

# STRESS RELIEF



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the document

Across the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused an  
increased amount of stress that has been  
proven to be hard to handle.

These are unprecedented times and everyone is learning ways  
to stay healthy, mind and body.

This packet will provide you with resources, tips, and  
new ways to reset and feel more like yourself.



A GUIDE TO HELP YOU COPE  
[WWW.HIA-CT.ORG](http://WWW.HIA-CT.ORG)

# Resources

For some specific resources within our community, please refer to the links below to help invest in yourself.



## **HIA: Health Improvement Alliance**

*Information on local resources including Covid-19, food, wellness tips, and much more!*

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## **The Hub - 2021 Mental Health and Substance Use Public and Nonprofit Resources**

Fairfield - Bridgeport - Stratford & Surrounding



## **The Hub - Free Peer Support Groups for Behavioral Health in Southwest Connecticut (for individuals & families)**

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## **All Recovery Zoom Meetings**

*Interested in attending any recovery meeting via zoom*



## **211 Connecticut**

*Suicide prevention and mental health assistance and support on mental care*

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## **NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Health**

*Learn more about signs and symptoms of mental illnesses and how to get treatment and resources*



## WORKING FROM HOME

Posture and  
Stretching



Staying  
Productive



## HELPING OTHERS

Children



Dealing with  
Uncertainty



## MENTAL HEALTH

Meditation



Breathing



Self-Care



## BODY WELLNESS

Physical Activity



Nutrition



# Mental Health

## Free Apps To Download



**Nike Training Club**  
Free Workouts / Guided Exercises



**Calm**  
Daily Meditation Guides



**Lists To Do**  
To Do Lists, Tasks and Reminders



**5 Minute Yoga App**  
Free Yoga Flows



**Headspace**  
Meditation and Sleep



**5 Minute Yoga App**  
Free Yoga Flows



**Reflectly**  
Journaling, mood tracking and daily quotes



"If you want to  
conquer the  
anxiety of life,  
live in the  
moment, live in  
the breath."  
- Amit Ray

# The Meditation Manual

by Shaman Redwood

*“Peace comes from within. Do not seek it without.” the Buddha*

This simple guide will de-mystify the art of **Mindfulness Meditation** and provide clear instructions to establish your own daily practice.

*“What is Meditation and why should I try it?”*

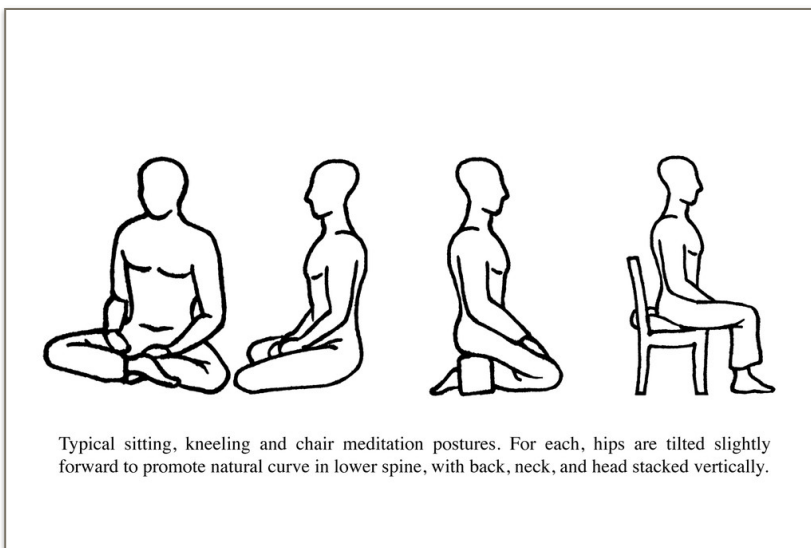
**Meditation is a cognitive training exercise** developed over three and half thousand years ago to cultivate a joyful mind. The benefits include **tranquility, powerful concentration, and freedom from depression or anxiety**. Meditation can be intimidating, but it’s actually easier than you think. Even doctors and therapists are now prescribing meditation as an effective treatment for mental health issues.

*“When & where should I meditate?”*

**Find a quiet time and place** where you won’t be bothered. A cool, dark room in-doors is ideal. **Set a timer**. Beginners can start with 10 to 20 minute sessions. Morning is ideal, but you can meditate in the evening or any other time of day too. Avoid meditating two hours after eating.

*“How do I sit during meditation?”*

- ☼ **Sit comfortably** with your body upright and your back straight, without leaning forward, backward, or to either side.
- ☼ You can sit cross-legged or kneeling on the floor with a pillow or bench, or sit in a chair—**choose whichever is the most relaxed posture for you**.
- ☼ **Meditation is not an endurance contest**, so do not force yourself to sit in an uncomfortable posture.
- ☼ However, **avoid lying down** for your daily practice, or else you’ll experience drowsiness and fall asleep.
- ☼ **Feel free to move** or adjust positions throughout your meditation session, just **move in slow motion** with mindfulness of your movements.
- ☼ **Rest your hands** palms up on your knees or in your lap, letting your **arms and shoulders relax**.



*“How do I begin a meditation session?”*

- ☼ **Close your eyes.**
- ☼ **Take a long, deep breath** through the nose, hold the breath for a few seconds and then exhale through the mouth until the lungs are empty. **Repeat** for at least three cycles.
- ☼ As you take these deep breaths, consciously **relax the body**, dropping the shoulders away from the ears.
- ☼ **Resume normal breathing.**
- ☼ **Count the next 10 in-breaths**, without rushing or trying to control the breath.

*“So what am I actually **doing** during meditation?”*

Here’s the technique in a nutshell: ***Pay attention to your breath until you notice you’ve become distracted; congratulate yourself for noticing the distraction and then gently guide your attention back to the breath; repeat until the timer is up.***

Let’s take the process step-by-step:

- ☼ **Rest your attention on the breath.** You can observe the breath at the nose, in the chest, in the belly, or all three at once. Choose whichever of these options is easiest for you and work with that as your meditation object. Observe the breath as you inhale. Observe the breath as you exhale. Observe the pauses between breaths. You’re not looking for anything unusual here, just observe the normal sensations of breath entering and exiting the body.
- ☼ **Do not suppress your thoughts or emotions**, because doing so will only agitate your mind. Instead, ***let your thoughts and emotions arise as normal, but let them remain in the background*** while your attention rests on the breath.
- ☼ Eventually, ***your attention will forget the breath and begin mind-wandering***, likely distracted by thoughts, emotions, or physical sensations. Pro-tip: that’s okay! In fact, it’s inevitable. When you notice your attention has forgotten the breath, there is no need for frustration or guilt, though this reaction is common.
- ☼ At some point during mind-wandering, you will experience an, “Aha!” moment ***when you realize your attention has forgotten the breath***. Instead of reacting with frustration, ***congratulate yourself for remembering***. Give yourself a moment of pride for successfully catching the mind-wandering.
- ☼ Then gently and patiently ***guide your attention back to the breath***, and continue observing the breath as before.
- ☼ In this manner, ***continue attending to the breath*** while keeping an eye out for those “Aha!” moments. As soon as you notice your attention is mind-wandering, congratulate yourself for noticing and then gently re-direct your attention back to the breath, and ***start again***.
- ☼ **Repeat** this process until the timer is up.

The actual technique of meditation is quite simple, but not necessarily easy. Notice we are *not* trying to stop thinking. We are just noticing when the mind is distracted and continuously

redirecting our attention to the breath. Each time your attention wanders away from the breath and you gently bring it back, ***you are subtly strengthening your control over the mind and carving new neural pathways in your brain.***

*“What’s so special about the breath?”*

We observe the breath during meditation because ***physical sensations like breathing are the gateway to the present moment.*** The breath is always happening right now, unlike thoughts or emotions which usually dwell on past or future. ***So the simplest way to be present in the current moment is to focus on the physical sensations of the breath.*** Since the breath is always with you, you can take your practice everywhere you go. Meditating on the breath effectively reduces anxiety or depression when deployed in daily life, outside of your regular sitting practice.

*“So how does meditation help with my mood?”*

Use this simple technique to regulate your mood, even when you’re not sitting in meditation. As anxiety or depression arises throughout your day, ***rest your attention on the breath even while walking, driving, or performing daily tasks.*** Also pause regularly for a mindful moment:

- ☼ ***Stop*** whatever you’re doing.
- ☼ Sit or stand up with a ***straight back.***
- ☼ ***Close your eyes.***
- ☼ Rest your ***attention on the breath.***
- ☼ ***Take three, long, deep breaths,*** inhaling through the nose and exhaling through the mouth.

Often, simply paying attention to the breath is enough to dispel any anxiety or depression. Remember that the breath and the mind are connected. When the mind is agitated, the breath speeds up and shortens. When the mind is calm, the breath slows down and lengthens. Therefore, you can control the mind by controlling the breath.

When you feel anxiety or depression arising, ***deliberately lengthening and deepening the breath will trigger a sense of calm.*** In this manner, you can combat negative thoughts and emotions at any time and place.

*“Can meditation help me sleep?”*

Yes; you can use mindfulness meditation to sleep better. Just lie flat on your back with your eyes closed, and take three long, deep breaths while relaxing the whole body. Then focus your attention softly on the breath. Don’t worry about when sleep will come, just know that your body is already resting in this position. Drowsiness will eventually arise and you can simply surrender to it when it comes.



*“But how do I establish a **consistent** daily practice?”*

- ☼ **Meditate at the same time each day**, as a set schedule makes it much easier.
- ☼ **Remind yourself why** you want to practice, whether it's for happiness, better performance at work, or spiritual advancement.
- ☼ When you feel resistance to meditating for your usual duration, **practice for a shorter duration rather than skipping the session altogether**.
- ☼ Start with a number of days per week that feels comfortable, and then **gradually increase** the number of days per week as you feel ready for the next challenge.
- ☼ **Be patient** with yourself and approach the practice joyfully. Take it one day at a time and avoid making arbitrary deadlines for yourself.

*“How can I measure my progress?”*

You can measure your progress over time by noting how much of each meditation session is spent with the breath as opposed to mind-wandering. With practice, you will notice that time spent mind-wandering gradually decreases and time spent actually observing the breath increases. As the balance tips in the favor of the meditation object and away from mind-wandering, thoughts and emotions naturally fade out of awareness altogether, replaced by an abiding calm, tranquility and clarity of mind.

*“How can I meditate for longer durations?”*

Eventually, you will want to extend the time of each meditation session. 10 to 20 minutes is suitable for beginners, especially before a consistent daily practice is established. Once a daily practice is routine, then gradually extend the duration of each session. Only extend by a few minutes, and once that additional time feels comfortably routine, only then should you extend another few minutes. In this manner, you can gradually extend the duration of your meditation sessions until you are sitting comfortably for 45 minutes to an hour.

You may take months or even years to reach that level of practice, and that's okay. How fast you advance is not important, **what matters is that you are enjoying your practice in a comfortable manner**. You cannot make a flower bloom faster by force, only with love and patience.

*“How hard should I work to advance my practice?”*

Your meditation practice should not be one of extreme exertion, or else you will end up dreading your sessions. Do not let meditation become just another chore you feel obligated to do.

**Remember that meditation is your chance to enjoy some quiet solitude and to disengage from the stresses and rigors of daily life.** Through a daily meditation practice, you can cultivate the ability to dwell constantly in tranquility and peace whenever and wherever you are, regardless of what's happening outside of you.



# Breathing Exercises

Paying attention to how we breathe can often be overlooked because it's completely automatic. However, becoming aware of and incorporating breathing exercises into our daily routine has many benefits, including promoting calmness, increasing focus, and performing your best.

## Breathing Breaks

*Several times a day, take breathing breaks to help refresh your energy, let go of distractions, and increase focus.*

- Stand and take a deep breath while your raising arms slowly over your head.
- Exhale as you lower your arms. Repeat 3 times.

## Paced Breathing

*Paced Breathing is a technique that can help to activate stress reduction mechanisms in the body by promoting a harmonious state between your respiration system and your heart.*

- The basic technique is to inhale for a count of 2-4 seconds and exhale for a count of 4-6 seconds. Find the combination that works for you, making sure to exhale longer than you inhale.
- Focus your attention on a specific object, image, sound or even your breath to free your mind from distractions.
- Begin by taking a normal breath and then take a deep breath. Breathe in slowly through your nose, letting your chest and lower belly expand. Breathe out slowly through your mouth, pursing your lips and making a swoosh sound.
- If your mind wanders, gently redirect your focus back to the counting and breathing.
- Using a breathing app in the beginning can help serve as a breathing coach. Eventually, the paced breathing will become second nature.

### Free Paced Breathing Apps:

iPhone:  
*Breathe Deep*

Android:  
*Paced Breathing*

## Abdominal Breathing Technique

*This technique can help create a feeling of calm composure, renewed energy, and focus.*

- While sitting, with one hand on the chest and the other on the belly, take a deep breath in through the nose, ensuring the diaphragm (not the chest) inflates with enough air to create a stretch in the lungs.
- Exhale slowly through pursed lips. Initially repeat 3 times. You can work up to 6-10 deep, slow breaths per minute for 2-3 minutes.



**Be Well at Work**

*Faculty/Staff Health Programs*

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[uhs.berkeley.edu/bewellatwork](https://uhs.berkeley.edu/bewellatwork)

# Breathing Exercises (continued)

## 4-4-8 Breathing

*The 4-4-8 Breathing technique is great to use when you feel stressed or tense because it can help to calm the nervous system, clear the head of distractions and reduce stress.*

- While sitting, breathe in through your nose for a count of 4, taking the breath into your stomach.
- Hold your breath for a count of 4.
- Release your breath through your mouth with a whooshing sound for a count of 8.
- Without a break, breathe in again for a count of 4, repeating the entire technique 3-4 times in a row.
- Focus on counting when breathing in, holding the breath, and breathing out.

## Simple Yoga Breathing

*Yoga breathing is relaxing and can be used anytime to help with a relaxation response, including when stretching during yoga.*

- Sit or lie down comfortably, resting your hands below your navel.
- Tune in to the way you breathe. Inhale and exhale naturally through your nose for a few minutes, noticing the slight rise and fall of your hands. Consider the way the air feels as it enters and exits your nostrils.
- Start to count silently forward (1, 2, 3...), then backward (... 3, 2, 1) as you breathe in and out.
- Gradually make each exhalation twice as long as each inhalation. Focus on breathing slowly and smoothly, humming each time you exhale. The slight vibration can be very soothing.

## Laugh

*It's true what they say – laughter really is the best medicine. A hearty chuckle can stimulate circulation and soothe tension. Laughter also increases endorphins released by the brain and produces a relaxed feeling.*

- Surround yourself with a few items that make you laugh – a funny cartoon, funny photos, or a fun toy.
- Share stories with co-workers. A willingness to laugh at yourself sometimes can also serve as a good reminder not to take life so seriously, which can do wonders for your stress level.

*Note: Individuals can sometimes experience dizziness when practicing breathing exercises. With practice, dizziness usually goes away. If holding the breath or any part of the breathing exercise feels uncomfortable, reduce it down to just a few seconds.*



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# Self-Care Tips

**Self-care means taking time to do things you enjoy.** Usually, self-care involves everyday activities that you find relaxing, fun, or energizing. These activities could be as simple as reading a book, or as big as taking a vacation.

**Self-care also means taking care of yourself.** This means eating regular meals, getting enough sleep, caring for personal hygiene, and anything else that maintains good health.

**Make self-care a priority.** There will always be other things to do, but don't let these interrupt the time you set aside for self-care. Self-care should be given the same importance as other responsibilities.

**Set specific self-care goals.** It's difficult to follow through with vague goals, such as "I will take more time for self-care". Instead, try something specific, such as "I will walk for 30 minutes every evening after dinner".

**Make self-care a habit.** Just like eating one apple doesn't eliminate health problems, using self-care just once won't have much effect on reducing stress. Choose activities that you can do often, and that you will stick with.

**Set boundaries to protect your self-care.** You don't need a major obligation to say "no" to others—your self-care is reason enough. Remind yourself that your needs are as important as anyone else's.

**A few minutes of self-care is better than no self-care.** Set an alarm reminding you to take regular breaks, even if it's just a walk around the block, or an uninterrupted snack. Oftentimes, stepping away will energize you to work more efficiently when you return.

**Unhealthy activities don't count as self-care.** Substance use, over-eating, and other unhealthy behaviors might hide uncomfortable emotions temporarily, but they cause more problems in the long run.

**Keep up with self-care, even when you're feeling good.** Doing so will keep you in a healthy routine. Plus, self-care might be part of the reason *why* you're feeling good!

# My Anxiety Game Plan

## Part One: Recognizing Anxiety

Sometimes, I feel anxious when... \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

This is what I experience in my body when I feel anxious: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

These are the thoughts I have when feel anxious: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Part Two: Dealing with Anxiety

When I feel anxious, these are the people I can talk to: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

I can make sure my parents know when I'm feeling anxious by: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

When I feel anxious, these are ways I can help my body become calm:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_

When I feel anxious, these are ways I can help my mind find balance:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_

When I feel anxious, this is what my parents can do to help me feel calm:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_

## Part Three: Challenging Anxiety

**When I feel anxious, is there an action I can take to help the source of my anxiety go away** (like studying if I am concerned about my grades)?

**If so, what can I do to make this action easier to accomplish?** Some ideas could include breaking large tasks into smaller, achievable goals or creating a peaceful environment where it's easier to get work done.

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**Sometimes, anxiety tricks us into believing things that are not true. Write down a few things that ARE true that can help you feel calm when anxiety tries to trick you.** Some examples could include, "One bad grade doesn't mean I'm not smart," or "I have friends who care about me and enjoy spending time with me."

1. 

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2. 

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3. 

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# ON OUR SLEEVES<sup>®</sup>

The Movement for Children's Mental Health

# Dealing with Uncertainty

**Life is filled with uncertainty and worries about the future. While many things remain outside your control, your mindset is key to coping with difficult circumstances and confidently facing the unknown.**



## The role of uncertainty in life

Uncertainty is all around us, never more so than today. Whether it concerns a global pandemic, the economy, or your finances, health, and relationships, much of what lies ahead in life remains uncertain. Yet as human beings, we crave security. We want to feel safe and have a sense of control over our lives and well-being. Fear and uncertainty can leave you feeling stressed, anxious, and powerless over the direction of your life. It can drain you emotionally and trap you in a downward spiral of endless “what-ifs” and worst-case scenarios about what tomorrow may bring.

We’re all different in how much uncertainty we can tolerate in life. Some people seem to enjoy taking risks and living unpredictable lives, while others find the randomness of life deeply distressing. But all of us have a limit. If you feel overwhelmed by uncertainty and worry, it’s important to know that you’re not alone; many of us are in the same boat. It’s also important to realize that no matter how helpless and hopeless you feel, there are steps you can take to **[better deal with uncontrollable circumstances](#)**, alleviate your anxiety, and face the unknown with more confidence.

# Learning to cope with uncertainty

While we may not wish to acknowledge it, uncertainty is a natural and unavoidable part of life. Very little about our lives is constant or totally certain, and while we have control over many things, we can't control everything that happens to us. As the coronavirus pandemic demonstrated, life can change very quickly and very unpredictably. One day things may be just fine, the next you've suddenly become sick, lost your job, or found yourself [struggling to put food on the table](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/coping-with-financial-stress.htm) or provide for your family.

To cope with all this uncertainty, many of us [use worrying as a tool](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/anxiety/how-to-stop-worrying.htm) for trying to predict the future and avoid nasty surprises. Worrying can make it seem like you have some control over uncertain circumstances. You may believe that it will help you find a solution to your problems or prepare you for the worst. Maybe if you just agonize over a problem long enough, just think through every possibility, or read every opinion online, you'll find a solution and be able to control the outcome. Unfortunately, none of this works. Chronic worrying can't give you more control over uncontrollable events; it just robs you of enjoyment in the present, saps your energy, and keeps you up at night. But there are healthier ways to cope with uncertainty—and that begins with adjusting your mindset.

*Read: [How to Stop Worrying](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/anxiety/how-to-stop-worrying.htm)*

The following tips can help you to:

- Focus on controlling those things that are under your control.
- Challenge your need for certainty.
- Learn to better tolerate, even embrace, the inevitable uncertainty of life.
- Reduce your anxiety and stress levels.

## Tip 1: Take action over the things you can control

Much about life is uncertain at the moment—and many things remain outside of your control. But while you can't control the spread of a virus, the recovery of the economy, or whether you'll have a paycheck next week, you're not totally powerless. Whatever your fears or personal circumstances, instead of worrying about the uncontrollable, try to refocus your mind on taking action over the aspects that are within your control.



For example, if you've [lost your job or income](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/job-loss-and-unemployment-stress.htm) during this difficult time, you still have control over how much energy you put into searching online for work, sending out resumes, or [networking with your contacts](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/relationships-communication/job-networking-tips.htm). Similarly, if you're worried about your health or a recent diagnosis, for example, you can still take action by lowering your stress levels, reaching out to loved ones for support, and managing your symptoms.

By focusing on the aspects of a problem that you can control in this way, you'll switch from ineffective worrying and ruminating into active problem solving. Of course, all circumstances are different and you may find that in some situations all you can control is your attitude and emotional response.

*Read: [Coping with a Life-Threatening Illness or Serious Health Event](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/grief/coping-with-a-life-threatening-illness.htm)*

## Actively deal with your emotions

When circumstances are out of your control, it's easy to become overwhelmed by fear and negative emotions. You may think that bottling up how you feel, trying to put on a brave face, or forcing yourself to be positive will provide the best outcome. But denying or suppressing your emotions will only increase stress and anxiety and make you more vulnerable to depression or [burnout](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/burnout-prevention-and-recovery.htm).

When you can do nothing else about a situation, you can still actively [face up to your emotions](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/mental-health/emotional-intelligence-eq.htm)—even the most negative and fearful ones. Allowing yourself to experience uncertainty in this way can help you reduce stress, better come to terms with your circumstances, and find a sense of peace as you deal with challenges.

## Tip 2: Challenge your need for certainty

While uncertainty and change are inescapable parts of life, we often adopt behaviors to try to cope with the discomfort they can bring. In addition to [worrying through every possible scenario](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/anxiety/how-to-stop-worrying.htm), you may:

**Excessively seek reassurance from others.** You repeatedly ask friends or loved ones if you're making the right decision, endlessly research information online, or seek out expert advice in an effort to remove uncertainty from your life.

**Micromanage people.** You refuse to delegate tasks to others, either at work or home. You may even try to force people around you to change, to make their behavior more predictable for you.

**Procrastinate.** By not making decisions, you hope to avoid the uncertainty that inevitably follows. You'll find ways to delay or postpone acting—or even avoid certain situations all together—in an attempt to prevent bad things from happening.

**Repeatedly check things.** You call or text your family, friends, or kids again and again to make sure they're safe. You check and re-check emails, texts, or forms before sending, double-check lists to ensure you haven't missed anything that could have repercussions on the predictability of the future.

## How to challenge these behaviors

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You can challenge the behaviors you've adopted to alleviate the discomfort of uncertainty by asking yourself the following questions:

### 1. What are the advantages of certainty? What are the disadvantages?

Life can change in a moment and it is filled with unexpected events and surprises—but that's not always a bad thing. For every unpleasant surprise, such as a traffic accident or [serious medical diagnosis](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/grief/coping-with-a-life-threatening-illness.htm) (<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/grief/coping-with-a-life-threatening-illness.htm>), there are good things that happen out of the blue as well—a dream job offer, a surprise pay rise, or an unexpected phone call from an old friend. Opportunity often arises from the unexpected and having to face uncertainty in life can also help you learn to adapt, overcome challenges, and [increase your resiliency](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/surviving-tough-times.htm) (<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/surviving-tough-times.htm>). It can help you to grow as a person.

### 2. How much can you be absolutely certain about in life?

Does anyone have a job for life, a guarantee of good health, or absolute certainty over what tomorrow will bring? Behaviors such as worrying, micromanaging, and procrastinating offer the illusion of having some control over a situation, but what do they change in reality? The truth is no matter how much you try to plan and prepare for every possible outcome, life will find a way of surprising you. All striving for certainty really does is fuel worry and anxiety.

### 3. Do you assume bad things will happen just because an outcome is uncertain?

What is the likelihood they will? When you're faced with uncertainty, it's easy to overestimate the likelihood of something bad happening—and underestimate your ability to cope if it does. But given that the likelihood of something bad happening is low, even in these precarious times, is it possible to live with that small chance and focus instead on the more likely outcomes? Ask your friends and family how they cope with uncertainty in specific circumstances. Could you do the same?

By challenging your need for certainty, you can begin to let go of negative behaviors, reduce stress and worry, and free up time and energy for more practical purposes.

## Tip 3: Learn to accept uncertainty

No matter how much you strive to eliminate doubt and volatility from your life, the truth is you already accept a lot of uncertainty every day. Each time you cross a street, get behind the wheel of a car, or eat takeout or restaurant food you're accepting a level of uncertainty. You're trusting that the traffic will stop, you won't have an accident, and everything you're eating is safe.

The chances of something bad happening in these circumstances is small, so you accept the risk and move on without requiring certainty. If you're religious, you also likely accept some doubt and uncertainty as part of your faith.

When **irrational fears** (<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/anxiety/phobias-and-irrational-fears.htm>) and worries take hold, it can be hard to think logically and accurately weigh up the probability of something bad happening. To help you become more tolerant and accepting of uncertainty, the following steps can help:

**Identify your uncertainty triggers.** A lot of uncertainty tends to be self-generated, through excessive worrying or a pessimistic outlook, for example. However, some uncertainty can be generated by external sources, especially at times like this. Reading media stories that focus on worst-case scenarios, spending time on **social media** (<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/mental-health/social-media-and-mental-health.htm>) amid rumors and half-truths, or simply communicating with anxious friends can all fuel your own fears and uncertainties. That's the reason why so many people start panic buying when bad news breaks—they see others doing it and it feeds their own fears. By recognizing your triggers, you can take action to avoid or reduce your exposure to them.

**Recognize when you feel the need for certainty.** Notice when you start to feel anxious and fearful about a situation, begin to worry about what-ifs, or feel like a situation is far worse than it actually is. Look for the physical cues that you're feeling anxious. You might notice the tension in your neck or shoulders, shortness of breath, the onset of a headache, or an empty feeling in your stomach. Take a moment to pause and recognize that you're craving reassurance or a guarantee.

**Read:** [Anxiety Disorders and Anxiety Attacks](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/anxiety/anxiety-disorders-and-anxiety-attacks.htm) (<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/anxiety/anxiety-disorders-and-anxiety-attacks.htm>)

**Allow yourself to feel the uncertainty.** Instead of engaging in futile efforts to gain control over the uncontrollable, let yourself experience the discomfort of uncertainty. Like all emotions, if you allow yourself to feel fear and uncertainty, they will eventually pass. Focus on the present moment and your breathing and allow yourself to simply feel and observe the uncertainty you're experiencing. Take some slow, deep breaths or try a [meditation](https://www.helpguide.org/home-ages/audio-meditations.htm) (<https://www.helpguide.org/home-ages/audio-meditations.htm>) to keep you anchored in the present.

[Listen to HelpGuide's Coping with Uncertainty meditation.](https://www.helpguide.org/meditations/coping-with-uncertainty-meditation.htm)  
(<https://www.helpguide.org/meditations/coping-with-uncertainty-meditation.htm>)

**Let go.** Respond to the what-ifs running through your head by acknowledging that you're not a fortune teller; you don't know what will happen. All you can do is let go and accept the uncertainty as part of life.

**Shift your attention.** Focus on solvable worries, taking action on those aspects of a problem that you can control, or simply go back to what you were doing. When your mind wanders back to worrying or the feelings of uncertainty return, refocus your mind on the present moment and your own breathing.

### **Accepting uncertainty doesn't mean not having a plan**

Accepting uncertainty doesn't mean you shouldn't have a plan for some of life's unforeseen circumstances. It's always good to have some savings put by in case of unexpected expenses, keep a preparedness kit handy if you live in an area at risk for earthquakes or hurricanes, or have a plan if you or a loved one falls ill. But you can't prepare for every possible scenario. Life is simply too random and unpredictable.

## **Tip 4: Focus on the present**

Uncertainty is often centered on worries about the future and all the bad things you can anticipate happening. It can leave you feeling hopeless and [depressed](https://www.helpguide.org/home-pages/depression.htm) (<https://www.helpguide.org/home-pages/depression.htm>) about the days ahead, exaggerate the scope of the problems you face, and even paralyze you from taking action to overcome a problem.

One of the surest ways to avoid worrying about the future is to focus on the present. Instead of trying to predict what might happen, switch your attention to what's happening right now. By being fully connected to the present, you can interrupt the negative assumptions and catastrophic predictions running through your mind.

You can learn to purposely focus your attention on the present through [mindfulness](https://www.helpguide.org/harvard/benefits-of-mindfulness.htm) (<https://www.helpguide.org/harvard/benefits-of-mindfulness.htm>). With regular practice, mindfulness can help change your preoccupation with future worries to a stronger appreciation of the present moment—as well as help calm your mind, ease stress, and boost your overall mood.

You can start a mindfulness practice by following an [audio meditation](https://www.helpguide.org/home-pages/audio-meditations.htm) (<https://www.helpguide.org/home-pages/audio-meditations.htm>) or incorporating it into an exercise program, such as [walking](https://www.helpguide.org/harvard/how-to-start-a-walking-program.htm) (<https://www.helpguide.org/harvard/how-to-start-a-walking-program.htm>). Using mindfulness to stay focused on the present can take perseverance. Initially, you may find that your focus keeps wandering back to your future fears and worries—but keep at it. Each time you focus your attention back on the present, you’re strengthening a new mental habit that can help you break free of uncertainty.

## Tip 5: Manage stress and anxiety

Taking steps to reduce your overall stress and anxiety levels can help you interrupt the downward spiral of negative thoughts, find inner calm, and better cope with the uncertainty in your life.

**Get moving.** [Exercise is a natural and effective stress-reliever and anti-anxiety treatment](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/healthy-living/the-mental-health-benefits-of-exercise.htm) (<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/healthy-living/the-mental-health-benefits-of-exercise.htm>). Try adding a mindfulness element and focusing on how your body feels as you move. Pay attention to the sensation of your feet hitting the ground as you walk, run, or dance, for example, or the rhythm of your breathing, or the feeling of the sun or wind on your skin.

**Make time for relaxation.** Choose a [relaxation technique](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/relaxation-techniques-for-stress-relief.htm) (<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/relaxation-techniques-for-stress-relief.htm>) such as meditation, yoga, or [deep breathing](https://www.helpguide.org/meditations/deep-breathing-meditation.htm) (<https://www.helpguide.org/meditations/deep-breathing-meditation.htm>) exercises and try to set aside time each day for regular practice.

**Get plenty of sleep.** Excessive worry and uncertainty can disturb your sleep—just as a lack of quality, sleep can fuel anxiety and stress. Improving your daytime habits and taking time to relax and unwind before bed can help you to [sleep better at night](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/sleep/getting-better-sleep.htm) (<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/sleep/getting-better-sleep.htm>).

**Eat a healthy diet.** [Eating healthy meals](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/healthy-eating/healthy-eating.htm) (<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/healthy-eating/healthy-eating.htm>) can help maintain your energy levels and prevent mood swings. Avoid sugary and processed foods and try to add more omega-3 fats—from salmon, walnuts, soybeans, and flaxseeds—to give your overall mood a boost.

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