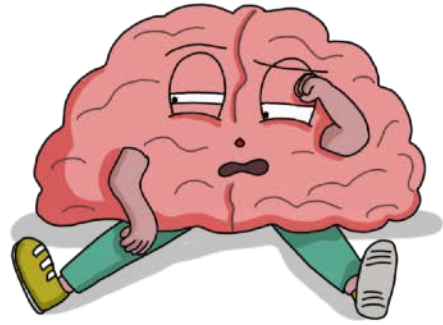


Anxiety E-book

Rebekah Ballagh
Journey to Wellness

What is Anxiety?



Anxiety is your body's threat response. If your brain perceives something in your environment as a danger to you, then it sends signals that prepare your body to protect you.

Inside your brain you have something called an amygdala. It's the region of your brain that is responsible for scanning for danger and alerting you to potential threats.

When you are in this 'threat response' state, your amygdala sends a signal down your brain stem to prepare your body for action.

You may have heard of flight/fright/freeze/fawn?

When under threat you respond in one of these ways, either instinctively wanting to fight back against the threat, run away from the threat, freeze and become still in the hopes the threat doesn't notice you or 'please and appease' the threat.

With anxiety, quite often you may notice a feeling of wanting to escape a situation, avoid it entirely or run away.

This is your flight response in action.

You may also notice a whole range of physical symptoms.

When your brain sends a signal to your body that there is a threat, your body responds by getting ready to run, fight or freeze. Hormones are released into your body - adrenaline and cortisol.

You may notice your breathing quickens or shallows - this is to increase the level of oxygen in your body, ready to use if you start to flee or fight.

You may notice sweating, wobbly legs or tingling in your hands and legs.

You may notice butterflies in your tummy - this is because your brain temporarily diverts energy and blood flow away from functions like digesting your food, into your limbs readying you to run or fight.

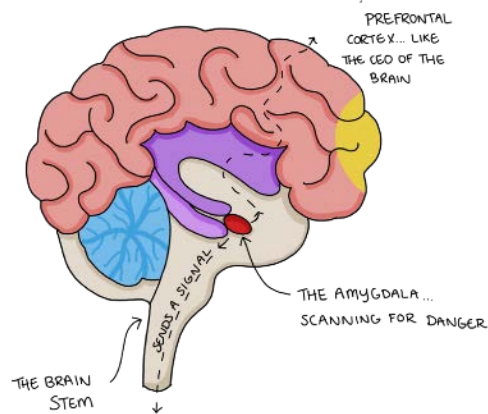
You might feel dizzy, lightheaded, nauseous, sweaty and hot. Your muscles may become tense.

All of this is normal - it's your body getting ready to deal with a threat.

This threat response is evolutionary.

Our great great great ancestors were cavemen. They lived lives full of dangers and threats - rival tribes and sabretooth tigers were real and they had to be on the lookout for them and protect themselves and their tribes at all times in order to survive. The amygdala did its job of scanning the environment for things like a rustling in the bushes or the low growl of a predator.

If it detected these things, it would send an instant signal down the brain stem and the cavemen's bodies would jump into action.



When under threat a second signal is also sent - to your prefrontal cortex. This is the front part of your brain. It's responsible for logical thought, decision making, language, reason, thinking, common sense and reason.

This signal moves much slower than the fast-track signal down your brain stem to your body. For this reason, your body kicks into that anxious/panic mode before you can logically weigh up if something is a threat.

Here is an example... You're walking down the hallway to your bedroom and a dark 'thing' falls off the wall and onto your shoulder. You immediately do a wee 'crazy dance' trying to flick what you can only assume is a spider out of your hair. Your tummy has gone all funny and you are reacting without thought. This is your fast track! Your amygdala has let your body know that a potentially poisonous bug is on you and you need to sort it out.

Now the dark thing has fallen to the floor and you realise that it was just a piece of blue tack from an old poster that had come loose. You stop doing the spider dance and carry on down the hallway. This is your slow track! You have taken a second to realise it isn't a threat and tell yourself that you are safe and okay.

You may still feel a little on edge now - that's the adrenaline/cortisol that is still in your body. but you are able to tell yourself there is no danger and begin to regulate your anxiety again.

Right - back to our cavemen... Thanks to this evolutionary and vital survival mechanism, we are all here today - with this exact same brain function.

There are no sabretooths about today - but this threat response function is still *vital*. Think of this scenario:

You cross the road thinking it is all clear but suddenly see a car coming towards you. Without the amygdala sending a fast-track signal to our bodies, we wouldn't even bother to try to jump out of the way!

These days your amygdala functions a bit like a smoke alarm.

Sometimes it goes off when there is a real threat, like a fire. Other times it goes off when it only thinks it detects a threat; like when you burn the toast.

Our threat response goes off often about 'burnt toast' situations these days... not a real-life threatening situation; but nevertheless, our brain responds like it is one!

Examples of this are the very intense anxiety you might feel before an exam, the flutter of nerves you experience when you are in a crowded space, the fear you feel meeting new people, having to do a speech or presentation in front of the class, going to the mall... the panic you get when a friend sends a text that seems like everyone is mad at you.

How do you manage anxiety?

There are so many wonderful tools, strategies, techniques and approaches to working with anxiety.

I experienced anxiety for most of my life - in my early to mid twenties it was at its worst. I was suffering panic attacks every time I was in a stressful situation, had to speak publicly or felt like I was being judged.

I woke up every morning anxious and feeling overwhelmed.

In my work as a counsellor and through my extensive post-grad specialist trainings in anxiety, threat responses, panic attacks, worry, the nervous system and so much more I discovered tools that helped me get my life back and rid myself of panic attacks.

I have packed the best of what I have learned, the things that worked for me and the tools I have taught to thousands of clients into a range of courses and resources on my website.

In this e-book I want to give you a gentle introduction and a few powerful tools to help start you on the track to feeling more calm, confident and in control of anxiety and your life.

In this e-book we will explore some tools based in mindfulness, grounding and acceptance therapies.

If you are ready for more, and to dive deeper... If you are ready to really commit, then join me over on my website to begin a range of powerful, transformative and potentially life-changing courses. All affordable. All my way of making mental wellness accessible.

Let's start with learning how mindfulness helped me...



What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is about being aware of your experience in the present moment.

It is the practice of noticing your thoughts, physical sensations and surroundings, without judgement and without trying to change anything.

Mindfulness is also about 'turning off auto-pilot' to be intentionally in the here and now. You can learn to notice when your thoughts have drifted off, perhaps into the past or future, and bring them back to the present.

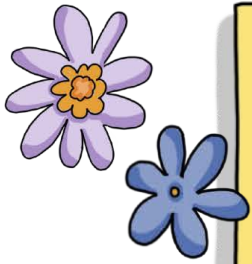
You can think of your thoughts as though they fall somewhere along a timeline. Mindfulness is a state where you are present in the current moment. Often though, we become lost in our thoughts; drifting off into future concerns and worries, asking ourselves "what if....?".... This is where feelings of stress, anxiety and overwhelm tend to manifest.

Then, at the other end of the timeline, we can get stuck ruminating on the past, dwelling on regrets. This is where we may find ourselves feeling guilt, depression, or becoming trapped in grief.

Of course it is normal and even necessary to spend some time thinking about the past and the future. Sometimes, thinking about the past is a way to reminisce over wonderful memories, or to unpack and learn from our mistakes. Thinking about the future is a way for us to plan, to get excited, and to be responsible for our choices.

It is possible though, to spend too much time in these places, perhaps just getting stuck on auto-pilot and not really being present in our lives and surroundings.

If you are someone who experiences anxiety or panic, depression, has been through trauma, is feeling stressed and overwhelmed in life or who struggles with dissociation - grounding and mindfulness are wonderful tools to help you reconnect with your body, calm your nervous system and lower your stress levels.

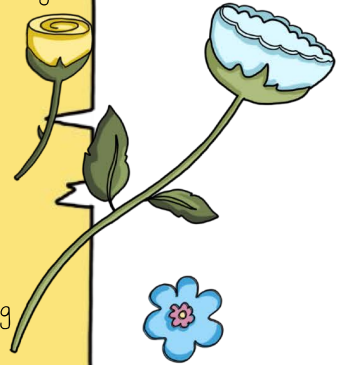


What is grounding?

Grounding is a way of becoming centred and present by tuning in to the present moment.

It's like anchoring yourself back into your body and safely into the now.

Using your senses is a simple and effective way to ground yourself. You can tune in to your body using your sight, touch, smell, taste and hearing.

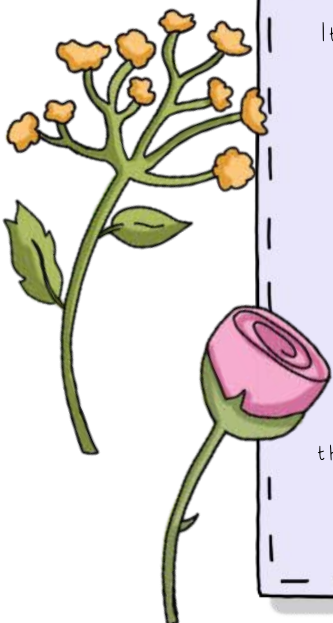


A mindfulness practice has been shown to improve focus and concentration abilities overtime, to lower anxiety and to improve mood.

Many people can become overwhelmed at the thought of a mindfulness practice. Often assuming it means you need to engage in formal meditation, clearing the mind of thoughts and sitting in a zen like position without moving - not true!

You can, of course, practice mindfulness through meditation - but even this does not mean you need your mind to become a blank slate.

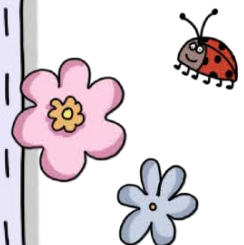
Both meditation and mindfulness are practices of observation without judgment.



It's easy to buy into your thoughts, to believe every one, and to follow them all down rabbit holes.

You've probably had the experience of thinking one thing and then 10 minutes later realising that you have totally spiralled and are now lost in a mist of worry, panic, overwhelm or dissociation.

Mindfulness and grounding teach us to observe thoughts, recognise they are not facts, and to create distance and space between us and the thought.

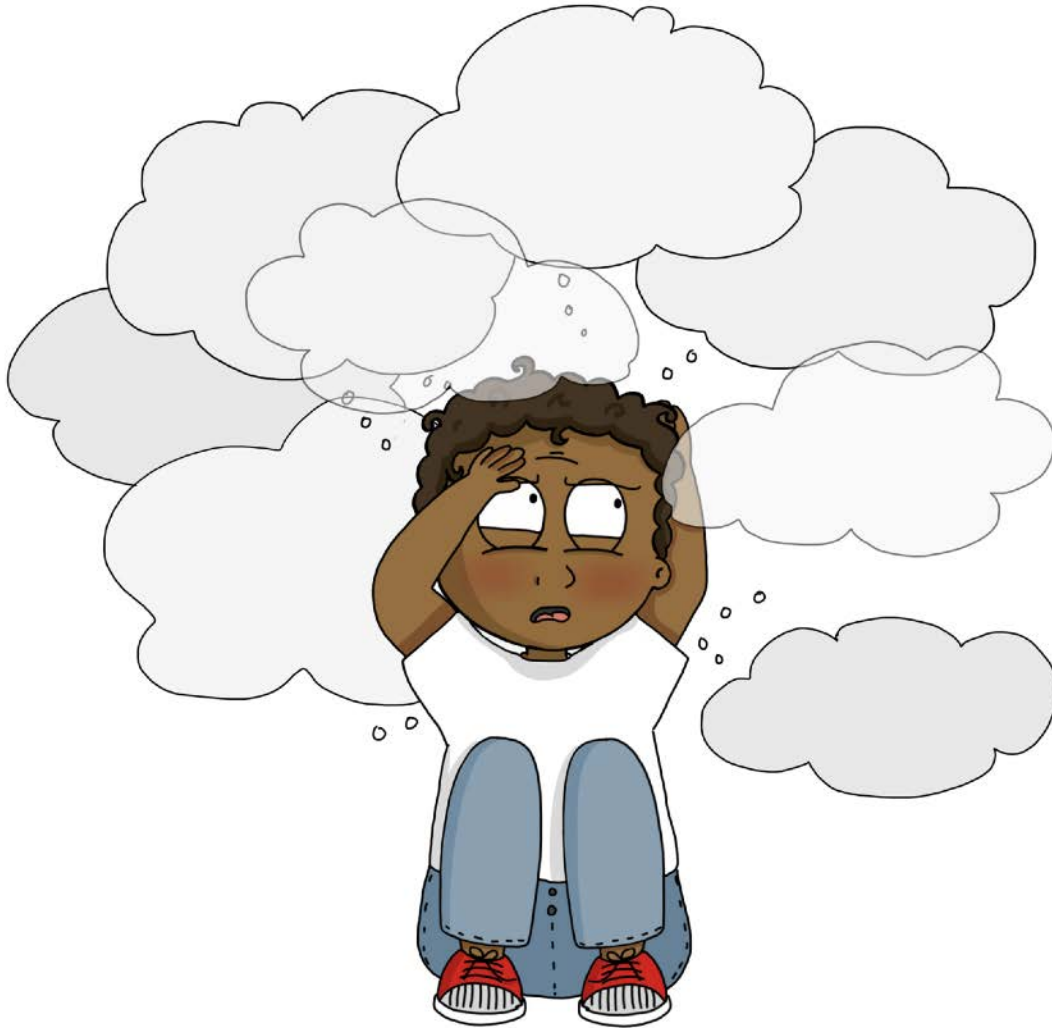


Your Busy Brain

We all have thoughts - and many of which pop up without our conscious choosing or control.

Thoughts pop in and out of our heads all day long.

Research has estimated we have anywhere between 12,000 and 60,000 thoughts per day. Many of these thoughts are repeat thoughts (ones we have had many times before) and many more again are negative. It's extremely easy to go about our days without really paying much attention to how we are responding to our thoughts.





It's not until we experience anxiety, depression, stress or overwhelm that we realise how much of a trap our thoughts can become.



Anxiety wants you to grab hold of each and every time worry that pops into your mind. It wants you to dwell on these thoughts, to pick at them, to analyse them, to follow each and every one down their little whirlpools.

Depression wants you to fixate and to ruminate on every negative thought you have about yourself and the world. To become bogged down by the weight of it all. To feel helpless, and to believe that thought that you are.



Here are some analogies to help you approach your thoughts in a mindful way...









Picture your thoughts as leaves floating down a stream that you are sitting beside. You watch as the thought enters your consciousness and then watch as it floats on by, allowing it to carry on its way without judgement or action.



Imagine the thoughts that enter your mind are like clouds floating across a blue sky. You observe them, knowing they will pass by in their own time without needing any help from you. You allow them to be.



Picture your thoughts as snow flakes falling. You notice them as they appear and then you allow them to drift and float to the ground. They melt away. You allow them to fall without trying to catch any or hold on to them.



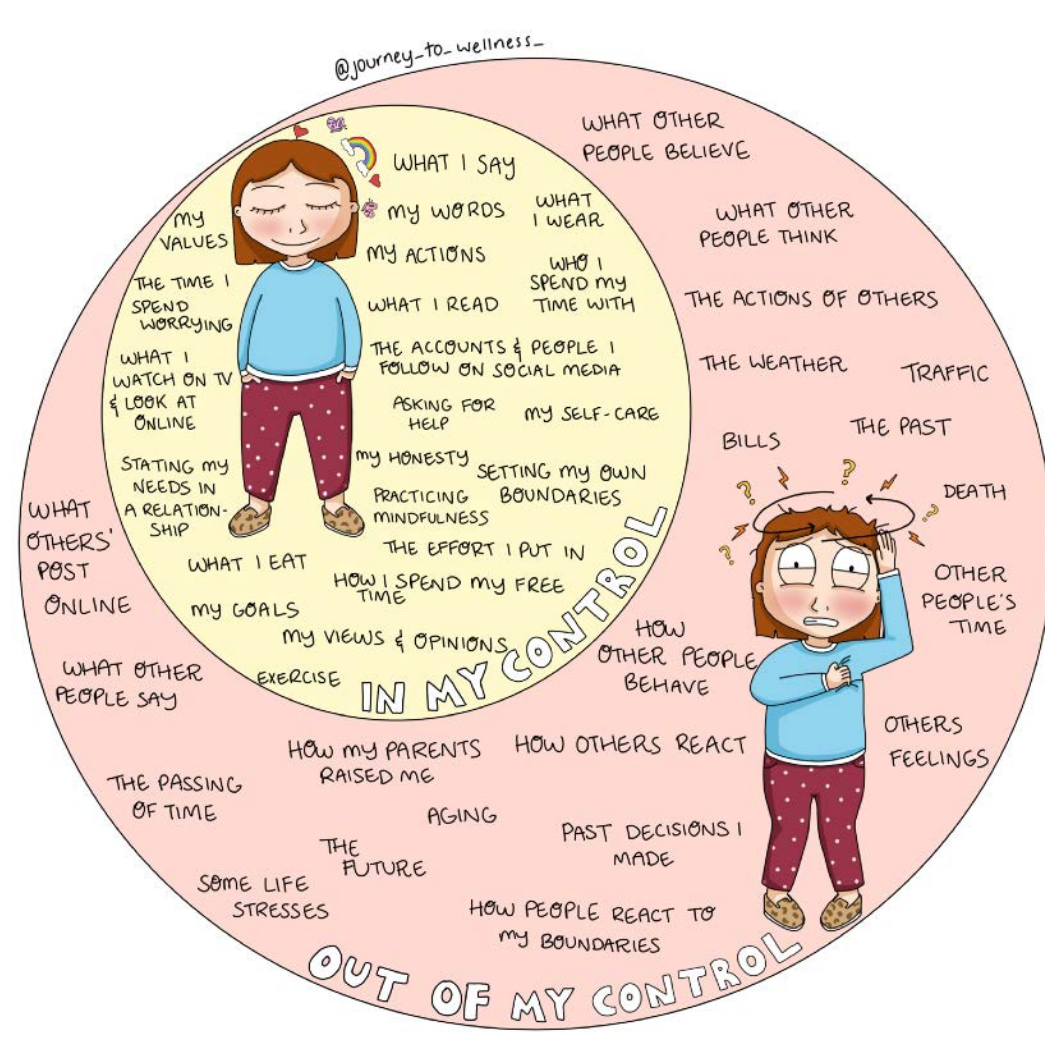
Imagine your thoughts are like little raindrops running down a window pane. You can sit in the calmness inside, knowing the storm outside does not affect you. You watch the rain drops as they appear on the glass. You notice them as they make a trail down the window, then disappear. You allow each rain drop to appear and to pass, just as you do your thoughts, knowing you can't change the weather or the rain.

Anxiety loves control

When you spend a lot of thinking thinking and worrying about things that are outside your circle of control you may notice increasing stress, tension and anxiety.

Conversely, when you focus on the things that are *within* your control, you can take back your power and take action to reduce your worry.

Check out the control wheel below for some example of things that are both within and outside of your control...



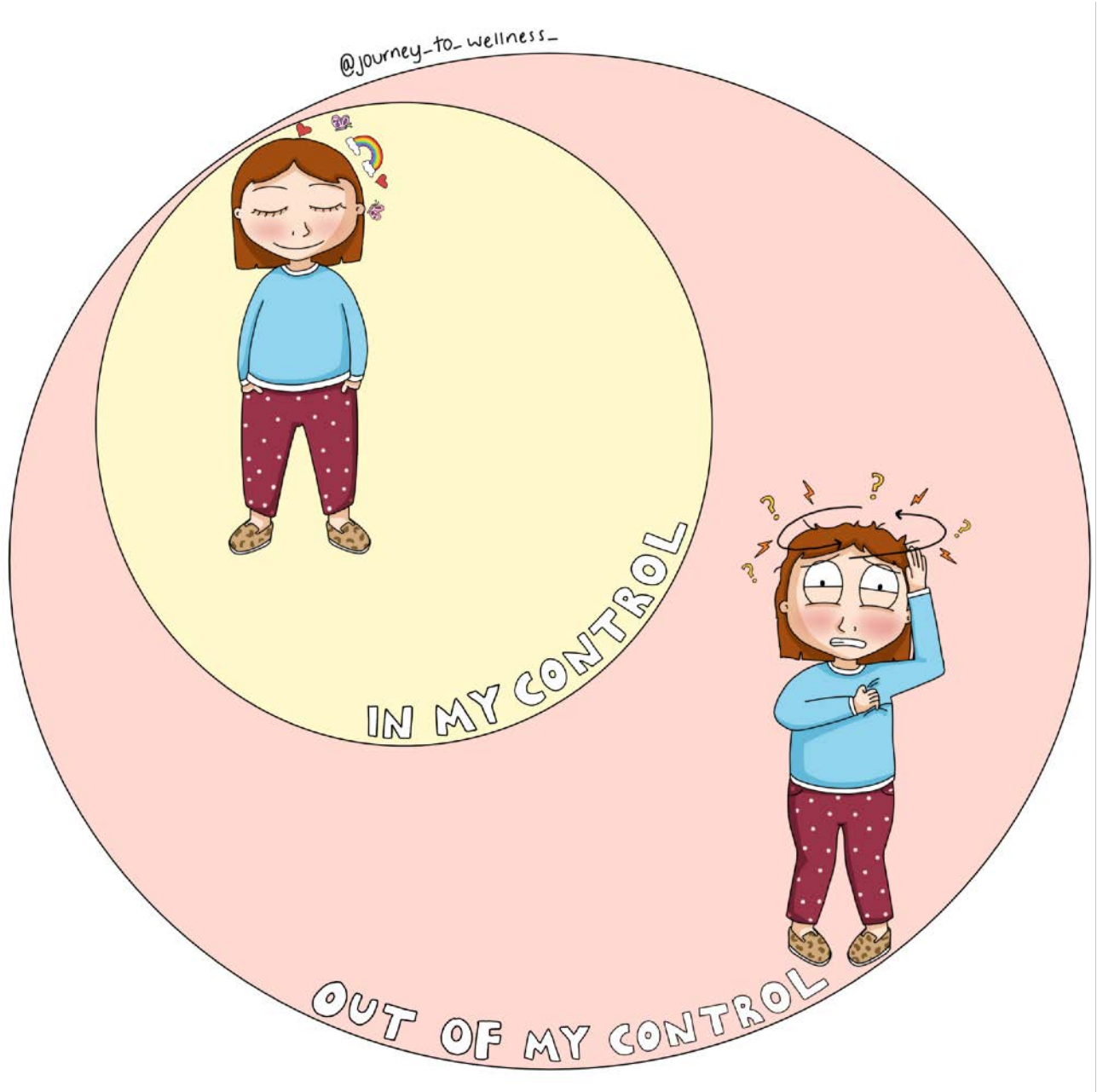
Reflect on this...

1. Which circle do most of my worries tend to lie in?
2. What could I do to shift most of my focus to things *within* my circle of control?
3. What could I do about the things within my circle of control?
4. In which circle do my thoughts sit most of the time?
5. What do I notice about how I feel when I spend time focusing on things that are out of my control?

Use the blank control circles below and write out your own worries, anxious thoughts etc - Place them in the circle where you believe they belong.

When you are finished, review this:

Are you surprised by where you thoughts and concerns lie?
Are you happy with the balance?
What can you do to address the concerns?
What can you do to make sure the majority of your focus lands on things within your control?



Calm anxiety with the power of the breath

Your breath is a powerful tool to use in your grounding and mindfulness practice. It is the direct link to your parasympathetic nervous system (the rest, digest, restore and peace part of your autonomic nervous system)

When you breathe deep into your diaphragm, directing your breath down into your belly, you activate the vagus nerve - this is your connection again to the parasympathetic nervous system.

How empowering to know that we are able to tap into this function of our body whenever we need it.

You have a tool, at your disposal, anytime, day or night, to help you ride through big emotions, calm yourself in times of anxiety and stress and bring you back to your body in times of dissociation.



Your breath
is your
anchor

Mindful Moments

Using mindfulness and grounding throughout your day is like giving your system a wee 'reboot' and refresh. Tools like this work wonders in helping you reduce anxiety levels.

When you go to bed at night, while you are asleep your brain is able to consolidate learning and file away things in your memory. It's a crucial time for our bodies and brains to reset and digest our day.

You can give your body and brain this same 'digestion time' by taking a few mindful moments throughout the waking hours in your day.

Take time when you can to pause and simply notice your present experience.

- What am I thinking in this moment?
- What am I feeling in my body right now?
- What is happening around me?
- What can I see? Smell? Hear? Feel/Touch?
- Notice things with acceptance, non-judgement and curiosity.

How often in your day do you stop to check-in with your thoughts, your surroundings, your body and your senses?



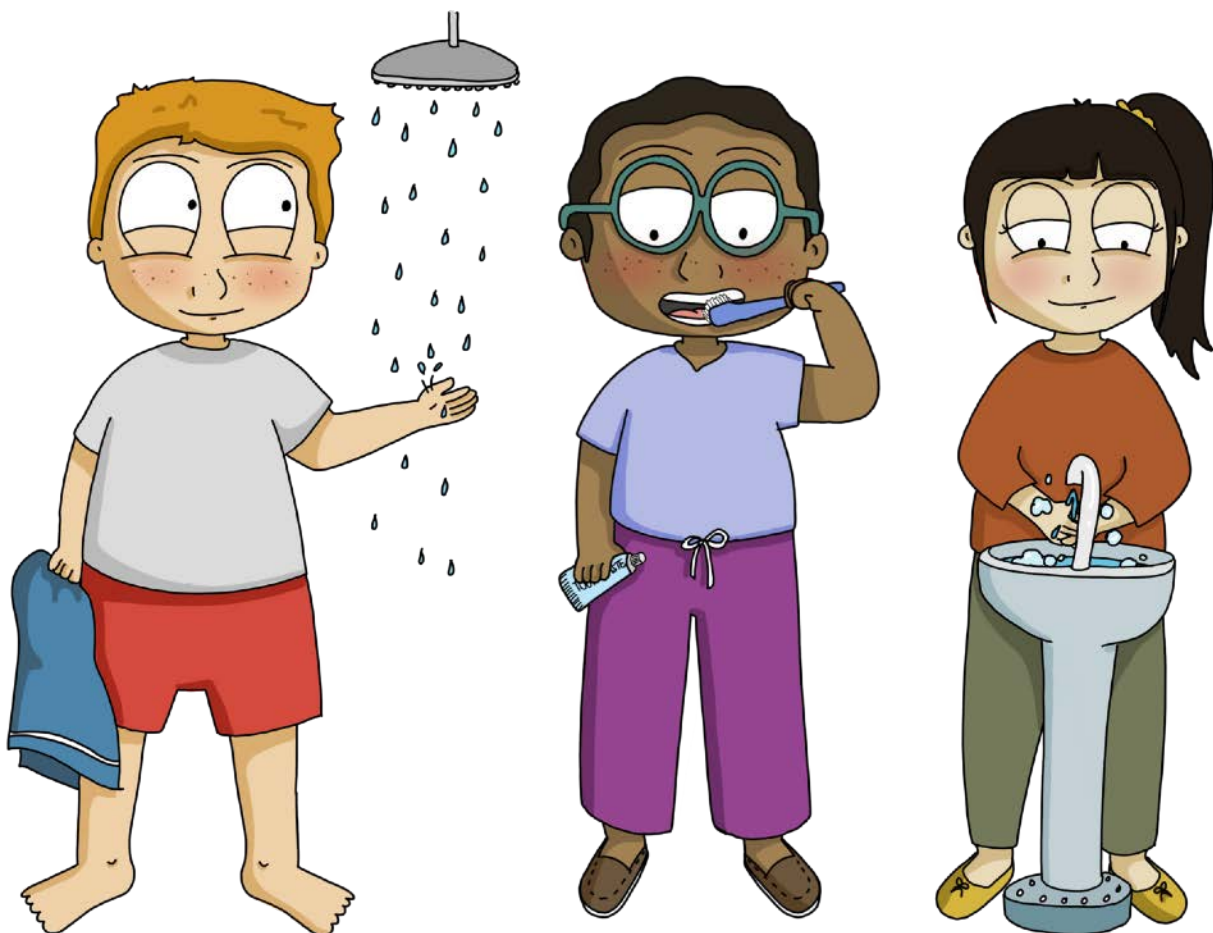
You can practice mindfulness right in the middle of any activity you are doing, without setting aside any specific time.

All you do is carry on with your daily tasks in a mindful way, noticing thoughts comes and go while you do your task, noticing what your body is doing and how it is feeling, observing what you are seeing, feeling/touching, hearing, tasting etc.

A good hint to remain mindful is to imagine you are doing this task for the first time ever, or to imagine you were going to write extremely detailed step-by-step instructions on how to do this task. You could also imagine you were trying to describe what you are doing to someone who is blind or who cannot experience their other senses.

Here are some examples of daily tasks you can do mindfully...

- Doing the dishes/loading or unloading the dishwasher
- Making a cup of tea
- Getting dressed
- Having a shower
- Brushing your teeth
- Driving to or from work
- Walking to/from somewhere
- Cleaning



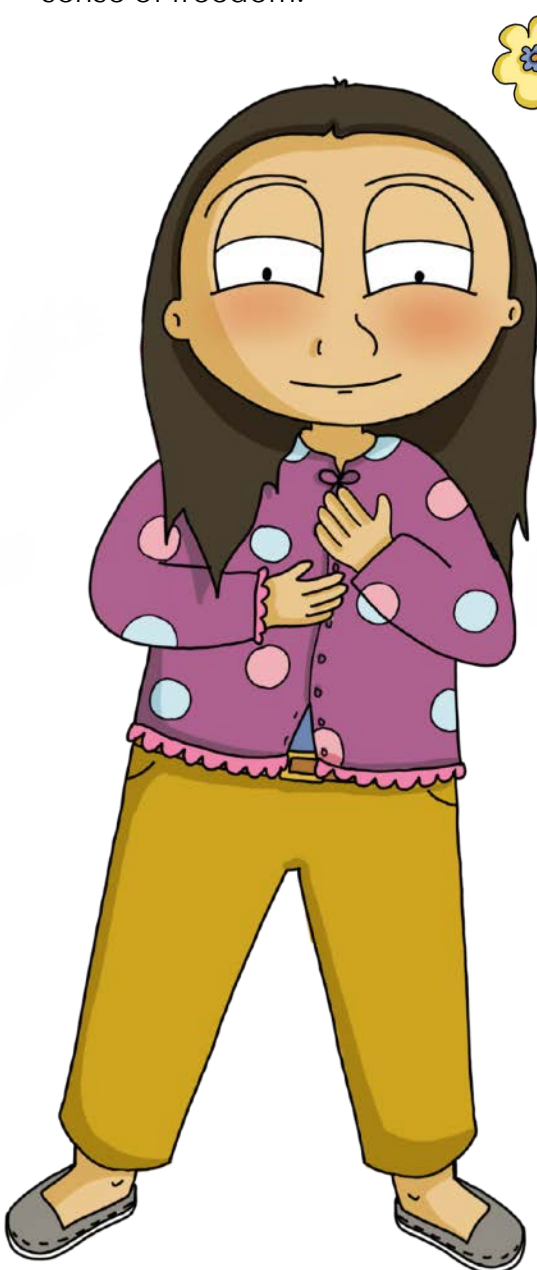
Bite-sized Mindfulness

A simple, non-threatening way to practice mindfulness and grounding is in 'bite-sized pieces'.

This is all about weaving small practices into your day that aren't time consuming. Practicing mindfulness in this way makes it feel achievable to incorporate into your day, and therefore you are more likely to stick to it and create a habit.

Then, you are going to see those long-term results; changes in your brains wiring, improved focus and mood, decreased anxiety and stress, decreased reactivity and feeling more grounded and calm.

You'll also begin to see thoughts as 'just thoughts' and motions as passing experiences that do not need to be hurried along or judged. This shift is empowering and creates a sense of freedom.



The coloured bubbles ahead hold a variety of different bite-sized mindfulness practices that you can easily incorporate into your day to day life.

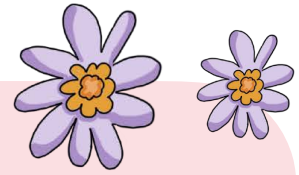
They are simple and each one takes 5 minutes or less.

Several of them you can easily continue on with for as long as you like too - so if you're feeling particularly stressed and keen to put aside a solid chunk of time to slow down and be mindful, then all you need to do is extend the time you do these practices until you are ready to move on with your day.

You might like to record yourself reading the text in the bubbles, taking long pauses, and play it back to yourself to be guided through each exercise.

Or, you may just like to read through the exercises first and then go with your own flow and in your own time.

Let's start out with a simple mindfulness practice in which you simply observe your thoughts.



Observing Thoughts

Take a comfortable seat where you feel supported and at ease. Start with 3 long, slow breaths deep into your belly at your own pace.

Now, close your eyes and gently shift your attention to your thoughts. Imagine a blank chalkboard in your mind. Each time you have a thought, you see it appearing on the board in a crisp white chalk. As the next thought enters, the previous one fades from the board and is replaced.

Allow yourself to simply notice and observe each thought. Let each one stay for as long as it naturally needs to. There is no need to move them along or to try to hold on to them.

Notice each and every thought and see it appear on the chalkboard. Sometimes the thoughts may be repeat thoughts. Sometimes they might even be things like 'this is weird' or 'I don't think I'm doing this right' - pop them all on the board then let them fade.

If your mind is blank at times, that's fine.

If your focus wanes and you notice your mind has wandered off, forgetting to observe thoughts, and rather getting lost in them or following a thought spiral - that's okay! This is what minds do. Simply notice this and then return your attention to observing the thoughts mindfully.

Continue for another 30 seconds, or as long as you need. Then gently bring your focus back to the room, and open your eyes.

Here are a couple of powerful somatic practices to help calm your anxiety...

Tapping

Sit somewhere comfortable. Lean back into your chair or against the wall. Notice the feeling of the floor or the chair underneath you, supporting you.

Cross your arms over your chest and gently tap your shoulders, alternating to tap one side at a time. You can also try this by placing your hand on your thighs and tapping one leg at a time.

Breathe deeply and slowly. You may like to close your eyes. Continue for as long as you like.



ISOMETRIC MUSCLE RELAXATION

Learn to create relaxation in your body by tensing and relaxing specific and isolated muscle groups.

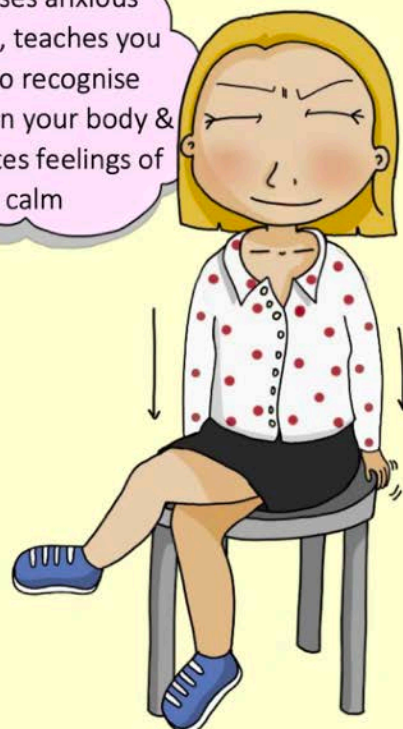
HOW TO:

1. Take a seat. Take a deep breath and hold for 7 seconds
2. At the same time, use your arms to pull yourself down onto your seat. This will tense your arms and shoulders.
3. After 7 seconds, breathe out and say the word "relax" to yourself while simultaneously letting go of the seat and releasing all tension from your muscles

Try these other muscle groups at step 2:

- Tense legs by crossing feet at ankles, press your upper leg down while lifting lower leg up to meet the pressure
- Hunch and release shoulders
- Clasp hands tight together while simultaneously pulling arms out/apart

Releases anxious tension, teaches you how to recognise tension in your body & generates feelings of calm



This practice is a lovely way to pivot your attention away from anxious thoughts & worries...

Pick a Colour

Pick a colour - it might be your favourite colour or one at random.

Close your eyes and take 3 deep belly breaths at your own pace.

Open your eyes and look around the space you are in. Take note of each and every thing you see in the colour you chose.

Look for this colour in everything, from large object to tiny details on an object that appears to be another colour.

Spend a minute or so focusing on finding your colour.

Each time your mind wanders off into thoughts and gets distracted during this, simply and gently acknowledge this. It's what minds do. And then bring your focus back to searching the room for your colour.

It might feel tricky at first to train your focus onto this one sense. That's okay. The more you work at these mindful practices, the easier they become and the more focused you will become.

When you are ready, take a few deep breaths and carry on with your day.



Tune in to Sounds

Take a seat somewhere comfy or lie down. Feel your body being held and supported by the surface beneath you.

Close your eyes or gently lower your eyelids.

Take 3 deep breaths, noticing your belly rising and falling with each inhale and exhale.

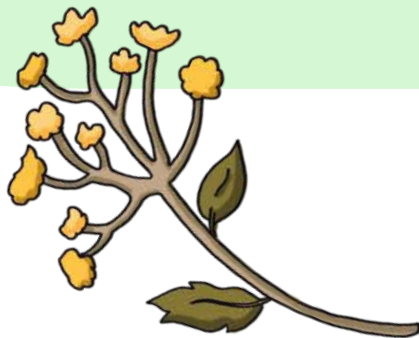
Now bring your attention to the space you are in and begin to notice the sounds around you.

Name each sound to yourself in your mind as you notice it, making a list of each new sound you hear as you hear it.

Tune in to sounds nearby, and further away, shifting your focus in and out of the room.

Spend a few minutes here, or as long as you like. When you are ready gently shift your attention to your body, noticing where it is in contact with the surface beneath you.

Slowly open your eyes and return to the room.



Body Scan

Take a seat somewhere comfy or lie down. Feel your body being held and supported by the surface beneath you.

Close your eyes or gently lower your eyelids.

Take 3 deep breaths, noticing your belly rising and falling with each inhale and exhale.

Now bring your attention to your feet. Notice how they feel. Notice what they are touching. Now move to your calves, then thighs.

Move your way through each area of your body, scanning and observing. If you notice any tension, you may like to gently release this, activity relaxing the muscles.

Finish with your face and head then bring your attention back to the room, opening your eyes.



Mindful Bite

Each time you take your first bite of a meal, make it a mindful one.

Simply pause before eating, smell your food, notice the way it looks. Then take a bite, holding the food in your mouth for a moment as you notice the texture and initial taste.

Savour this first bite as if you had never eaten this food before. Then continue on with your meal and day.


A tool for worry

@journey-to-wellness



11





Overcoming Anxiety

Overcoming anxiety takes time.
Building a mindful practice takes practice!

The first time you do something or learn something new your brain creates a pathway. The more you repeat this new habit or behaviour, the stronger this pathway becomes. At first the pathway is like a dirt track, not well trodden and a little tricky to navigate. Over time the track becomes easier and easier to travel - soon, it's a road, then a highway. At this point it will feel quite automatic and natural to you.

So, at first, it is normal if working to overcome anxiety feels uncomfortable, tricky, even scary. It's normal if your mindful and grounding practice doesn't feel natural. Your mind *will* wander off! Keep at it and be gentle and compassionate with yourself.

Remember you can start with just small chunks of time, weaving mindfulness into your existing daily habits and rituals.

The key concepts to fall back on with a mindful approach to anxiety are:

- Non-judgement of thoughts and physical sensations
- Acceptance
- Observation
- Allowing thoughts and feelings to come and go
- Tuning in to your senses
- Focusing on the present moment
- Awareness of the here and now

If you would like to join a 30 day guided Grounding and Mindfulness course you can sign up on my website, www.journeytowellness.online under the courses section

Ready for more?

If you are ready to dive deeper and explore ways to really kick your anxiety in the butt - then lets go!

Head on over to www.journeytowellness.online

You'll find a full course on anxiety there or some more specific options, like a panic to peace masterclass, a workshop on overcoming people pleasing, a workbook on morning anxiety, a course on soothing and regulating the nervous system and SO so much more.

PLUS - if you grab a membership you get...

- ✨ All of my courses!
- ✨ Access to a monthly workshop & group coaching session with my in The Wellness Club
- ✨ Free access to all upcoming monthly webinars/masterclasses

All for just \$69nzd

Thanks for being here today - thanks for showing up for you.

I know that anxiety can feel completely draining, exhausting, infuriating, depressed, overwhelming... all of it. I get it. I've been there.

I can't wait to cheer you on and help you through this journey. I know things can be different for you. Because things are different for me now.

I'll see you over on my website
Love Becks
X