life, but did you know that breathing plays an essential role in anxiety? This information sheet will briefly discuss the role of breathing in anxiety and guide you through a simple calming technique that uses breathing patterns to help you relax.

Breathing is a powerful determinant of physical state. When our breathing rate becomes elevated, a number of physiological changes begin to occur. Perhaps you've noticed this yourself when you've had a fright; you might suddenly gasp, feel a little breathless and a little light-headed, as well as feeling some tingling sensations around your body. Believe it or not, the way we breathe is a major factor in producing these and other sensations that are noticeable when we are anxious.

## Anxious breathing

You might already know that we breathe in oxygen – which is used by the body – and we breathe out carbon dioxide. In order for the body to run efficiently, there needs to be a **balance** between oxygen and carbon dioxide, and this balance is maintained through how fast and how deeply we breathe. Of course, the body needs different amounts of oxygen depending on our level of activity. When we exercise, there is an *increase* in both oxygen and carbon dioxide; in relaxation there is a *decrease* in both oxygen and carbon dioxide. In both cases the balance is maintained.

When we are anxious though, this balance is disrupted. Essentially, we take in more oxygen than the body needs – in other words we overbreathe, or *hyperventilate*. When this imbalance is detected, the body responds with a number of chemical changes that produce symptoms such as dizziness, light-headedness, confusion, breathlessness, blurred vision, increase in heart rate to pump more blood around, numbness and tingling in the extremities, cold clammy hands and muscle stiffness.

The normal rate of breathing is 10-12 breaths per minute – what's your breathing rate?

## The Calming Technique

While overbreathing and hyperventilation are not specifically dangerous (it's even used in medical testing!), continued overbreathing can leave you feeling exhausted or "on edge" so that you're more likely to respond to stressful situations with intense anxiety and panic.



Gaining control over your breathing involves both slowing your rate of breathing and changing your breathing style. Use the calming technique by following these steps and you'll be on your way to developing a better breathing habit.

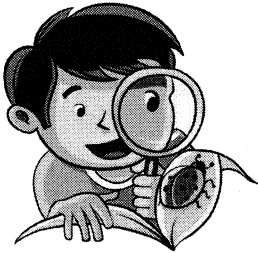
- 1 Ensure that you are sitting on a comfortable chair or laying on a bed
- 2 Take a breath in for 4 seconds (through the nose if possible)
- 3 Hold the breath for 2 seconds
- 4 Release the breath taking 6 seconds (through the nose if possible), then pause slightly before breathing in again.
- 5 Practise, practise, practise!

## Breathing tips

- When you first begin changing your breathing, it may be difficult to slow your breathing down to this rate. You may wish to try using a 3-in, 1-hold, 4-out breathing rate to start off with.
- When you are doing your breathing exercises, make sure that you are using a stomach breathing style rather than a chest breathing style. You can check this by placing one hand on your stomach and one hand on your chest. The hand on your stomach should rise when you breathe in.
- Try to practise at least once or twice a day at a time when you can relax, relatively free from distraction. This will help to develop a more relaxed breathing habit. The key to progress really is practise, so try to set aside some time each day.

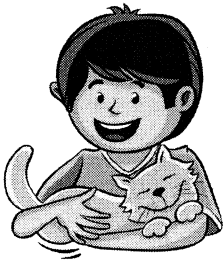
***By using the calming technique, you can slow your breathing down and reduce your general level anxiety. With enough practice, it can even help to reduce your anxiety when you are in an anxious situation.***

# THE 5 SENSES GROUNDING TECHNIQUE



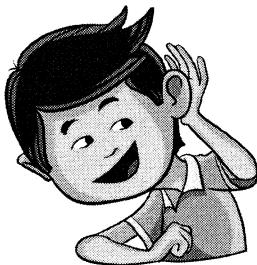
## LOOK

Name 5 things you can see



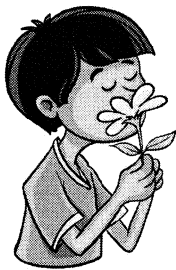
## FEEL

Name 4 things you can feel



## LISTEN

Name 3 things you can hear



## SMELL

Name 2 things you can smell



## TASTE

Name 1 thing you can taste