



SELF-HELP GUIDE

Managing Anxiety, Panic and Health Worries

Practical, evidence-based tools you can start using today



Anxiety, panic attacks and constant health worries are common, and they respond well to the right habits. The tools in this guide come from cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), the most widely studied approach for these problems. Read it once, then keep the reminder card on the last page handy.

1 What is happening in a panic attack

A panic attack is a sudden surge of intense fear with strong body symptoms: racing heart, shortness of breath, dizziness, shaking or chest tightness. It usually peaks within a few minutes and then settles.



Not dangerous

It feels frightening, but a panic attack is not life-threatening.



It passes

It settles on its own, usually within minutes, whatever you do.



Fighting feeds it

Running away or fighting the feeling makes it stronger. Staying put teaches your brain it is safe.

2 What to do while it is happening

- 1 **Stay where you are**, if it is safe to do so.
- 2 **Slow your breathing**. In gently through the nose for about 4 seconds, out slowly through the mouth for 4 to 6 seconds.
- 3 **Name it**: "This is panic, not danger. It will pass."
- 4 **Look outward**. Focus on one object, a sound, or what is around you.
- 5 **Use a coping line**: "I have felt this before and it passed. I can handle this."

Try to avoid

- Leaving the place the moment panic starts (when it is safe to stay)
- Holding your breath or breathing too fast
- Telling yourself "I am dying" or "I am losing control"



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3 Breathing: practise when calm

Slow breathing calms the body's alarm response. It works best when practised daily, so it becomes automatic when panic arrives.



Sit or stand comfortably. Breathe in through the nose and let your stomach rise. Out slowly through the mouth.

Repeat for 1 to 3 minutes, once a day

4 Grounding: the 5-4-3-2-1 technique

Grounding pulls your attention out of racing thoughts and into the present moment. Say each one silently or out loud.

- | | | |
|---|----------------------|--------------------------|
| 5 | things you can see | colours, shapes, objects |
| 4 | things you can touch | chair, phone, fabric |
| 3 | things you can hear | traffic, a fan, voices |
| 2 | things you can smell | or 2 textures |
| 1 | thing you can taste | or 1 slow breath |

5 Cut down your safety behaviours

Safety behaviours feel protective but keep panic going. Each one tells your brain the danger was real.

- Always carrying water
- Sitting near exits
- Avoiding exercise
- Checking your pulse
- Needing someone with you

THIS WEEK

- ☐ Pick one safety behaviour to reduce.
- ☐ If you always check your pulse, delay it by 10 minutes, then 20, then skip it once.
- ☐ Stay in a situation you would normally avoid (a crowded shop) a few minutes longer each time.

This is how your brain learns the feared outcome does not happen.

6 Daily routine that lowers baseline anxiety



Move

Walking, running, swimming or yoga, most days.



Sleep

Keep a steady sleep and wake time.



Eat

Regular, balanced meals keep energy stable.



Cut back

Alcohol, nicotine and recreational drugs worsen anxiety.

+ Add one relaxation practice each day: breathing, stretching, mindfulness or a short walk.



7 When the worry is about your health

Checking your body, searching symptoms online and asking for reassurance bring short relief, but they keep health worries alive.

Reduce checking and reassurance-seeking

STEP 1

Keep a one-week diary of how often you check your body, search symptoms or ask for reassurance.

STEP 2

Reduce it gradually. If you check 10 times a day, aim for 8, then 6.

STEP 3

Delay the urge. When you want to check or google, wait 10 to 15 minutes and do something else.

STEP 4

Limit symptom searching. Set specific times, if at all, and use trusted sources only.

Swap the catastrophic thought for a balanced one

WORRY THOUGHT

"This headache means I have a brain tumour."



MORE BALANCED THOUGHT

"Headaches are common and usually not serious. I have had this before and it passed."

"My heart is racing, something is wrong."



"Anxiety can make the heart race. This has settled before and it will again."

Ask yourself: What is the evidence for and against this thought? What would I tell a friend with this worry?

Reduce avoidance

Skipping exercise, appointments or social plans out of health fear keeps anxiety strong. List what you avoid, do the easiest one this week, then work up. *Avoiding the gym for fear of a heart problem? Start with a 5-minute walk.*

8 When to seek professional help

Professional support can speed recovery. Talk to a clinician if:

- Panic attacks are frequent, or you are avoiding many places and activities
- Health worries take over your day or cause significant distress
- **You have chest pain, fainting or symptoms you are unsure about.** Get medical advice first to rule out physical causes

CBT (including guided self-help) is effective, and sometimes medication alongside therapy helps.

✂ CUT OUT AND KEEP

Quick reminder card

DURING PANIC

Stay put.
Breathe: in 4, out 4 to 6.
Say: "This will pass. I am safe."
Ground with 5-4-3-2-1.

HEALTH WORRIES

Delay checking or googling 10 to 15 minutes.
Write the worry, then a balanced thought.
Do one avoided activity this week.

DAILY BASICS

Move your body.
Sleep at regular times.
Practise breathing once a day.