

100 Ways to Stop Stress

Science-backed tools for stress and anxiety: for the office, the 3am wake-up, the anxious gut, and everything in between.

FENICE HEALTH

A NOTE BEFORE YOU START

Anxiety isn't a flaw.
It's an alarm stuck on.

Your nervous system was built to keep you alive. When it senses a threat (a deadline, a tense message, a 3am thought), it speeds up your heart, tightens your muscles, and pauses your digestion. Helpful when you're being chased. Exhausting when it never switches off.

The good news: the alarm can be turned down. Not by thinking your way out of it, but by sending your body signals of safety, again and again, until it believes them.

This guide gives you 100 of those signals, each one specific, practical and, where possible, backed by research you can look up yourself.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

1. **Don't try all 100.** Skim the chapters and tick the ones that feel doable.
2. **Pick 3.** One for panic moments, one for sleep, one daily habit.
3. **Practise when you're calm,** so the tool is there when you're not.
4. **Give each one 2 weeks** before deciding whether it works for you.

This guide is general information, not medical advice. If anxiety is affecting your daily life, please speak to a doctor or therapist (see page 25).

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SHORT ON TIME?

Start with these 14.

If you only try a handful, try these. They're the fastest to learn, the best researched, or the ones people tell us make the biggest difference.

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CHAPTER 01

In 60 seconds

When anxiety spikes and you need your body to come down now.

1

The physiological sigh 30 SEC START HERE

Two inhales through the nose (a full one, then a short top-up), then one long, slow exhale through the mouth. Repeat 1–3 times.

↳ Balban et al., Stanford, 2023: 5 min a day of this 'cyclic sighing' improved mood more than mindfulness meditation. [1]

2

Cold water on your face 30 SEC START HERE

Hold your breath and splash or dip your face in cold water for 15–30 seconds. It triggers the dive reflex, which slows your heart rate.

↳ Part of the 'TIPP' skills in DBT (Marsha Linehan). [2]

3

5-4-3-2-1 grounding 1 MIN

Name 5 things you see, 4 you can touch, 3 you hear, 2 you smell, 1 you taste. It pulls attention out of the spiral and into the room.

4

Name it to tame it 10 SEC

Say, out loud or in your head: "I'm feeling anxious." Putting a feeling into words lowers activity in the brain's alarm centre.

↳ Lieberman et al., UCLA, 2007 ('affect labeling'). [3]

SKIP THE GUESSWORK

Don't test 100. Find your 5.

Fenice Reset sends one body-first tool a day for 30 days, then helps you build your own routine.

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5

Widen your gaze 30 SEC

Soften your eyes until you can see the edges of the room without moving them. Tunnel vision goes with alarm; wide vision signals safety.

6

Push the wall 20 SEC

Press both palms hard against a wall for 10 seconds, then let go completely. Feel the release in your arms and chest.

7

The butterfly hug 1 MIN

Cross your arms over your chest and tap your shoulders left-right, slowly, while you breathe.

↳ Developed by Lucina Artigas for EMDR therapy. [4]

8

Hand on heart 1 MIN

Place a warm hand on your chest, feel it rise and fall, and breathe slower than the feeling.

↳ A 'soothing touch' practice from Kristin Neff's self-compassion work. [5]

9

Sip ice-cold water 1 MIN

Slowly, noticing the cold all the way down. A strong, neutral sensation gives your mind something to hold.

10

Count back from 100 in 7s 1 MIN

100, 93, 86… It keeps your working memory too busy to keep feeding the worry.

CHAPTER 02

Breathe

Your breath is the only part of your nervous system you can steer on purpose.

11 Box breathing 2 MIN

In 4, hold 4, out 4, hold 4. Five rounds.

↳ Taught to US Navy SEALs (look up: Mark Divine). [6]

12 4-7-8 breathing 2 MIN

In through the nose for 4, hold for 7, out through the mouth for 8. Four rounds, sitting or lying down.

↳ Look up: Dr. Andrew Weil. [7]

13 The long exhale 3 MIN START HERE

Breathe in for 4, out for 6–8. A longer exhale than inhale nudges you into 'rest and digest'.

14 Nose-only breathing ALL DAY

Keep your mouth closed during the day, even when walking. Mouth breathing keeps you in a light alarm state.

↳ Look up: James Nestor, 'Breath'. [8]

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15 Resonance breathing 10 MIN

About 6 breaths a minute: 5 seconds in, 5 seconds out, for 10 minutes. It's the pace that maximises heart-rate variability.

↳ Look up: Paul Lehrer, HRV biofeedback. [9]

16 Book on the belly 3 MIN

Lie down with a book on your stomach and make it rise and fall. Chest breathing is stress breathing.

17 The 'voo' sound 2 MIN START HERE

On a long exhale, make a low 'voooo' like a foghorn, deep enough to feel it in your belly. 5–10 times.

↳ Look up: Peter Levine, 'In an Unspoken Voice'. [10]

18 Alternate-nostril breathing 5 MIN

Close the right nostril, breathe in left; close the left, breathe out right; switch. Five minutes.

↳ A yoga practice called Nadi Shodhana.

19 Wim Hof breathing 10 MIN

30 fast, full breaths through the nose, exhale and hold on empty, then one deep breath and hold 15 sec. Three rounds, lying down. Never in water or while driving.

↳ Kox et al., 2014 (Radboud University, PNAS). [11]

20 Count your breaths 5 MIN

Count each exhale from 1 to 10, then start again. When you lose count, start at 1, without judgment.

↳ A classic Zen practice.



CHAPTER 03

Your body

Anxiety lives in muscles as much as in thoughts. Release the body and the mind follows.

21 Progressive muscle relaxation 10 MIN START HERE

Tense each muscle group for 5 seconds, then release for 15, from your feet up to your face.

↳ Look up: Edmund Jacobson, who developed it in the 1930s. [12]

22 Shake it off 1 MIN

Stand and shake your hands, arms, legs and whole body for 60 seconds, like animals do after danger.

↳ Look up: Peter Levine, 'Waking the Tiger'. [13]

23 The jaw reset 10 SEC

Lips together, teeth apart, tongue resting on the roof of your mouth. Check it every time you check your phone.

24 Press between your brows 2 MIN

Press gently on the point between your eyebrows for 1–2 minutes while breathing slowly.

↳ The acupressure point 'Yintang', studied for anxiety before surgery. [14]

25 A 10-minute walk 10 MIN

The quickest mood reset most people have access to. Even better outside, without your phone.

26 Acupressure mat: back, neck & belly 20 MIN

Back: lie on it with knees bent, 15–20 min. Neck: rest your neck on the rolled pillow for 5 min. Belly: lie face-down on it for 5–10 min to soften a tight, crampy gut. Start with a T-shirt; the first 2 minutes sting, then warmth spreads.

↳ Look up: Shakti mat, Pranamat.

27 Weighted blanket NIGHT

Around 10% of your body weight. Deep, even pressure tells your body it's held.

↳ Ekholm et al., 2020, Karolinska Institute: better sleep in people with anxiety and depression. [15]

28 Vibroacoustic therapy 20 MIN

Lie on a mat, bed or chair that plays low-frequency sound as vibration through your body (30–120 Hz). 20 min feels like being hummed to sleep.

↳ Look up: Olav Skille (Norway), its founder. [16]

29 Massage ball: jaw, psoas, diaphragm 5 MIN START HERE

Jaw: roll a small ball on your masseter (the muscle you feel when you clench) for 1 min per side. Psoas: lie face-down with a soft ball just inside your hip bone and breathe into it for 2 min. Diaphragm: hook your fingertips or a ball gently under your lower ribs and breathe slowly.

30 A vagus nerve stimulator 15 MIN

A small device that sends a gentle electrical pulse to the vagus nerve through the ear or neck, 10–20 min a day. Research is early but growing. Check with your doctor first, especially with a heart condition.

↳ Look up: taVNS research; devices like Nurosym, Pulsetto. [17]

CHAPTER 04

Your mind

You can't stop anxious thoughts. You can change how much you believe and follow them.

31 Worry time 15 MIN START HERE

Book 15 minutes a day to worry on purpose. When a worry shows up at another time, write it down and save it for then.

↳ Look up: Thomas Borkovec, Penn State. [18]

32 Write the 'most likely' outcome 5 MIN

Under each worry, write the worst case, the best case, and the most likely case. The most likely one is usually boring.

33 Solvable or not? 2 MIN

Ask: can I do something about this right now? If yes, write the next tiny action. If no, park it.

34 "I'm having the thought that..." 30 SEC

Put this in front of the worry: "I'm having the thought that I'll fail." It creates distance between you and the thought.

↳ 'Cognitive defusion' from ACT (look up: Steven Hayes). [19]



THE FOUNDER'S STORY

Rise Again

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35 The thought record 10 MIN

Write the situation, the thought, the feeling (0–100%), the evidence for and against, and a more balanced thought.

↳ Look up: David Burns, 'Feeling Good'. [20]

36 The 10-10-10 rule 1 MIN

Will this matter in 10 minutes? In 10 months? In 10 years?

↳ Look up: Suzy Welch.

37 RAIN 5 MIN

Recognize what's happening, Allow it to be here, Investigate it gently in your body, Nurture yourself with kindness.

↳ Look up: Tara Brach. [21]

38 Get curious 2 MIN

Instead of fighting the feeling, ask: where is it in my body? Is it hot or cold, moving or still? Curiosity is incompatible with panic.

↳ Look up: Judson Brewer, 'Unwinding Anxiety'. [22]

39 "I'm excited" 10 SEC

Before a big moment, say "I'm excited" instead of "calm down". Your body's arousal is the same; the meaning changes.

↳ Alison Wood Brooks, Harvard, 2014. [23]

40 Finish the loop 10 MIN

Most 'free-floating' anxiety is unfinished business. Write down every open loop in your head, then pick one to close today.

CHAPTER 05

At work

Most adult anxiety is built between 9 and 6. Small changes to how you work add up.

41 One tab, one task 25 MIN

Work in 25-minute blocks on a single task with everything else closed.

↳ The Pomodoro technique (Francesco Cirillo). [24]

42 Batch your email ALL DAY

Check email 2–3 times a day at set times, with notifications off in between.

43 One exhale per unlock 5 SEC START HERE

Every time you unlock your phone, take one slow exhale first. Most of us hold our breath when we check a screen.

↳ Look up: Linda Stone, 'email apnea'. [25]

44 Rehearse the first 30 seconds 2 MIN

Before a meeting or presentation, say your first 30 seconds out loud. Starting is the scariest part.

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45 A 'done' list 3 MIN

At the end of the day, write what you actually finished. Your brain remembers what's missing, not what's done.

46 Walk-and-talk calls 20 MIN

Take one call a day on foot. Movement burns off stress hormones while you talk.

47 Micro-breaks 5 MIN

Stand up, look out a window or stretch for 5 minutes every 60–90 minutes.

↳ Albulescu et al., 2022 meta-analysis: micro-breaks boost energy and reduce fatigue. [26]

48 Ask "what does done look like?" 1 MIN

Vague tasks fuel anxiety. Ask your manager or client for a clear finish line.

49 Sit near daylight ALL DAY

Move your desk towards a window if you can. Light regulates your body clock and mood.

50 A shutdown ritual 5 MIN

End the day by reviewing tomorrow's list and saying "shutdown complete". Then stop checking.

↳ Look up: Cal Newport, 'Deep Work'. [27]

CHAPTER 06

Sleep & 3am

Anxiety and bad sleep feed each other. Break the loop at night and the days get easier.

51 The 5-minute to-do list

5 MIN · START HERE

Before bed, write tomorrow's to-do list. Be specific.

↳ Scullin et al., 2018, Baylor University: people fell asleep ~9 minutes faster. [28]

52 The cognitive shuffle

5 MIN · START HERE

Picture random, unrelated objects one by one: apple, bicycle, ocean, lamp... It stops your brain building stories.

↳ Look up: Luc Beaudoin, Simon Fraser University. [29]

53 The 20-minute rule

–

Awake for more than 20 minutes? Get up, go to another dim room, and only go back when sleepy.

↳ A core part of CBT for insomnia (CBT-I). [30]

54 Same wake-up time, 7 days

DAILY

Even after a bad night. A fixed wake-up time is the anchor of your body clock.

MAKE IT A HABIT

One tool a night, for 30 days.

Fenice Reset picks the next tool for you and checks in, so you keep the ones that work.

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55 **Morning daylight** 10 MIN

Get 10 minutes of outdoor light within an hour of waking. It sets you up to feel sleepy at night.

56 **Turn the clock away** –

Checking the time at 3am starts the countdown panic. Face the clock to the wall.

57 **A cool bedroom** NIGHT

Around 17–19°C. Your body needs to cool down to fall asleep.

58 **Caffeine curfew** DAILY

No caffeine within 8–10 hours of bedtime.

↳ Drake et al., 2013: caffeine taken 6 hours before bed cut sleep by an hour. [31]

59 **Skip the evening drink** NIGHT

Alcohol helps you fall asleep but fragments the second half of the night, a common cause of 3am wake-ups.

60 **A body scan in bed** 15 MIN

Move your attention slowly from toes to head, relaxing each part. Try a 'yoga nidra' or 'NSDR' audio.



CHAPTER 07

Your gut

Your gut and brain are wired together through the vagus nerve. Calm one and you calm the other.

---

61 **Eat sitting, slowly, no screens** EVERY MEAL

Digestion only works well in 'rest and digest'. Eating while stressed or scrolling keeps you out of it.

---

62 **5 breaths before you eat** 30 SEC

Five slow breaths with a long exhale before the first bite.

---

63 **Gut-directed hypnotherapy** 15 MIN/DAY START HERE

One of the best-researched treatments for IBS, done with a therapist or an app.

↳ Look up: Prof. Peter Whorwell, Manchester; the Nerva app. [32]

---

64 **Walk after meals** 10 MIN

10–15 minutes of easy walking after eating helps digestion and blood sugar.

65 **Low-FODMAP (with a dietitian)** WEEKS

A short elimination-and-reintroduction plan to find your trigger foods, not a forever diet.

↳ Developed at Monash University. [33]

66 **Fermented foods daily** DAILY

Yoghurt, kefir, kimchi, sauerkraut.

↳ Wastyk et al., 2021, Stanford: raised microbiome diversity and lowered inflammation markers. [34]

67 **30 plants a week** WEEKLY

Count different vegetables, fruits, grains, nuts, seeds, herbs and spices. Diversity feeds a diverse gut.

↳ The American Gut Project (McDonald et al., 2018). [35]

68 **Peppermint oil capsules** AS NEEDED

Enteric-coated capsules can ease IBS cramps. Check with your doctor or pharmacist first.

69 **A symptom diary** 2 MIN/DAY

For 2 weeks, log food, stress, sleep and symptoms. The patterns are often stress, not food.

70 **Heat on the belly** 15 MIN

A hot-water bottle relaxes gut muscles during cramps.

CHAPTER 08

Daily habits

The boring basics that quietly lower your baseline anxiety.

71 **Cap coffee at 1–2 cups** DAILY

Caffeine mimics anxiety: racing heart, jitters. Switch afternoon coffee to decaf.

72 **Protein at breakfast** DAILY

A blood-sugar crash feels like anxiety: shaky, sweaty, on edge. Eggs, yoghurt or tofu keep you steady.

73 **Drink water first** DAILY

A glass of water before your first coffee. Even mild dehydration worsens mood.

74 **Move 150 minutes a week** WEEKLY START HERE

Anything that raises your heart rate.

↳ Singh et al., 2023, University of South Australia: a review of 97 reviews found exercise clearly reduced anxiety. [36]

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75 **Lift weights twice a week** WEEKLY

Strength training reduces anxiety too, not only cardio.

↳ Gordon et al., 2017 meta-analysis. [37]

76 **120 minutes in nature a week** WEEKLY

Parks, forests, water, in any mix of visits.

↳ White et al., 2019, University of Exeter. [38]

77 **News once a day** DAILY

Pick one time and one source. Endless scrolling keeps your threat system switched on.

78 **No phone for the first 30 minutes** 30 MIN

Start the day in your own head, not in everyone else's inbox.

79 **Something to look forward to** WEEKLY

Put one small, enjoyable thing in your calendar every week.

80 **Watch the 'hangxiety'** –

The anxiety the day after drinking is real: alcohol withdrawal leaves your nervous system rebounding.

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CHAPTER 09

People

Humans calm down faster around other calm humans. It's called co-regulation.

81 Send one text 30 SEC

"Thinking of you." Connection helps the sender as much as the receiver.

82 Say it out loud 10 MIN

Tell one trusted person how you actually feel. Anxiety shrinks when it's shared.

83 A 20-second hug 20 SEC

Long enough for your body to register it as safe.

84 Pet an animal 10 MIN

10 minutes with a dog or cat lowered students' cortisol.

↳ Pendry & Vandagriff, 2019, Washington State University. [39]



WHAT ACTUALLY WORKED

Rise Again

What I tried after burning out, what worked and what didn't. Data, graphs and sources.

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85 Sing with others 1 HOUR

Choir singers' heart rates start to sync up and slow down.

↳ Vickhoff et al., 2013, University of Gothenburg. [40]

86 Volunteer for an hour 1 HOUR

Helping others shifts attention away from threat and towards meaning.

87 Set one boundary 1 MIN

"I can't take this on this week." Say it once, kindly, without over-explaining.

88 Ask for specific help 1 MIN

Not "I'm overwhelmed" but "Can you pick up the kids on Thursday?"

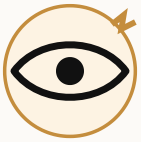
89 Talk to a professional WEEKLY START HERE

CBT is a first-line treatment for anxiety disorders and works for most people.

↳ NICE (UK) clinical guidelines. [41]

90 Unfollow what makes you feel behind 5 MIN

Your feed is part of your environment. Curate it like your home.



CHAPTER 10

Long-term calm

Practices that, done for weeks, change your baseline.

91 **10 minutes of mindfulness a day** 10 MIN START HERE

Sit, breathe, and gently return to the breath each time your mind wanders.

↳ Hoge et al., 2023, JAMA Psychiatry: an 8-week MBSR course worked as well as a common anti-anxiety medication. Look up: Jon Kabat-Zinn. [42]

92 **Three good things** 3 MIN

Each night, write three things that went well and why.

↳ Look up: Martin Seligman. [43]

93 **Expressive writing** 20 MIN

Write about what's bothering you for 15–20 minutes, 4 days in a row. Nobody reads it.

↳ Look up: James Pennebaker. [44]

94 **Sauna** 20 MIN

2–3 sessions a week.

↳ Look up: Prof. Jari Laukkanen's Finnish sauna studies. [45]

BUILD YOUR ROUTINE

Your calm, on autopilot.

30 days, one tool a day, then a routine that fits your week. Start tonight.

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95 **A cold finish** 1 MIN

End your shower with 30–60 seconds of cold. Training calm in discomfort.

96 **Track your HRV** DAILY

Heart-rate variability shows how recovered your nervous system is. Watch what raises it.

97 **Make music** 20 MIN

Play an instrument, even badly: a handpan, a guitar, a drum. Flow is the opposite of worry.

98 **The self-compassion break** 1 MIN

Say: "This is hard. Other people feel this too. May I be kind to myself right now."

↳ Look up: Kristin Neff. [5]

99 **One value-driven action a day** DAILY

Anxiety shrinks your life. Do one small thing that matters to you anyway.

↳ Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). [19]

100 **Rate your anxiety 0–10 daily** 30 SEC

Two weeks of scores shows you what actually moves the needle.

IMPORTANT

When to get help.

Self-help tools are powerful, but they're not a replacement for care. Please talk to a doctor or a licensed therapist if:

1. Anxiety or panic attacks are stopping you from working, sleeping, eating or seeing people.
2. You've felt anxious most days for several weeks.
3. You have physical symptoms that are new or getting worse (chest pain, blood in stool, weight loss, symptoms that wake you at night). Rule out other causes first.
4. You're using alcohol, drugs or food to cope.
5. You have thoughts of harming yourself. Contact your local emergency number or a crisis line straight away. You don't have to handle it alone.

Good to know: anxiety is one of the most treatable mental health conditions. Therapies like CBT help most people, and medication can be a helpful option. Asking for help is a skill, not a weakness.

GO DEEPER

Further reading.

The books behind many of the tools in this guide. Start with whichever chapter spoke to you most.

Breath	James Nestor
Unwinding Anxiety	Judson Brewer
Feeling Good	David D. Burns
Waking the Tiger	Peter A. Levine
The Happiness Trap	Russ Harris
Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers	Robert Sapolsky
Full Catastrophe Living	Jon Kabat-Zinn
Radical Acceptance	Tara Brach
Self-Compassion	Kristin Neff
The Mind-Gut Connection	Emeran Mayer
Deep Work	Cal Newport
Say Good Night to Insomnia	Gregg D. Jacobs

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