

Factsheet 8B: Exercises to cope with fear, hypervigilance and panic

EXERCISE: Relaxed Breathing Method

Often when people are frightened or upset, they start to breathe faster. This is a natural survival response to prepare the body to fight or run away.

Sometimes our body can remain stuck on high alert and fast breathing can continue over a long period of time causing unpleasant physical sensations. Relaxed breathing is a simple technique that helps you slow down the body's survival response and is helpful in reducing our feelings of fear and panic.



Practice the exercise below for at least 5-10 minutes each day.

It may be difficult at first, but the more you practice the easier it will become. Practicing during times of ease will help your body more easily remember a sense of safety. This can help to reduce feelings of fear when they happen and can help you recover from an experience of panic more quickly.

Step 1



Lie on your back or sit comfortably upright with both feet on the floor.

Step 2



Place one hand on your stomach and the other on your chest.

Step 3



- Breathe in for 4 seconds
- Hold for 4 seconds

Step 4



Say the word 'relax' (or another calming word) every time you breath out for 6 seconds.

Step 5



Continue breathing like this until all signs of fear, tension and panic have gone.



Sometimes the symptoms will return after a short while – that's normal. Just continue the Relaxed Breathing Method again for as long as is needed.

EXERCISE: Notice five things



Practice this technique throughout the day, especially any time you find yourself getting caught up in difficult thoughts and feelings.

When we are feeling tense and afraid, we are caught up in difficult thoughts, memories, emotions and sensations related to the past or our fears for the future.

Bringing our focus to our sense of sight, sound, touch, smell and taste can be a quick and powerful way of bringing our attention back to the present moment where we are safe.

Pause for a moment. Notice and name what you are experiencing (e.g. I am having a difficult memory, I have tightness in my chest). Then look around and name out loud the following:



5 things you can see



4 things you can hear



3 things you can touch
(or that you can feel on your skin)



2 things you can smell



1 thing you can taste

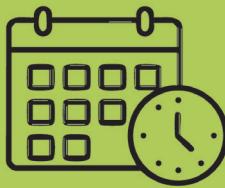
EXERCISE: Remind yourself you are safe

Unwanted memories from the past and worry about the future can make you feel unsafe. A simple strategy you can practice daily is reminding yourself that you are safe now.

Combining this with the Relaxed Breathing Method can be particularly helpful when practiced regularly.



Remind yourself of where you are right now (e.g. I am in my bedroom, in my house, in Brisbane).



Remind yourself of when it is right now (e.g. It is 5pm on Sunday. It is the date/month/year).



Remind yourself how where you are right now is different to the past. Be specific.



If you are not in a safe environment, consider reaching out to QPASTT or another service that you trust.