

THREE TIPS FOR A PEACEFUL MIND



While anxiety gets a bad rap, it actually does serve a purpose in our lives. Think of it as that little hint of intuition that says, “Look again before turning out into the intersection,” then you see a cyclist coming down the street. We need a little anxiety in our lives to keep us safe.

However, in our lives of overly scheduled busy-ness, multiple screens demanding attention, and too much multitasking, anxiety can begin to take over. Our nervous system never gets a chance to reset to neutral, so our minds and bodies stay in overdrive.

When our system is overly amped up, it’s easy to slip into patterns of thinking the worst and feeling edgy and jumpy. To manage this feeling of anxiety, we try to control, prepare and avoid discomfort and stress, which may work in the moment, but can often leave us feeling ragged.

I would estimate that over 90% of the people I work with struggle with anxiety in some capacity. In many ways, it’s a symptom of our hectic world.

When working with a client experiencing anxiety, I try to first boil it down to a few suggestions they can integrate in their lives right now to give them back some control over the fear.

You can start one or all of these suggestions today to begin to get a handle on anxiety and put it back in its proper place. Incorporate these changes into your day-to-day schedule, then reevaluate in a few weeks to see how you’re feeling. You’ll be surprised at how impactful these three small steps can be!

ONE: BREATHE

Yes, I know. You’ve heard this before. Breathwork is often touted as a miracle cure, and you can’t read a self-help or healthy lifestyle article without some mention of breath.

Why is that? Because it works, with one caveat ...

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If the first time you try to practice calming breathwork is in the middle of an anxiety attack, it's very likely it may not help, and it might even make your feeling of panic worse.

The key is to practice breathwork REGULARLY, so it's there as a routine tool you can use when you begin to feel that anxious feeling come on.

For people who are chronically anxious, the breath is often too fast, held too long, or too shallow (doesn't go deep into the lungs and instead lands in the upper part of the chest). When you breathe like this, you're unconsciously sending the message to your brain that you are not safe, keeping you in a style of hypervigilance.

To make breath a tool you can turn to, start today. A few times a day, place your hand on your heart and just notice how you're breathing. If you want to take it a step further, spend five minutes a day just noticing your breath – follow it all way to the end of the exhale, hold for just a moment, and then follow it up to the top of the inhale.

You can also place one hand on your heart and one on your belly while doing this. Your mind will wander. No big deal. Just gently bring it back to concentrating on a nice, slow breath.

Eventually, your breath will become your companion and you can attempt more advanced breathing practices when feeling anxious or panicked. But even just noticing your breath for five minutes a day can greatly reduce your anxiety.

TWO: COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS

Oh, how I love gratitude! I can honestly say that practicing gratitude has changed my life. When I started this practice, I was not in the best place emotionally. I was in the midst of an intense period of anxiety and insomnia. My life felt overwhelming, and I was definitely pessimistic. I was in therapy, willing to try anything else that might help.

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\Brené Brown inspired my practice with her statement, “An attitude of gratitude is not enough,” meaning, you have to flex your gratitude muscles, so to speak. Inspired by this idea, I started a gratitude journal six years ago and still practice today. There is a tremendous amount of research to support the positive benefits of gratitude:

- Grateful people are more optimistic, agreeable, open and less neurotic
- Gratitude practice leads to lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol
- Expressing gratitude activates serotonin production, which leads to an improved mood
- Feeling grateful activates the brain stem region that produces dopamine (serotonin, dopamine and oxytocin are neurotransmitters that work together to produce happiness)
- Gratitude is negatively related to depression and positively to satisfaction with life

It’s so easy to start a practice of gratitude! If you wait for big events to start counting your blessings, you may never start. Instead, look around for the small details that make a big impact on you ... the sound of the rain, a hug from your partner, heat, running water, light switches, or the part of you that doesn’t hurt!

Some days it’s hard to find things to be grateful for, but just the process of looking over your day in search of small blessings can start the positive chemical chain of events in your brain!

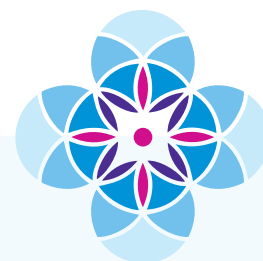
To begin, make a note every day of five things you’re grateful for. Jot them down in a pretty journal, on a notepad, or even start a list on your phone that you can take with you everywhere.

Another way to use this same practice is try the “Stop, Look, Go!” method: When you do something ordinary during your day, such as turning on the faucet, “stop.” “Look,” or feel gratitude for that small thing, such as clean running water. Then “go” on about your day. Try one of these practices and notice how your anxiety and thoughts shift.

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THREE: REST DEEPLY

If you've previously tried yoga or meditation to experience a feeling of calm and rest but couldn't ever quite get into a peaceful groove, I have a secret for you: yoga nidra.

To put it bluntly, yoga nidra, also called yogic sleep, basically feels like ... cheating! It may be the easiest gateway to achieving a feeling of meditative calm during yoga, and someone else does a lot of the work for you!

During yoga nidra, a trained yoga instructor guides you through every phase of the practice, basically leading your mind (and your very supported body) from waking consciousness to what's called the "hypnagogic" state – that delicious stage of consciousness just between waking and sleeping.

The hypnagogic state is deeply restful, so at the end of each guided session you feel deliciously rested. In fact, some yoga nidra teachers claim their nidra is equal to anywhere from one to three hours of sleep during a 20- to 45-minute practice.

Richard Miller, PhD and a clinical psychologist, author, yogic scholar and spiritual teacher, best sums up why we all should practice yoga nidra:

"To induce deep relaxation throughout the body and mind, eliminate stress, overcome insomnia, solve personal problems, resolve trauma, and to neutralize and overcome anxiety, fear, anger, and depression."

In my practice, I find that yoga nidra benefits nearly every client I work with. Yoga nidra can decrease anxiety, reduce obsessive thinking, create deep relaxation and invite into your life all of your desires. As a methodical guided meditation, it helps to release tension and restore all physical and emotional layers.

During "yogic sleep," your body is very supported – you generally lie on your back and get very

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comfortable with the support of pillows, bolsters and blankets. If you want to give this restorative practice a try, there are a number of options online.

Don't let anxiety keep you from living a full and vibrant life. Taking a few key steps to limiting anxiety can leave you feeling happy, calm and ready to embrace all that life sends your way.

BONUS! TRY A FREE CONSULTATION

Sometimes the best tools don't feel like enough, and anxiety feels unmanageable alone.

Sometimes we need someone to talk to so we stop feeling like we are going crazy, someone who can normalize our feelings, and has experience helping others find relief from anxiety. I have many ways of supporting my clients in feeling better and living more joyfully.



**I OFFER FREE 20-MINUTE CONSULTATIONS
FOR ANYONE WHO IS INTERESTED IN
WORKING WITH ME.**

If you'd like to explore further how you can incorporate healthy changes in your routine to combat anxiety one-on-one, check out my website, www.NicholeJones.com, send me a note at Nichole@NicholeJones.com or call 720.273.3492 to schedule an appointment or your free consultation.

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