

5 Mind-body Techniques to release Anxiety

Do you have troubles breathing, relaxing, and sleeping? Do you find yourself overthinking and ruminating till the point of spacing out and experiencing a perpetual sense of worrying?

Anxiety is a very common problem in our society, which can negatively impact on our confidence, relationships and health. Holding chronic tension can often tax our bodies contributing to inflammation, immune system impoverishment, chronic pain and fatigue.

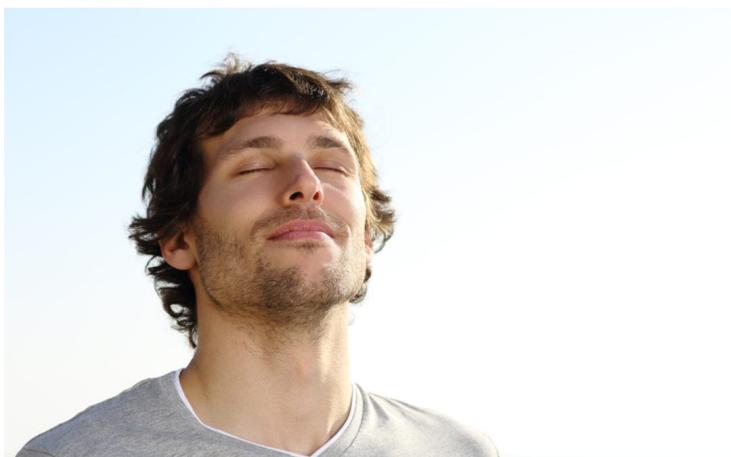
Together with talking therapy and medications, today Yoga is more and more recognised as a valuable complementary therapy for those of us suffering from anxiety.

Indeed, recent studies show that specific practices embracing movement, mindfulness and breathing appear to modulate our stress response making us more emotionally and mentally resilient and grounded.

The following is a series of self-soothing techniques, including breath regulation and calming postures, which you can easily practice at home: you just need a quiet space with no distractions, a mat or towel, may be relaxing music if you wish. Some of these exercises don't even require any physical movement, so they can be used whenever and wherever you need to be focused and clear-headed, including your office or the tube (I do them all when I am on a plane, except from number 3).

1) **Elongating the outbreath.** Close your eyes or keep them down cast, and as you inhale, notice the air entering your nostrils, filling your chest and all the way down the bottom of your lungs. On the exhale, trace the air leaving your lungs and exiting through your nose (or mouth if it helps in the beginning). As you keep on practicing, try and let the breath out become slower and more subtle, taking as long as possible to fully empty your lungs, but making sure you are not forcing the action.

Elongating the out breath is one of the most powerful and immediate techniques to relax the body and slow down the heart rate.

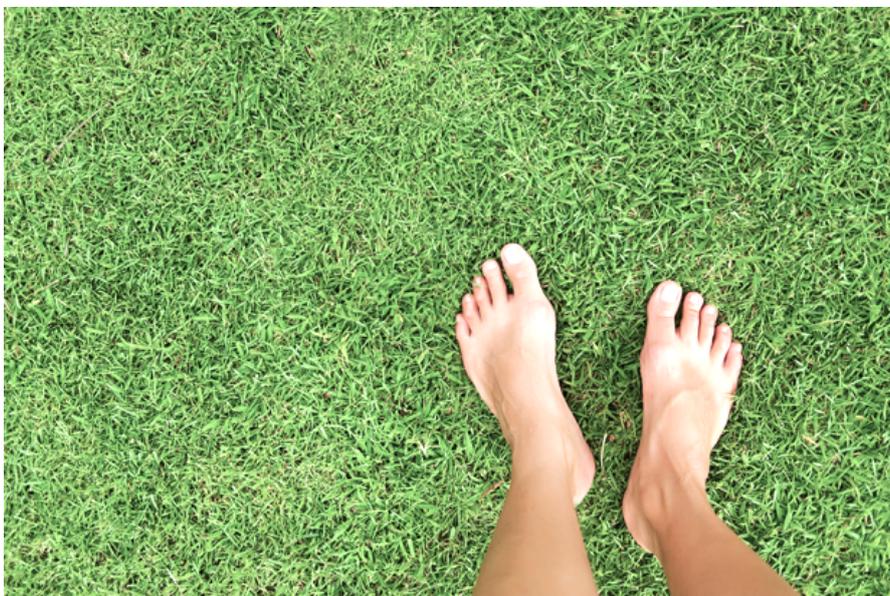


2) **Grounding.** When we are not rooted, we are easily overwhelmed by our feelings and the fluctuations of whatever happens around us.

Instead, being grounded means being fully present in our body in the moment and receiving a sense of support and safety from the earth.

Sitting, standing or walking, bring all your attention to the soles of your feet, absorbing any information from the ground. Sometimes it helps to wiggle the toes a little, or to shift the weight side to side, even to squeeze all the muscles of the legs to feel them alive and then release them completely. Allow your weight to sink and to receive support from the ground (you can imagine roots growing under your feet or leaving imprints in the sand).

The more connected you are with the earth and present in your legs and feet, the easier it is to control the experience of anxiety and panic.



3) **Calming Yoga postures.** Some Asanas (Yoga poses) can help you release tension from the system, stimulating the "rest and digest" part of the nervous system. Some also open the areas that usually tend to be in a state of chronic contraction when we are unconsciously over reacting to external or internal stressors.

Here is a simple sequence of postures, which you can hold for 2 to 10 minutes depending on how comfortable you are with the practice. Those which open the chest can have an uplifting and liberating effect, while those with a bending forward action tend to be calming and favour introspection.

Make sure you don't feel any pain, just a gentle sensation of stretching, and feel free to practice the elongation of the out breath to help the body relax.

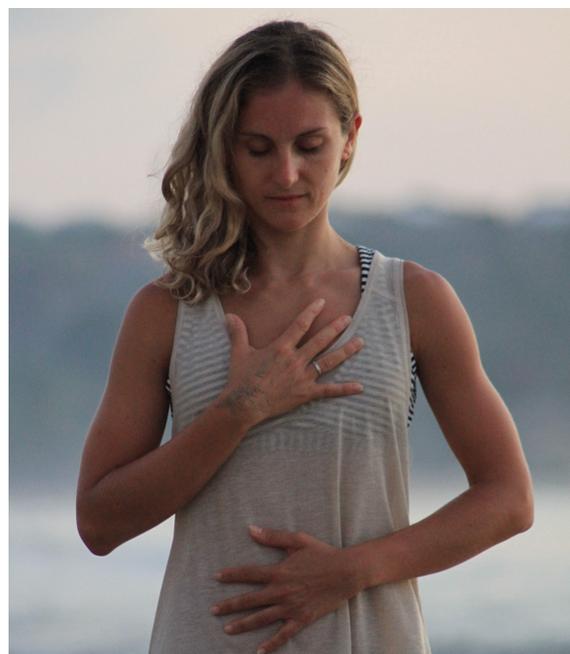


4) **Coherent breathing.** This is a form of breathing that involves taking long slow breaths, about five per minute, maintaining a balance between duration of the inhalation and exhalation.

Find a comfortable position, laying on your back or sitting. Start noticing your breath as in exercise 1), but now try and inhale for 4 counts and exhale for 4 counts. After a while, see if you can breath in and out for 5 seconds and finally for 6, which for most of us is the optimal rhythm to calm the nervous system. Of course, the length can vary based on your current lungs capacity and experience, so feel free to adapt it to a point that feels relatively comfortable, it shouldn't generate more stress!

At first you can find it useful to mentally count the seconds, this helps keeping the mind more focused. You can also place one hand on the abdomen and one on the chest: with this tactile feedback it can be easier to allow the lowest part of the ribcage to move freely instead of trapping the breath in the upper chest.

This is a simple yet powerful way to calm the body through its effect on the autonomic nervous system and it's perfect to be practiced for 10-20 minutes a day every day if needed.



5) **Child's pose with massage of the trigeminal nerve.** Seated in a child's pose (on your knees, knees apart and feet together), rest your forehead on the floor. Allow your head to slowly roll side to side and massage the space between your eyes brows. The pressure stimulates one of the branches of the trigeminal nerve, which has a calming effect on the system.

If uncomfortable, you can elevate and pad your forehead with a soft support, like a yoga block or a book with a towel on top (or manually press and massage the point with your fingers if you can't take child's pose). You can do this for 2-5 minutes with your eyes closed.



I hope these practices can be useful for you to manage stress and complement other therapies and tools (please make sure you consult a doctor or therapist to receive a broad view on available treatments).

If you wish to know more about how Yoga can help you release anxiety please join one of my next [courses](#) or get in touch at yogaforanxietyrelief@gmail.com.

Thank you for reading!