

Separate the Emotional Sensation From the Story

Exercise: Interrupt the anxiety loop by focusing on the physical sensation that is connected with our anxious thinking. Works well with the Working With Your Anxiety worksheet. Remember to do these with compassion.

Why this helps

When we're highly anxious, our bodies can get stuck in overdrive. A racing heart, a tight chest and shallow breathing don't just *feel* bad: they send a message back up to the brain that says, "There really is danger." The brain takes that as proof and the anxious thinking gets louder ("Something's wrong. I can't cope."). Those thoughts then signal the body to stay on high alert, and the loop keeps feeding itself, making everything feel worse.

This exercise interrupts that loop. When you set the story aside and simply notice the physical sensations with curiosity, the brain stops getting fuel for the danger story. Your attention moves out of the worrying mind and into the present moment, and the body gets the signal that, right now, you're okay. As the body settles, the thoughts tend to quiet too.

The steps

- 1 Ground your body first.** Take a few slow breaths out then in, making the out-breath longer than the in-breath. Feel your feet on the floor and the support beneath you.
- 2 Name the emotion.** Simply notice what's here: I am feeling anxiety, fear, dread.
- 3 Find it in your body.** Where do you feel it? Chest, throat, stomach, shoulders, jaw?
- 4 Stay with the *physical* sensation, not the story.** "I'm anxious" or "Something bad is going to happen" or anything that starts with "I feel like" is a story. "Tightness in my chest," "fluttering in my stomach," "heat in my face" are sensations. Gently let the story go and come back to the sensation.

Tip: if thoughts keep pulling you in, try putting "I fear..." in front of them ("I fear that I'll mess this up"). It reminds you that it's a fear that is connected to a story, not a fact.

- 5 Notice its edges.** Where is it most intense? Where does it fade or end?
- 6 Find a calm place in your body.** Somewhere that feels neutral or okay: the back of your arm, the top of your foot, the tip of your nose, wherever.
- 7 Rest your attention there for 1–2 minutes.** Notice how it feels, even if it feels like nothing. Nothing is good.
- 8 Remember: you are not the emotion.** You're the one noticing it. The anxiety is one part of you, and you are the whole.