



Holding fears in your body and experiencing anxiety is a state of being most all of us can relate to. Especially existing in today's increasingly busy and stress-ridden world, there's so many things to feel anxious about. Here are some perspectives and tools for anxiety from a somatic body-based lense. This is here to help you explore what actually helps and what doesn't.

Understanding Anxiety on a Nervous System Level

I've found it helpful to understand anxiety from an evolutionary standpoint. Because at its core, anxiety is here to help us!

Historically your survival as a human was regularly under threat. To face these threats, anxiety was programmed into our beings as a useful and very needed **signal and response of danger**.

*"Hey! We detect a threat!", says the nervous system
"Let's prepare this precious body to take action and do whatever it takes to survive!"*

The body receives signals that it's time to prepare for action - and fast!

increased heart-rate, quick shallow breath, tension of muscles (especially jaw, shoulders and neck), shutdown of digestive tract are a few responses I'm sure you're familiar with that are **there to help the body be ready to protect itself**.

This is where fight/flight comes in. If fight/flight does not seem to resolve the threat, then freeze comes in. This is why you might feel a crash of energy or frozen after a build-up of persistent anxiety.

*please note...this is a very simplified version of what happens physiologically

Okay... but what now?

I share this background because reflecting on this simple background of where anxiety comes from, I have found can help begin the journey of **befriending your anxiety**. Understanding anxiety is there as an ancient mechanism to preserve your safety.

Anxiety in of itself is not unhealthy. Some levels of stress are actually positive for your health and keeps your body functioning well.

The unhealthy part is when anxiety persists and stays "stuck" in the body.

So most of these tools center around helping **release anxiety by first allowing it to being there, as it is**.

These tools are simple yet profound.

They can help restore your body's natural ability to ebb and flow between stress and calm.

Use these tools to reconnect with a sense of **peace and safety** in being alive.

exploring your relationship with anxiety...

- What are your main triggers that lead to anxiety?
 - How do you know when you're anxious? What in your body tells you anxiety is here?
 - What are your usual coping mechanisms when you feel anxiety? What do you do to try to soothe yourself when feeling anxiety?
- *Don't worry if your coping mechanisms are considered "healthy" or not. Things like having a smoke or a drink, or picking your nails or turning to your phone are all useful to identify and get to know as your habitual responses to anxiety.
- How do you feel towards the part of you that feels anxiety?
 - How do you treat yourself when you feel anxious? What does your inner-dialogue usually sound like? What tone? What kind of words?
 - How do you communicate/relate to others when you feel anxiety? How aware or not aware do you try to make others when you feel anxiety?
 - How do you want your relationship with anxiety to look/feel?



breath, breath, breath...

You've probably heard it before and i'll say it again, breath, breath, breath...

Working with your breath is the **most immediate way** to access and regulate your nervous system

The first step in any breath technique is to **start by bringing awareness to your breath**, notice that it's there (it's always there, like a best friend 😊) Take a moment to stop whatever you're doing and be with the breath, follow the flow of energy as it moves in and out, in and out.

here are the most common breath techniques to try

lengthen the exhale

simple and sweet

breath in a count of 4 on the inhale

breath out a count of 8 on the exhale

if counting isn't your thing, just focus on making the exhale longer than the inhale

this will downregulate your nervous system & bring more parasympathetic (yin/calming) energy into the body

belly breathing

so many of use forget to breathe through our bellies and instead chronically breathe primarily through the upper chest.

This is again, super simple but an effective way to bring calm to the body.

Place your hand on your belly.

Allow the belly to rise and fill up on the inhale & to gently fall and return to its normal position on the exhale.

other breath to try

square breath



straw breath



coherent breathing



grounding to earth

Often when there is anxiety we lose touch with our sense of connection to earth, reconnecting with the ground can help stabilize your system.



Start by sensing into your feet

Feel the contact your feet have with the ground below you

If you're indoors, imagine the ground below the building you're in

Connect with the cool sense of solid ground below you

As you walk, keep your awareness to the bottoms of your feet

'The Work' - 4 Questions

this is a popular practice from Byron Katie to reframe a thought that may be causing your anxiety



Identify a thought or belief that has been causing you distress. Ask yourself and reflect on these four questions;

1. *Is it true?*
2. *Can you absolutely know that it's true?*
3. *How do you react—what happens—when you believe that thought?*
4. *Who would you be without that thought?*

find a grounding anchor

look in all directions around you, pick something that feels calming when you look at



keep your awareness on that which grounds you

return to the mental image of your anchor throughout your day

use R.A.I.N.

this is a mindfulness practice from Tara Brach



Recognize - *What is happening right now?*

Allow - *Can I let this be here?*

Investigate - *What is this experience like in my body?*

Nourish - *What does the part of me feeling anxiety need most from me right now?*