

A close-up photograph of a bright green leaf with several clear water droplets resting on its surface. The leaf is positioned diagonally, with its tip pointing towards the bottom right. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting a natural, outdoor setting. The overall mood is peaceful and refreshing.

5 Powerful Practices to Relieve Anxiety

By Margaret Munoz

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A Holistic Approach to Anxiety

We often yearn for the magic pill that will fix the anxiety and fix our lives, but really we know it just doesn't work like that. Many people have found that taking drugs for anxiety, while sometimes very necessary, is not a viable proposition long term – not least because of the side effects. (I'm not talking here about medication for long term specific mental illnesses – which is essential).

Anxiety is really a number of symptoms telling you that something is not right and that you need to investigate what it is trying to tell you. It might be saying you need to resolve past traumas, it might be saying you have a biochemical imbalance, it might be saying you are not living to your values, that you have a problem with your thinking, that you're not looking after your body, that you are overloaded, that you are suppressing your needs or your creative expression, that you are not dealing with stress in a resourceful way– or any number of other things.

“ A holistic approach to anxiety means having consideration for the complete person, physically, psychologically and spiritually ”

Common symptoms are:

- inability to stop worrying about the past, present or future
- feelings of unease, apprehension, panic or fear
- a racing mind, difficulty concentrating
- heart palpitations, rapid breathing, shortness of breath
- sweating, trembling, dizziness, feeling weak or tired
- difficulty sleeping, nightmares
- restlessness, an impending sense of danger or doom
- muscle tension and headaches
- numbness or tingling in the hands and feet
- digestive disorders including indigestion and diarrhoea



These are the symptoms of the “fight or flight response” and the results of high levels of adrenalin and cortisol in your bloodstream. I’m fond of saying “anxiety is a hormone”! But because the symptoms are so unpleasant you can become enslaved by anxiety and think it rules you, and that you are helpless in the face of it.

Anxiety or panic “attack” is a commonly used term. Which paints you as a victim. And that is precisely the stance from which you need to liberate yourself. After all, anxiety is an inside job and it’s possible to do much more than you might think to alleviate the symptoms.

A holistic approach to anxiety means having consideration for the complete person, physically, psychologically and spiritually. I’ve described some of the many factors involved in the cause of anxiety so it’s not just the symptoms but the underlying causes which need addressing. Our ability to be well depends on many different factors and these all need to be taken into consideration.

Happily there are a great many natural ways in which anxiety can be alleviated without causing harm to the body and your journey of becoming free from anxiety will involve you exploring some of these and finding out which ones work best for you. You can find out more about holistic approaches to anxiety in my blog.

As well as working on the long term causes, it is possible to alleviate anxiety symptoms in the short term – and in this eBook I give you some ideas on effective actions you can take right now to support yourself. Remember, anxiety is not who you are, it is what you do.

It’s time to take back your power and become free from anxiety.

If you need any help, please contact Margaret at margaret@tangibleresults.com.au



What is a Practice?

A practice is something which is done regularly, possibly at the same time each day, and adhered to, no matter the distractions or resistance. And we do it quite simply because it yields results and is one of the most effective ways of pushing against ingrained beliefs, attitudes, emotions and behaviours.

You may well be familiar with the practice it requires to play golf or ski, sing or dance, speak professionally, sell a product, manage a project – to excel at anything takes practice. In this instance we want to look at practices that we can engage in that will support us in going free from anxiety, stress and tension, no matter what it is caused by.

Prepare an Action Plan

Read through the suggested practices below and pick one or more that appeal and that you can do immediately. Try them out. Then decide what you are going to undertake as ongoing practices to support yourself in feeling less stressed and anxious.

It's amazing how we can forget to do things when we are under duress, so I suggest putting up a schedule on the wall, or putting reminders in your phone or computer – whatever works for you.

Unfortunately reading this won't help you much but doing the practices can make a huge difference. So make sure you take some action. And of course [contact me](#) if you have any questions or need support in any way.



Relaxation

If you are anxious it is essential to take time out to specifically help your body to relax even if it is only 10 minutes a day. Find this time and it will pay handsomely in terms of increased efficiency and productivity during the rest of your day.

There are many ways of going about this but if you are not familiar with meditating, a process like yoga nidra or progressive body relaxation, it can be good either to do something guided or a breathing practice.

Why breathing? Well, when you are anxious it affects your breathing – your breathing becomes shallow and you might even feel tight in your chest. You also breathe more rapidly. Some people really have trouble breathing when they are anxious and end up hyperventilating which means not getting enough oxygen and blowing out too much carbon dioxide. That can then lead to light-headedness and a feeling of pressure in the chest and not getting enough air which in turn leads to more fear and panic – which then makes it even harder to control the breathing.

So it's really important to break this loop and breathing practices can really help this and have a profoundly calming effect. Focussing on the breath is also the best known way of keeping the mind in the present moment in the body, instead of being off on anxiety provoking thoughts. When the mind is more relaxed the body also relaxes and vice versa. This is a great feedback loop to get into instead!

“ When the mind is more relaxed the body also relaxes and vice versa ”

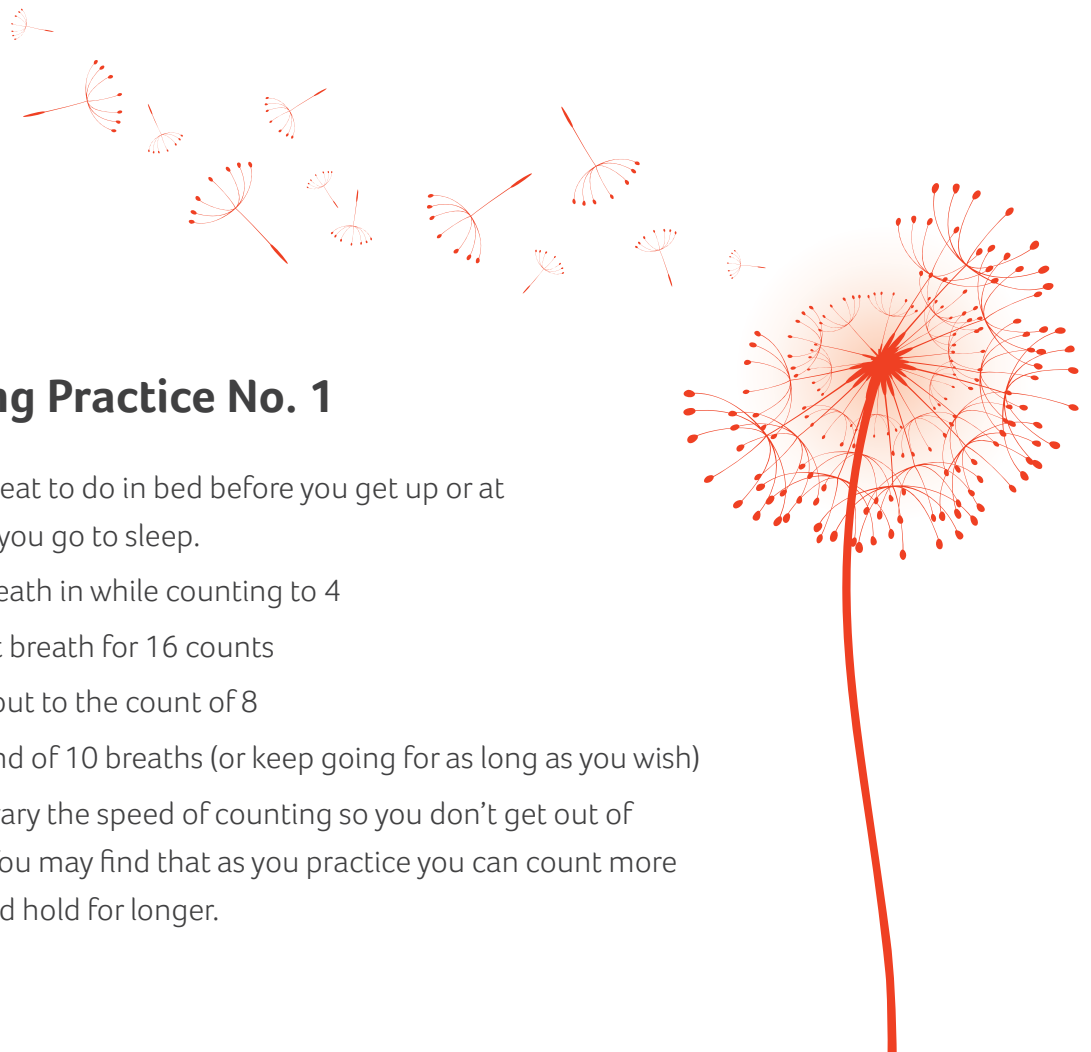
As long as you are alive your breathing is always with you and it's an incredibly powerful ally in learning to relax and be present because tuning into it brings you right into the here and now, anchoring you into the fundamental, rhythmic flow of life.

I'm going to give you three very simple breathing practices – try them one at a time, perhaps on different days – you might find they all fit well or that one in particular helps you to feel calmer and more relaxed.

You can do all the practices sitting up or lying down. I often like to lie down when I'm doing the first two breathing practices at home because then my whole body is supported by the floor or bed and can relax fully.

When you breathe it is important to breathe right down into your abdomen so it sticks out when you breathe in. We often do it the other way around so you might have to practice for a while. It's easiest to get this right lying down because then the rest of your body can't compensate. Put your hands on your belly so your fingers touch. When you breathe in, your fingers should move apart.

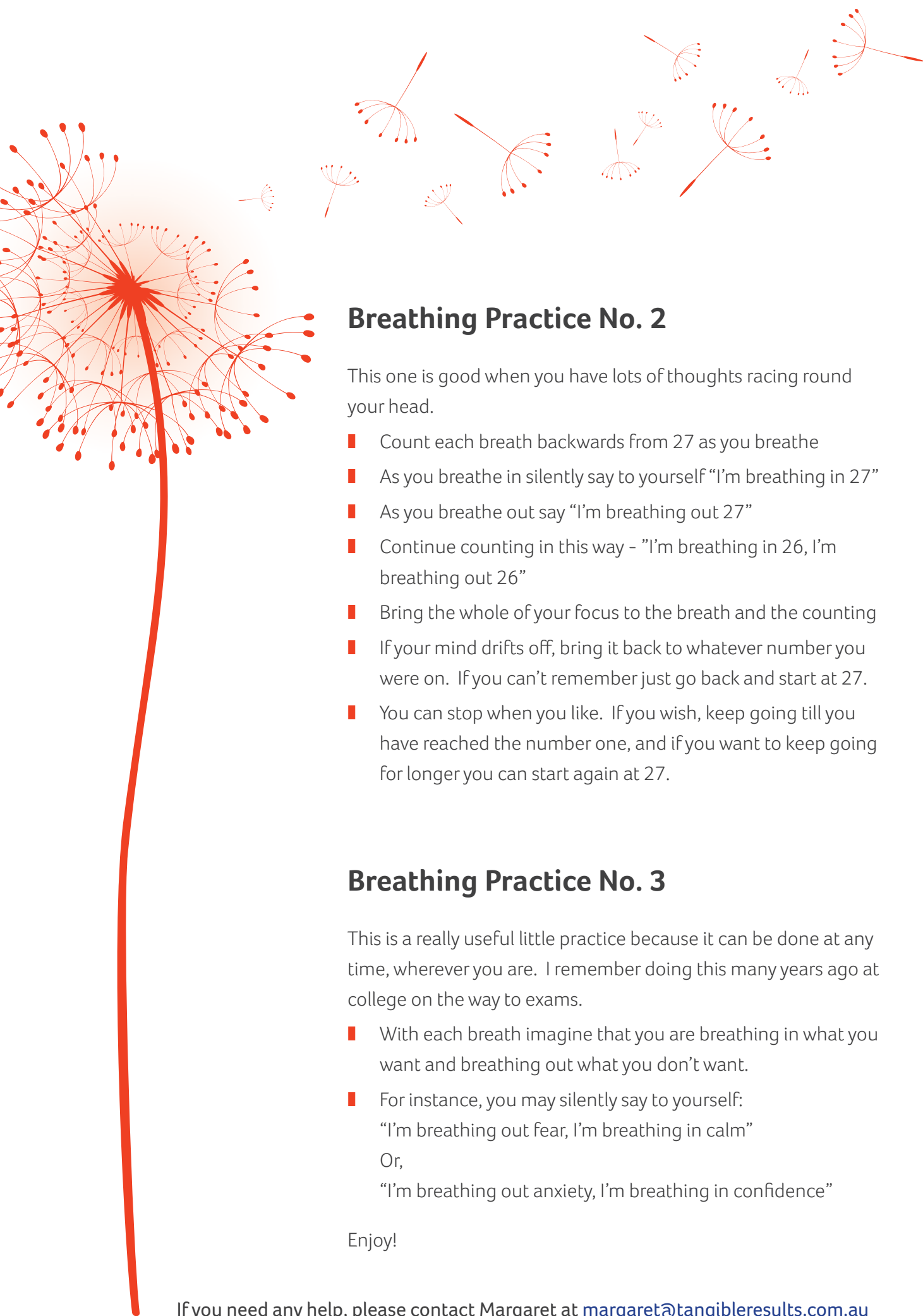
Here we go:



Breathing Practice No. 1

This one is great to do in bed before you get up or at night before you go to sleep.

- Take a breath in while counting to 4
- Hold that breath for 16 counts
- Breathe out to the count of 8
- Do a round of 10 breaths (or keep going for as long as you wish)
- You can vary the speed of counting so you don't get out of breath. You may find that as you practice you can count more slowly and hold for longer.



Breathing Practice No. 2

This one is good when you have lots of thoughts racing round your head.

- Count each breath backwards from 27 as you breathe
- As you breathe in silently say to yourself “I’m breathing in 27”
- As you breathe out say “I’m breathing out 27”
- Continue counting in this way - “I’m breathing in 26, I’m breathing out 26”
- Bring the whole of your focus to the breath and the counting
- If your mind drifts off, bring it back to whatever number you were on. If you can’t remember just go back and start at 27.
- You can stop when you like. If you wish, keep going till you have reached the number one, and if you want to keep going for longer you can start again at 27.

Breathing Practice No. 3

This is a really useful little practice because it can be done at any time, wherever you are. I remember doing this many years ago at college on the way to exams.

- With each breath imagine that you are breathing in what you want and breathing out what you don’t want.
- For instance, you may silently say to yourself:
“I’m breathing out fear, I’m breathing in calm”
Or,
“I’m breathing out anxiety, I’m breathing in confidence”

Enjoy!

If you need any help, please contact Margaret at margaret@tangibleresults.com.au



Meridian Tapping

I came across meridian tapping in 2001 when the founder of Emotional Freedom Techniques, Gary Craig, was doing an amazing job of making it known to the world. There have been many developments in the energy medicine field since then and I still haven't found anything that has helped me as much – which is why I've specialised in it.

There are different forms of tapping you can learn easily on the internet but here I'm going to teach how to do the very basics of Faster EFT, because it will get you started straight away until you learn more. And it's easy!

Instructions for Faster EFT

Step 1

Firstly decide what problem or issue you want to address. Bring your attention to the emotional feeling or body sensation that it evokes. Let's say you are anxious about a situation at work. When you think about the situation notice where the anxious feelings come in your body, where there is tightness, tension, a feeling of nausea, a knot in the stomach etc.

If you have difficulty with doing that you might ask yourself "How do I know I feel anxious?" You don't have to know the answer but the question puts you more in touch with the problematic feelings.



Step 2

Measure the intensity of the emotion or the symptom you are experiencing on a scale from 0-10 where:

- 0 is the bottom end of the scale – there are no emotions or symptoms present and you feel calm and relaxed.
- 5 is the middle of the scale – you feel uncomfortable, but you can stand it.
- 8 is where the discomfort is severe.
- 10 is where the discomfort is as intense as it can get.


You do this so you can measure your progress and the intention is to keep tapping till you get to 0, 1 or 2.

Step 3

Using your index and middle fingers as a tapping pad, tap between 7 and 10 times (no need to count) on the following points (as in the diagram below)

1. Eyebrow point
2. Side of the eye
3. Under the eye
4. Collarbone

Tap firmly enough to feel it – though you can also touch or rub the spots.



“ Keep tapping through any resistance or new feelings that arise until they are gone ”

Step 4

As you tap, say the words “Let it go, let it go, let it go, it’s safe to let it go”

Step 5

Take a deep breath in, and let it out, imagine that you are blowing it all out.

Step 6

Hold your wrist (as in the diagram) and say the word “peace” while thinking of a happy memory or a relaxing, calm place you’ve been to. This replaces the negative state with a more resourceful state.

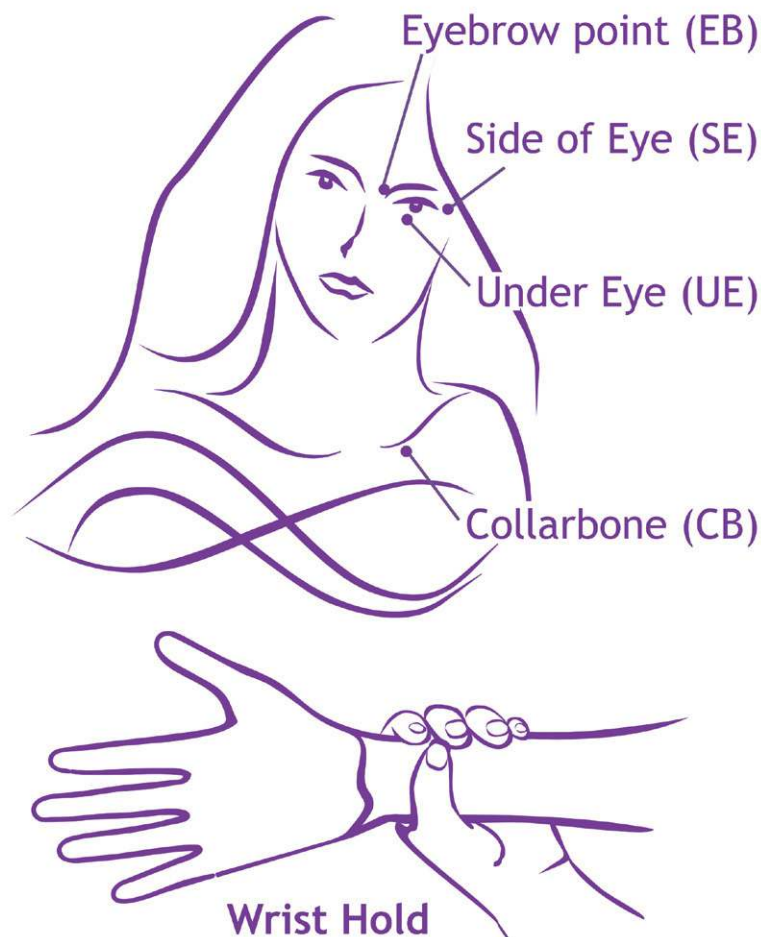
Step 7

Take stock. Check out what number you would give the intensity now. Has it gone down? Or has it increased? So for example you would think about the situation at work and see if you still felt anxious. Perhaps you started off at an 8 and now you are at an intensity of 5. If you are not at a really low number repeat the process.

You may find that the initial feelings have changed – perhaps you started off feeling anxious and now you feel angry. So this time focus on how you feel angry and tap again.

Keep tapping through any resistance or new feelings that arise until they are gone. If you are working on the memory of a negative event, keep tapping until the memory is positive.

Faster EFT Tapping Points



There is, of course, much more to learn but give it a go and see how much just doing this simple little process can relax you. Yes, it will feel strange, but you have nothing to lose except some anxiety and tension!

Tapping Practice

Find some time to tap every day. Either set aside a particular time to work on an issue, or tap to manage your state of being throughout the day as challenges come up. Alongside many thousands of people throughout the world it could be the most transformational thing you ever did.

If you need any help, please contact Margaret at margaret@tangibleresults.com.au



Kindness and Compassion

I'm inclined to think that one of the greatest sources of anxiety is what some people call "The Inner Critic". The voice in the head that manages to keep up a stream of criticism 24/7. And what I've noticed is that many people are totally unaware of just how critical their inner voice is. It's so automatic and has been there so long they don't even recognise it much of the time.

We internalise the judgements and criticisms from caregivers, school teachers, school kids and others, and we also form beliefs about our identity that are often buried. We may be aware that we think we're not good enough but we may not be aware that at rock bottom we believe we are worthless, or stupid, inferior, powerless, unimportant, unloved, unwanted, a burden, invisible, or a failure.

And that's just naming a few possibilities of what your core beliefs could be about yourself!

So given these deep seated ideas we have about ourselves and who we are – which are all false – it's not hard to see why anxiety would stem from any of them. The truth is that we are often harsh to ourselves in a way that we would never dream of being to other people.

I used to suffer from an intense fear of being criticised and I still remember when it finally dawned on me that no-one else could possibly criticise me as much as I did myself!

When you lack self-esteem and want to please other people or have them like you, you can spend your time dancing around trying to make them happy. This too is a recipe for anxiety - because what if you don't know what will please them? What if they don't like you?

There are many ways of tackling all of this, but one of the simplest and most immediate remedies is to find kindness and compassion for ourselves. They are qualities we are rather better at using with other people than ourselves, but we have an urgent need to develop them for ourselves. As the Dalai Lama has said: "Be kind whenever possible – it is always possible".

Kindness Practice

Ask yourself one or other of these questions as many times a day as you need to:

- If I were being kind to myself right now,
 - what would I be doing?
 - what would I be thinking?
 - what would I be feeling?
- What would be the kindest thing here?



Compassion Practice

You might notice that you actively criticise the part of you that is anxious, instead of recognising that this is a part of you that is not coping in some way, and needs soothing and calming instead of your critical self-talk.

To have compassion for yourself is to have a deep empathy for your suffering. It might be a stretch but you'll notice the difference it makes when you practice cultivating compassion instead of criticism or judgement.

To help you do this, think about or write down how you would respond to a good friend who was in the same situation. What would you do? What would you say? What tone of voice would you use? And then notice how you are responding to yourself. Is there a difference? If there is, you might want to contemplate about what causes that difference.

The aim is to become your very own best friend, to use your compassion for your own benefit, to make a compassionate stand for yourself in the face of whatever it is you are having difficulty with.

If you need any help, please contact Margaret at margaret@tangibleresults.com.au

“What if” Thinking

Otherwise known as catastrophizing! There's a really good way of getting anxious very quickly and that is by asking yourself a stream of negative “what if” questions. You know what I mean. I'm not talking about the sort of questions that are good for planning ahead and which need to be addressed. I'm talking about the ones that are fearful and just take on a life of their own.

For instance, if you are doing a presentation it might go like this:


What if I freeze? What if I go blank? What if people can see my hands shaking? What if I look stupid? What if I don't know the answer? What if the PowerPoint doesn't work? What if people don't like what I say? What if people are really bored? What if people don't get my jokes? What if I run out of time? What if they don't understand what I'm trying to convey? What if the audience is hostile?

Sometimes we can really get on a roll! And not even realise we are on it. Escalation is the name of the game!

The trouble with this is that when you ask the question you get an anxiety provoking image in response, which sets off anxiety symptoms in your body. Your “fight or flight response” is triggered which is exactly what you don't want.

“ What we want is calming, reassuring thinking instead and “what if” questions which send us in another feeling direction ”





***“ Every time you catch
a “what if” thought
replace it with a positive
thought that makes you
feel more resourceful,
strong and calm. ”***

The thing about “what if’s” is that they take place in the future. It’s a future that hasn’t happened, so you can’t possibly deal with it in the present. And most of them don’t actually happen, so it really is a waste of energy and anxiety. And if they do happen....well you deal with them when they happen – instead of feeling anxious for hours, days, weeks or months in advance.

What we want is calming, reassuring thinking instead and “what if” questions which send us in another feeling direction. What if it all goes really well? What if I just focus on enjoying myself? What if they love what I have to say? What if they are inspired? What if they really engage? What if I feel really confident? What if I just allow myself to relax?

“What if” Practice

Catastrophizing “what if’s” can be very insidious – they need weeding out so it’s essential to become alert to them.

Notice if there is a particular area where you tend to do that.

Every time you catch a “what if” thought replace it with a positive thought that makes you feel more resourceful, strong and calm.

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Calm Nutrition

You might not think that what you are eating or drinking is having a marked effect on your feelings of anxiety. But consider this. If you drink a cup of coffee and eat some chocolate, this immediately pushes up your blood sugar levels. Now anything in the body that is out of balance is a stressor and your body gets on to it right away.

So, being very clever, your body sends out some insulin to help get the sugar and caffeine out of the blood stream, but because it was a sudden hit, your body probably overreacts, which then sends your blood sugar levels plummeting. Low blood sugar levels raise the alarm bells so the body sends out some stress hormones – just what you don't want!

And of course, you've guessed it, when you have low blood sugar you feel anxious and lack concentration (your brain needs glucose and water to work).

There are whole books on this topic, but suffice here to suggest some simple practices that could help you feel less anxious.



Nutritional Practice No. 1

Eat regular meals. No more dashing out without breakfast, missing lunch, or thinking that a Mars bar constitutes a meal. Small frequent meals are best to avoid your blood sugar level dropping.

Nutritional Practice No. 2

Choose one or more foods or drinks to cut down on from the following list:

- Tea, coffee, alcohol, soft drinks, chocolate
- Foods with refined sugar in them – e.g. cakes, biscuits, pastries, lollies
- Foods containing preservatives/flavourings/colouring etc. (Who knows what's in them that is affecting your biochemistry).
- Canned and packaged foods (They often have high levels of sugar).

From my days as a naturopath, I formed the opinion that people often got further down the track by taking one step at a time, rather than going cold turkey and setting forth on a radical new diet. If you get to the third day and toss it out of the window because it's all too hard, you get less result than if you had just started cutting out one cup of coffee a day and kept going with it.

It has to be do-able to get long term results.

Nutrition Practice No. 3

Eat CALMING foods such as

- Fruits and vegies
- Nuts and seeds
- Beans
- Whole grains
- Dairy
- Herbs (spices in moderation)
- Meat, fish and poultry (in moderation)

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“ Small frequent meals are best to avoid your blood sugar level dropping ”



Summary

When you're feeling anxious, overwhelmed and stressed, it can be difficult to recognise that you really can turn things around. But while you may need external support as well, there is much you can do to soothe and calm yourself. Even doing one of these practices can start the ball rolling.

Action is the only thing that brings results so gather up all the determination that you have and pick the practice which appeals to you most and try it out. See how it works. Then add others and see which is most effective for you. A combination of physical relaxation, changing your mindset and good nutrition will bring you the best outcome.

Please contact me with any challenges or questions. I would love to hear from you.

About the Author

Margaret is a passionate advocate for people wanting to create lives that fully reflect who they truly are, and who want to contribute their greatest gifts to the world. An international peak performance specialist, speaker, trainer and the author of "The Power of Tapping" and "Create Prosperity", she is especially skilled in the alleviation of anxiety and stress.



Margaret has been consulting since 1988 and works in person in Sydney, Australia, and online around the globe.

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