

Personal Growth

How to Deal With Anxiety

🕒 11 MIN READ | APR 19, 2023



By **Dr. John Delony**

Anxiety *is* real. It's powerful. Anxiety affects millions and millions of adults, teens and children in the United States alone, and it's the most commonly diagnosed mental health challenge of our time.¹ It hijacks our thoughts, our guts and our heart rates. It can be crippling. But it's not a death sentence (even though it feels like it sometimes). And here's the truth: To start healing, you don't just deal with the *anxiety* . . . You have to address the things *causing anxiety in the first place*—the situations, thoughts, schedules and choices throwing your wellness and world totally out of whack.

Think of anxiety like a smoke alarm. It goes off when it detects a “fire” in your life. The alarms sound when you feel like you’re in danger or have an unpleasant emotion. And before you know it, your body floods with muscle tension or panic or a racing heart or you overanalyze every single detail of your day.

But the good news?

You can quiet the alarms and put out the fires.

Here’s how to get started dealing with anxiety.

11 Ways to Deal With Anxiety

Dealing with anxiety and healing the chronic fight, flight or freeze response is a multilayered process. While it might take some intentional counseling and lifestyle changes to help calm these stress responses, there are ways you can quiet anxiety in the moment. Here are 11 anxiety relief tools you can try right now:

1. Stop being alone.

Stop isolating. Just stop. Loneliness is killing us. It’s more destructive than obesity or smoking. Reach out to a friend or family member you can connect with . . . today. Have lunch with a coworker. Go for a walk with a neighbor. Meet some friends for nachos. [True human connection](#) and peace only happen when you’re safe and when you can be honest with other people. I don’t care if you’re an introvert or extrovert or what your Enneagram number or Myers-Briggs type is. You cannot get through life alone. Go hang out with someone. If you need [help with anxiety](#), there are people like friends and [trusted therapists](#) ready to walk alongside you. We can’t pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps. Believe me: I’m an introvert from Texas, and I’ve tried.

2. Take a deep breath and drop your shoulders.

When we get anxious, we hold our breath. Holding your breath cuts off oxygen to your brain. Breathing calms the body’s fight-or-flight response. Close your eyes and take a deep breath in through your nose for four seconds. Pause and hold your breath for seven seconds. Then, slowly exhale through your mouth for eight seconds. Do this until you feel more calm.

3. Turn off the news.

If you’re trying to deal with anxiety, the answer is not to consume more information or look at yet *another* inspirational Instagram post. Shut off the TV. Log off social media. Turn off the true

crime podcasts. Stop bingeing self-help books. Our minds are so attuned to messages from all types of media. You've got to recognize how much information is enough to stay updated and how much more will kick off a mental spiral of obsession and doom.

4. Write down your thoughts.

Get those looping, catastrophic thoughts out of your head and onto paper. Anxiety makes it easy to jump from a reasonable, healthy thought to a worst-case scenario death spiral. The way to end a spiral of overthinking and worrying is to release those thoughts from your brain. Seeing your thoughts and feelings on paper helps you search them for truth or exaggeration. For example, does forgetting your work assignment really mean you're stupid and unlovable? Of course not. Write your thoughts, see them, and challenge the dramatic, critical voice inside your head.

5. Go outside.

Get out when it's warm, cold, wet or dry. Get sunshine. Breathe fresh air. Watch clouds or count stars. Be cold. Or be hot. Walk barefoot in the grass. Hear the birds sing. You don't need to move to a cabin in the woods to reap the benefits of nature and help get rid of anxiety. Walk around the block. Visit the garden center at Home Depot. Or spend an extra minute in the sun before you walk into the office. You can find a way.

6. Move your body.

The last thing I want to do when I'm stressed out is exercise. But it's one of the most healing things you *can* do. Exercise is a powerful tool for reducing stress, fatigue, anxiety and depression. Moving your body could look like stretching before bed, lifting weights, walking the dog, or playing outside with your kid. Make it a goal to move your body every day—but also be sensitive to your body's needs. For example, if you're in a season of anxiety, your body probably doesn't need the extra stress of training for a marathon. Doing yoga, lifting weights, or rucking might be better options.

7. Back off caffeine, alcohol and sugar.

Our bodies are *extremely* sensitive to chemicals. And when it takes six cups of coffee to wake up in the morning and three glasses of wine to take the edge off after work, your body will go haywire. Toss a bag of sour gummy candy in the mix to numb out after a tough conversation, and your strung-out nervous system is primed for panic. Ditching (or lowering) [the caffeine](#), alcohol and sugar you eat and drink is one of the first ways to calm anxiety.

8. Rest.

Sleep is the most powerful tool we have to reset, heal and renew our bodies and minds. Be intentional about bedtime or naps. Leave your screens in another room, cut out the beer or glass of wine before bed, and try to get seven to nine hours of sleep every night (I hear ya, moms and dads of toddlers . . . hang in there). When you're learning how to stop the anxiety alarms, create a bedtime routine to wind down—and stick to it.

9. Start a gratitude journal.

I know this can feel super cheesy and Pinterest-y. But focusing on people, things, and experiences you're grateful for forces you out of obsessing over the past and future and brings your attention to the now. It also makes you stop staring into your navel and start looking into the eyes of someone who loves you or needs you. Gratitude improves happiness, health, optimism, mood, sleep and a sense of well-being. Start or end every day writing five different sentences that all begin with "I'm grateful for . . ."

10. Eat real food.

Please, treat your body well. Drink plenty of water and eat protein, healthy fats (like nuts and fish), and fruits and vegetables. You don't have to blow your budget on organic or pasture-raised foods—just eating more whole foods will make a huge difference. And simple tweaks like having breakfast and eating every few hours will help keep your blood sugar stable and your energy and [emotions](#) from skyrocketing or crashing.

11. Make a to-do list—and schedule margin.

Don't just make a to-do list—*do* what's on the list. If you already have a to-do list and it's 13 miles long, cut it down to the three most important or nagging things. And if you can make a simple routine to get the most important things knocked out (like making your bed, packing lunch, and getting outside), that'll free up your mind and set your day up for success. Pro tip: You also need to create space in your calendar for when—not *if*—life gets complicated. We all get flat tires, have sick kids, or work for a boss who wants us to stay late. Say *no* to things and create space to breathe.

5 Long-Term Ways to Get Rid of Anxiety

We've created a world that our bodies can't live in. Normal life is full of outrageous demands and expectations for what we can accomplish. But the fires in our lives are the problem—not

the alarms. When the alarms get too loud, finding peace and relief from the chaos can be difficult. But it's not impossible. (I explore this more in my Quick Read, [Redefining Anxiety](#).)



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If you're ready to take your healing one step deeper, I want to encourage you to do five important things today to start changing your relationship with anxiety.

1. Realize anxiety is not an identity, a badge of honor, or a cone of shame.

Anxiety is a *learned* physical and mental response to threats and disconnection—perceived or real. It's not a disease—it's an alarm system. It's your body's way of trying to take care of you. And since you learned it, it can be unlearned. *You are not your anxiety*.

2. Listen to what the alarms are saying.

Pay attention to your personal anxiety alarms and what makes them go off. Maybe it's running into a certain coworker in the hall or being ignored by someone you care about. Or maybe it's when you arrive home after a long, exhausting day and feel afraid to step inside because [loneliness](#) is waiting to greet you. Maybe it's a past tragedy, deep [trauma](#) or hyper-stressed mind. Pay attention to what your anxiety alarms are telling you so you can get what you need.

3. Look at the world you've built for yourself and examine your day.

Pause and examine your past, your current life, and your intentions and values for the future. I encourage you to write down your answers to these questions to get started:

- Am I safe and valued in my current environment?
- Do I have a [support system of close friends](#) and professionals I can lean on?
- Have I dealt with past traumas and painful relationships?
- Do I have a space where I'm connected and vulnerable with others?
- Do I find purpose and meaning in my work?
- Do I have space or margin in my life, both at home and at work?
- Am I free? Do I owe money on car loans or credit cards? Do I have family and work boundaries? Is someone else dictating my calendar?

- Am I prioritizing my health by eating well, exercising, and getting seven to nine hours of sleep every night?
- Do I believe in something bigger than me?
- What forms of distraction or comfort am I addicted to?

See what you learn—and what needs to change. You can heal and design an entire new future for yourself.

4. Stop trying to control the whole world.

You can only control two things in the world: your thoughts and your actions. That's it. You can't control gas prices or inflation. And you can't control other people's attitudes, insecurities, lack of [boundaries](#), or behaviors. Choose to spend your energy growing in strength and character and taking ownership of your choices and behavior. It may be difficult, but your thoughts and actions can be tamed. It just takes strength and practice, like working out a muscle.

5. Talk to a professional.

It's not weird to call a carpenter or a plumber when you need a professional to repair your house. It's not weird to talk to a counselor or doctor when you need support in making your life less anxious. Go talk to someone who can guide you on how to get rid of anxiety. And if they say you need [anxiety medicine](#), you need medicine. It can help turn the alarms down so you can get out of a burning house. If you do end up taking medicine for a season, it can be a remarkable support as you heal and change your thoughts and actions. Just remember that it doesn't have to be—and almost never should be—a part of your story forever.

Moving Forward From Anxiety

The next time the alarms sound, pause. You have tools to calm anxiety. Reach out to someone you trust. Breathe deep. Healing takes work, but you can do it. I know because I've been bent low by anxiety, intrusive thoughts and the runaway train of fear and compulsion. I had to put aside my pride and deal with my loneliness. I plugged into a community and got professional support. I took full ownership of my thoughts and actions, and I now experience peace and rest . . . on most days. And you can too.

To learn more about my story and how you can experience less stress in your life, check out [The Dr. John Delony Show](#). I help people just like you find the tools they need to create a non-anxious life. Check it out today.

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Dr. John Delony is a mental health expert with two PhDs from Texas Tech University—one in counselor education and supervision and the other in higher education administration. Before joining Ramsey Solutions in 2020, John spent two decades in crisis response, walking with people through severe trauma. Now at Ramsey Solutions, John writes, speaks and teaches on relationships, mental health, anxiety and wellness. He also serves as co-host of *The Ramsey Show*, the second-largest talk show in the nation that's heard by 18 million weekly listeners, as well as host of *The Dr. John Delony Show*. In 2022, John's book *Own Your Past, Change Your Future* instantly became a #1 national bestseller. You can also find John featured on DailyMailTV, Fox Business and *The Minimalists Podcast*. [Learn More.](#)

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