

How does grounding work?

Grounding techniques are about reconnecting ourselves, and our feelings with the present and being able to self-soothe.

When we are in a state of heightened anxiety or panic, our sympathetic nervous system is active and this is our fight and flight nervous system. Really useful when there is actual danger, but can be really debilitating if it takes over in safe situation. Grounding techniques often focus on stimulating our parasympathetic nervous system, often referred to as our rest and digest state. This is less reactive, and allows us to be mindful and present. This can work by connecting us with our current reality, with sensations, by distracting our mind and by slowing us down.

It doesn't work for me!

You know what? This is actually a really good point. What works for some may not work that well for you, and there are a number of reasons. There are many different methods of grounding. Some involve heavy focus on breathing, which if you're struggling with breath, can feel worse, others involve noticing sensations within the body, but again, this can be very uncomfortable for some and soothing for others. Also there's the remembering them while you are in that state, which is where practice outside of anxiety is important. There is a lot that can impact how it works for you.

Here I provide a small range, that involve Sensory techniques, visual techniques, and mental techniques. Practice some while you feel safe and find out what feels comfortable for you. You can also use more than one at a time, such as the 7 / 11 breathing and the reality check.

Is this all I need to do?

Honestly no. These are things to help get through moments of heightened anxiety, however does not address the underlying causes. If you are struggling with anxiety, It's recommended that you see your GP and / or a counsellor / therapist to address what may be going on for you that causing it.



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How to deal with panic and anxiety.



Various grounding techniques depending on your sensory capacity.

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Sensory techniques.

7 - 11 Breathing

7/11 Breathing is quite a simple one that works by activating your parasympathetic nervous system. You simply breathe in for a count of 7, hold for a moment and breathe out for a count of 11.

When we breathe quickly, or rapidly inhale, we are increasing our heart rate and preparing ourselves for activity. By focussing on breathing out slower than we breathe in, we are slowing our heart rate and signalling we are in a safe place to slow down.

5 4 3 2 1

This technique is about engaging all of your senses and focussing on the present, grounding you in the space around you. Each number corresponds to a sense.

5 - Sight. Look around and notice 5 things you can see. Really think about what they are, for example, I can see a table, it looks solid and wooden and quite heavy.

4 - Touch. Find four things that are tactile. It can be your clothes, the seat, your hair. Are they rough or smooth, warm or cold, hard or soft.

3 - Hearing. What three can you hear. The clock, it's ticking regularly, a plane going over head.

2 - Smell. Can you find two scents. It might be washing powder, or the smell of car exhaust going past.

1 - Taste. What can you taste, is it the coffee you have just had, or your toothpaste, maybe it's just something in the air.

Body Scan

Starting with your feet, focus on them, maybe even tense them briefly and release them. Notice the pressure of them against the floor or seat, how clothes feel against them. Slowly work your way up the body, with calves, knees and so on, all the way up. This grounds you in the sensation of your internal body, creating a sense of safety and connection. You can find YouTube guides that can talk you through this.

Cold Water

Cold water, on your face or wrists can activate the vagus nerve and the parasympathetic nervous system. If you are in a place where this is possible, it can be very effective however only do this for a couple of minutes.

Visual techniques.

Reality Check

This can be both a mental and visual method, depending on how you engage with it.

Panic and anxiety can be brought about by fear of the unknown or the potential of currently unseen dangers. The Reality Check is about noticing what is actually provable real. For Example "I am in a living room, in a friend's house. I am with people I trust, I am in no immediate danger. I am sitting on the sofa and I have my phone in my hand. The phone feels solid but warm right now." and so on. You can repeat things, and say this all out loud, even have someone say it for you, but it must all be currently true.



Eye-Spy

This one is similar to one of the parts of 5 4 3 2 1. The idea is to pick a feature of things you can see. This can be shape, colour, material, and you spend time noticing and searching for all things that you can see that match that. For example, things that are rectangular, I see a table, I see a rug, I spy a picture, I spy a window. You may choose a colour, say blue, I spy a car, I spy the sky, I spy a cushion . . . and so on. If you run out, pick another category, and keep going until you feel a bit calmer.

Items

This crosses visual into mental techniques. You are looking around for items, but each item leads to the next based on their spelling. For example, You may see a chair, C H A I R. You then look for something beginning with R, say Remote control, which ends in in, so you go to light, and so on. If you get stuck on a letter, choose a different letter within the word and carry on from there.

Mental techniques.

Counting

I know, sounds basic, but it can help. Pick a number, not too high, say mid teens or twenties. You will then count up to that number from one, and back down again. You will then do it again, but this time start from two, the next time three and so on. Try counting slowly and steadily, but not in particular time with anything like a clock, as the idea is that you are grounding yourself away from external stimulation. If you can do this out loud, even better.

Categories / The Alphabet game.

Pick a category, say foods, or films. You will then name something from that category for every letter. Sounds simple, though Q and X can often be tricky. So with fruit you would start with maybe apricot, then banana, then cherry. If you get to the end, go round again or pick a new category.

The Ministers Cat

An old parlour game, it's also quite a good one to mentally focus yourself. The game with other people contains the fact you are supposed to keep the rhythm and pace going, though we drop this part for the grounding technique. Similar to categories, you are going through the alphabet describing "the ministers cat". For example, "the ministers cat is an argumentative cat." the next time you add B. "the ministers cat is an argumentative, beautiful cat." Then C "the ministers cat in an argumentative, beautiful, creative cat." It gets tricky remembering it all, but that's the point. Keep going.

Soup-somnia

This is a good one as grounding, but also if you have racing thoughts when trying to sleep. Start off picking any word at all. Let's choose "soup". It has four letters, but that's not important. You start with the first letter, in this case S, and you name every thing you can think of that starts with that letter. Sausage, strainer, sun, stairs, Spain... when you get as many as you can think of, you move on to the next letter, and you do the same. This is good for helping with sleep, as it keeps the brain engaged enough to keep going, without over stimulating and without engaging with external stimuli. It is normal for your brain to wonder in this, if it does, that's fine, you can gently bring it back to the game when you notice.