

# Reducing Anxiety

Fear provides an immediate defense that can protect us from sudden harm. After the immediate threat subsides, our brain and body respond in ways that seek to protect us from a repeat of the original threat. Depending upon the perceived severity of the threat, we will remember information about the threatening condition, and may automatically respond in certain ways when the threatening condition is encountered at a future time.

Sometimes, this automatic future response is triggered when there is no threat. For example, at a point in the past we may have had an immediate defensive response to a bee. Ever since, we may tense up or lurch away when we think of bees, even though there are no bees present. If we have an instinctive feeling of fearful discomfort like this, it is termed “anxiety”.

There’s considerable verifiable evidence that Physical Activity, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), and Hypnotherapy - used separately or together - can reduce or eliminate anxiety. Sleep, meditation, and other healthy lifestyle changes can also help. These approaches needn’t involve medication or physical medical procedures.

## What can you do?

### **Physical Activity**

Physical activity can reduce anxiety. The activity can be as informal as taking slow deep breaths or going on casual walks, or as structured as sports or exercise routines. Anxiety can be eased within several days after you add more physical activity to your daily or weekly routine.

Physical activity releases endorphins: natural brain chemicals that improve your sense of wellbeing. Physical activity can also help break a cycle of worrisome thoughts. Choose activities that you might enjoy: perhaps gardening, washing your car, walking around the block, running, lifting weights, or playing basketball.

If you enjoy a physical activity then you're likely to keep it as part of your lifestyle, and thus keep getting its anxiety-reducing (and other) benefits. There are ways to add small amounts of activity throughout your day. You might take the stairs instead of the elevator, park farther away from work to fit in a short walk, or bike to work.

A 2023 article posted by the Mayo Clinic gives an overview: [Depression and anxiety: Exercise eases symptoms](#).

## **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)**

We can reduce anxiety by receiving CBT treatment from a trained therapist, and may eventually learn to treat ourselves without further help from a therapist.

One frequently used approach, called *cognitive restructuring*, can include writing about how you became aware of an event, writing about what you *thought* immediately after becoming aware, and writing about how you *felt* in response to your immediate thoughts. If your immediate thoughts were not based on fact, you can rewrite them so that they are based on fact.

If the rewritten thoughts do not help you to achieve any of your personal goals, you can rewrite them so they'll help achieve one or more goals. If the rewritten thoughts do not help you feel the way you want to feel, you can rewrite them to help you feel the way you want to feel.

This process is a way to improve both our thoughts and our feelings. With practice, we can improve our immediate automatic thinking in various situations.

A 2023 article posted by Verywell Mind provides detailed examples of the CBT process: [Understanding Anxiety Disorders](#). For further detail, see [CBT Training Materials](#). A 2024 article posted by The University of Oxford suggests a promising future for online CBT treatments in the United Kingdom: [New therapies developed by Oxford experts offer online support for anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorders](#).

## **Hypnosis**

Hypnosis can help with anxiety. “Hypnosis” refers to a process that guides a person into a state of less consciousness, using sound, vision and suggestive language. The word “hypnosis” is also used to name the experience a person goes through as a result of a hypnosis process.

This experience often involves moving into a state of semi-consciousness in which a person is not fully self-aware, induced by another person whose suggestions are readily accepted by the hypnotized person. During hypnosis a person can have focused attention, reduced peripheral awareness, loss of the power of voluntary action, and enhanced capacity to respond to suggestions.

Hypnosis is used in treatments for anxiety as well as for a wide variety of other mental and physical issues. A 2023 article posted by Verywell Mind provides a detailed discussion of hypnosis treatments: [Hypnotherapy: How You Can Benefit From Hypnosis With Therapy](#).

## **Does it work?**

## Effectiveness of Physical Activity in Treating Anxiety

There's some limited verifiable evidence that physical activity is an effective treatment for anxiety. A 2020 review published by the *Annual Review of Medicine* noted "A large and growing body of evidence suggests that physical activity (PA) may hold therapeutic promise in the management of mental health disorders." This includes management of anxiety. ([The Role of Exercise in Management of Mental Health Disorders: An Integrative Review](#))

## Effectiveness of CBT in Treating Anxiety

CBT therapy appears to be reasonably effective as a treatment for anxiety.

A 2011 [meta-analysis](#) study published in *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience* concluded that "CBT appears to be both efficacious and effective in the treatment of anxiety disorders, but more high quality studies are needed to better estimate the magnitude of the effect." Statistical projection of data from this study suggests that in 83% of anxiety cases, CBT treatment resulted in at least some improvement. (2011 study: [Cognitive behavioral therapy in anxiety disorders: current state of the evidence](#))

(Research studies consider whether treatments are both "efficacious" and "effective". A treatment is efficacious if it shows improvement in controlled testing environments. A treatment is effective if it shows improvement in real world healthcare.)

A representative 2003 study published in the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* found CBT to be a beneficial treatment for various forms of anxiety. For example, a group of 20 people who had social anxiety (a mild and common form of anxiety) were treated with CBT. The study indicated that for about 55% of social anxiety cases, CBT treatment resulted in at least some improvement. (2003 study: [Cognitive Therapy](#))

[Versus Fluoxetine in Generalized Social Phobia: A Randomized Placebo-Controlled Trial\)](#)

## **Effectiveness of Hypnosis In Treating Anxiety**

A 2019 meta-analysis study published in the *International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis* indicated that in 84% of anxiety cases, hypnosis treatment resulted in at least some improvement. The study also concluded that “Hypnosis was more effective in reducing anxiety when combined with other psychological interventions than when used as a stand-alone treatment.” (2019 study: [The Efficacy of Hypnosis as a Treatment for Anxiety: A Meta-Analysis](#))

## **To Learn More**

To learn more about anxiety, go to [Anxiety, Wikipedia](#)

To learn more about attention and focused attention go to [Attention, Wikipedia](#)

Here is a CBT therapy “writing about” example:

1. **Writing about how you became aware of an event:** Yikes! a bee landed on my picnic table.
2. **Writing about what you *thought* immediately after becoming aware:** The bee could sting me and I could have an allergic reaction causing breathing difficulty. (As a child it was hard for me to breathe in the presence of hay and dry grasses. Once, while leaning against a hay bail and experiencing breathing difficulty, I was also stung by a bee.)
3. **Writing about how you *felt* in response to your immediate thoughts:** terrified

4. **If your immediate thoughts were not based on fact, you can rewrite them so that they are based on fact:** I'm unlikely to have a strong breathing reaction, I'm concerned but not terrified.
5. **If the rewritten thoughts do not help you to achieve any of your personal goals, you can rewrite them so they'll help achieve one or more goals:** well, they do help achieve my goals of staying alive and not feeling frightened.
6. **If the rewritten thoughts do not help you feel the way you want to feel, you can rewrite them to help you feel the way you want to feel:** I could learn more about allergic reaction to bee stings, which might lead to easing my level of concern.

To learn more about CBT training for therapists, look at

Treating Worry and

Generalized Anxiety: A Cognitive-Behavioral Approach

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National Association of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapists

[www.nacbt.org](http://www.nacbt.org)

To learn more about cognitive restructuring go to [cognitive restructuring, Wikipedia](#)

To learn more about efficacy and effectiveness go to [Efficacy, Wikipedia](#).

To learn more about fear go to [Fear, Wikipedia](#)

To learn more about an example use of hypnosis in combination with other treatments go to [Psychology Today, Alexandra A. Bley](#)

To learn more about the prefix meta go to [Meta \(prefix\), Wikipedia](#)

To learn more about meta-analysis go to [meta-analysis, Wikipedia](#)

To learn more about peripheral awareness go to [peripheral awareness, Wikipedia](#)