

7 Tools for Reducing Anxiety

From [MentalHealth101.org](https://www.MentalHealth101.org)

What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is an emotion all humans experience. It involves strong feelings of stress and worry. Some people may experience it more frequently or with more intensity, but we all face it from time to time. Though it's not possible to completely avoid stress or anxiety, it doesn't have to control your life! There are ways we can manage anxiety and the unpleasant effects that come with it.

The 7 Tools for Reducing Anxiety outlined in this guide will teach you some effective and practical ways to reduce anxiety in your daily life. (We will walk you through each one on a separate page.)

The 7 Tools at a Glance

1. **Support System Checkup**
2. **Self-Esteem Checkup**
3. **Calming Resets**
4. **Boosting Resets**
5. **Mental Health Diet**
6. **Physical Diet**
7. **Get Professional Help**



While this guide is a great resource, we always recommend seeking help from a mental health professional, especially if you or someone you know is experiencing ongoing anxiety, depression, or any other mental health challenge.

If you or someone you know is struggling with thoughts of suicide, please call or text the Suicide Prevention Hotline at **1-800-273-8255**, or visit [suicidepreventionlifeline.org](https://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org).

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1. Support System Checkup

- Anxiety and stress can make you feel like you're the only one struggling and there's no one and nowhere to turn to for help. That's why a healthy support system is key to reducing anxiety!
- Use **The 5 Elements of Your Support System** listed below to evaluate your support system:
 - 1. People:** People are the most important element of your support system. Whether it's friends, family members, teachers, or counselors, it's important to have a small group of people you can talk to and trust, especially when you're going through a difficult time.
 - 2. Places:** Having somewhere to go to feel safe and free to be yourself without judgment is an important part of your support system that we often take for granted.
 - 3. Things:** Basic items such as food, shelter, clothing, and money are essential, but other items can provide additional support. For example, maybe you find comfort in a pet, a favorite book, or an app that helps you manage stress.
 - 4. Beliefs:** Your core beliefs and values provide support by guiding your decisions and providing meaning for your life.
 - 5. Activities:** Hobbies, interests, or coping skills can provide support by helping you calm down or reenergize depending on what's needed.

Reflection Questions

1. Which of the 5 Elements of Your Support System do you typically rely on the most for support?
2. What area of your support system could benefit from building up a bit more?
3. Make a list of the top elements of your support system for each of the five categories above.
4. Think about the people you spend the most time with. Are they making healthy life decisions and building you up? How are you being influenced by your friends and family?

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2. Self-Esteem Checkup

- Self-esteem is your overall sense of self-worth. As demonstrated in **the shadow metaphor** below, we tend to see ourselves either smaller than we are (self-minimizing) or we project an image larger than we are (self-projecting).
- **Healthy Self-Esteem comes from self-acceptance.** It means being confident enough to acknowledge your strengths and humble enough to laugh at some of your mistakes. The attitude is: *I'm not perfect, and that's okay.* (Perfectionism ultimately damages self-esteem.)

Self-Minimizing

Defeated perfectionism

“I’m never good enough.”

Critical of myself

Blind to my strengths

Easily offended

= Low Self-Esteem



Self-Projecting

Prideful perfectionism

“I’m the best at everything”

Critical of others

Blind to my weaknesses

Easily offended & offensive

= Low Self-Esteem

Reflection Questions

1. List **one strength** you can celebrate and **one weakness** you can acknowledge about yourself.
2. When you make a mistake, how do you respond? Do you mentally beat yourself up, blame it on others, laugh it off, or something else? How could this be affecting your mental health?

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3. Calming Resets

- Our coping strategies, or the way we respond to stress, can greatly influence the impact that negative emotions may have. When we react to stress with unhealthy coping strategies such as overeating, drinking, or escaping to Netflix or social media binges, it often leads to increased stress levels.
- **Calming Resets** are proven activities that activate the parasympathetic system to create an immediate calming effect in our brains and bodies.
- **Examples of Calming Resets** (What else would you add to this list?)

1. **Practice deep breathing**
2. **Reflect in silence**
3. **Write down your feelings**
4. **Tell your muscles to relax**
5. **Stand up and stretch**
6. **Take a slow walk**
7. **Draw something**
8. **Write down your thoughts**
9. **Forgive someone**
10. **Listen to calming music**



Reflection Questions

1. What are some healthy or unhealthy coping strategies you have used to relax from stress?
2. Choose one Calming Reset from the list above, or create your own. Practice the reset for at least 60 seconds.
3. How did you feel after completing the Calming Reset? What changes did you notice in your mind and body?

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4. Boosting Resets

- Sometimes when we experience stress or are overwhelmed, we may feel disengaged, unmotivated, or unfocused. In those moments, we need an energy boost, and it's important that we get it in a healthy way.
- **Boosting Resets** are simple, proven coping strategies that awaken our senses by releasing endorphins and dopamine, giving us the mental boost and renewed focus needed to face our next challenge.
- **Examples of Boosting Resets** (What else would you add to this list?)
 1. Jog in place
 2. Run in place
 3. Do jumping jacks
 4. Drink a glass of water
 5. Eat a healthy snack
 6. Compliment someone
 7. Help someone
 8. Thank someone
 9. Ask for help
 10. Dance to upbeat music



Reflection Questions

1. What are some healthy or unhealthy coping strategies you have used reenergize and focus?
2. Choose one Boosting Reset from the list above, or create your own. Practice the reset for at least 60 seconds.
3. How did you feel after completing the Boosting Reset? What changes did you notice in your mind and body?

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5. Maintain Your Mental & Physical Health

Mental Health and Wellbeing

- Mental health is more than the absence of mental illness. It's also the presence of mental wellness, and it influences your thoughts, behaviors, and your response to stress and anxiety.
- Just like physical health, mental health requires you to make continuous healthy choices regarding your coping strategies, where you find value, who is in your support system, etc.
- You're the captain of your ship! Use The Boat Metaphor to focus your energy on caring for your mental health instead of wasting energy on the things and people outside of your control.

Physical Health and Wellbeing

- Taking care of your physical health has immense positive effects on your body, mind, and ability to manage stress and anxiety.
- Nutrition: Fueling your brain and body with well-balanced meals, healthy snacks, and water throughout the day provides the nutrients needed to function, stay alert, and maintain energy.
- Exercise: Active movement provides a mental health reset by helping your mind refresh itself when you're feeling moody, depressed, or stuck. A lifestyle of regular exercise also improves cognitive functioning.
- Sleep: Getting enough sleep (8-10 hours for teens and 7-9 hours for adults) is critical to maintaining your physical and mental health.

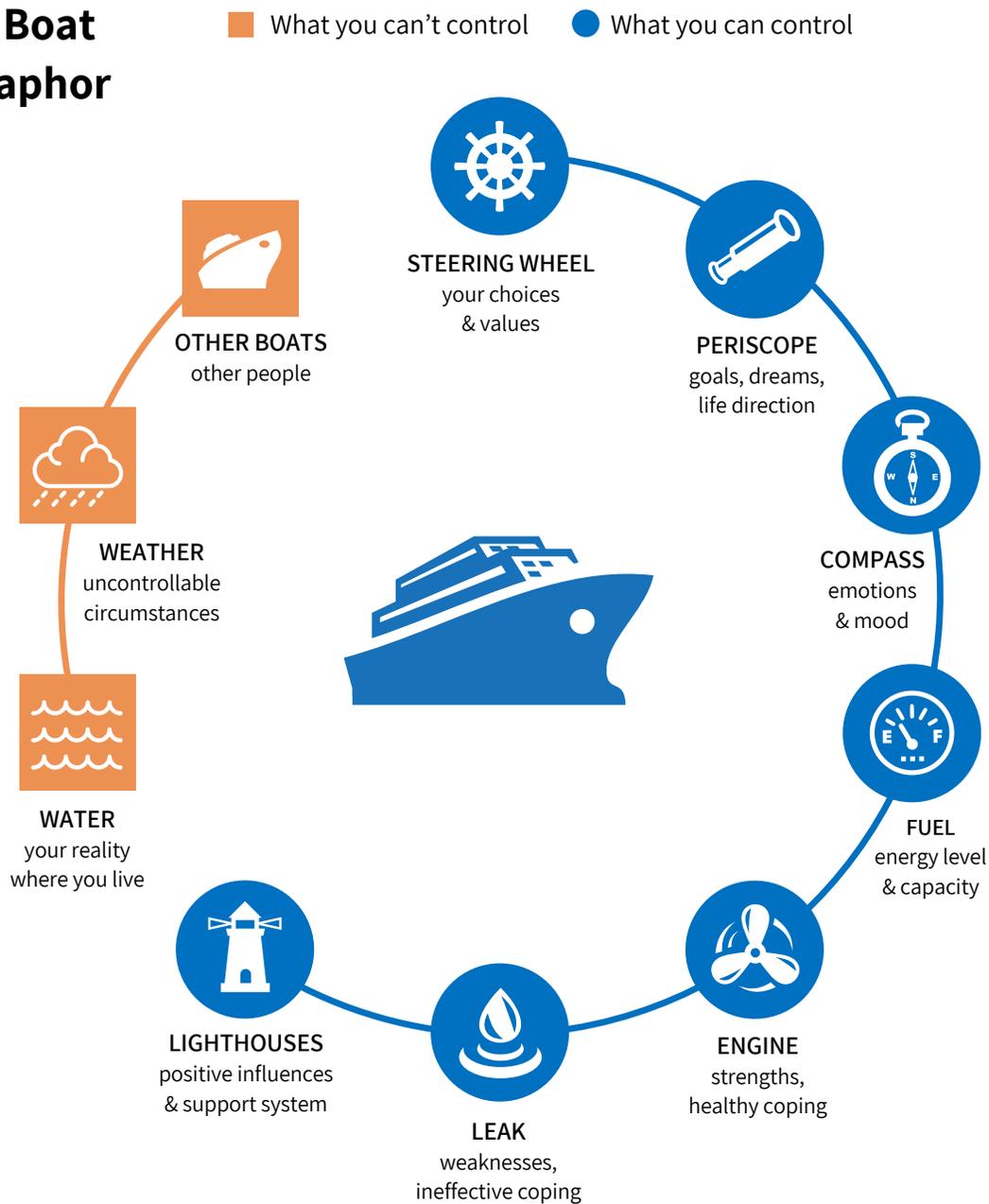
Reflection Questions

1. How could a person's physical health impact their mental health and wellbeing?
2. What is one area you want to improve mentally? What about physically? Take time to write a journal entry describing in detail how you will reach your goal for each area.

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6. The Boat Metaphor



Reflection Questions

1. Which one of the **seven elements you can control** do you feel is the healthiest in your life?
2. Which of the seven elements might need improvement or require some attention?

The Boat Metaphor is a simplified visual aid for discussing and understanding mental health and wellness. It is based on the sailboat metaphor by Dr. Hugo Alberts, PhD, and expanded on by Mental Health 101. © 2021

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7. Get Professional Help

- Everyone experiences periods of being mentally unwell, just like everyone experiences periods of being physically unwell. There's no shame in it – it's part of being human.
- Sometimes, you are able to manage stress and anxiety on your own with your support system, but just like some physical illnesses require a visit to the doctor, a mental illness may require some professional help.
- You cannot self-diagnose a mental illness, and often professional help is needed. Below are three indications you may be experiencing mental illness or at least... mental unwellness:

- 1. You have multiple symptoms, and...**
- 2. The symptoms are so bad that they seriously interfere with your ability to live daily life, and...**
- 3. The interference lasts for an extended period of time, such as several weeks or even months.**



- If you're not sure where to find a mental health professional, your primary care doctor can provide recommendations or you can visit the National Alliance on Mental Illness website at <https://www.nami.org/> for a full list of different types of mental health experts.
- If you or someone you know is struggling with thoughts of suicide, please call or text the Suicide Prevention Hotline at **1-800-273-8255**, or visit suicidepreventionlifeline.org.

Reflection Questions

1. How is a mental illness similar to a physical illness?
2. What is the difference between being mentally unwell and having a mental illness?
3. What are some steps you could take if you or someone you know would benefit from meeting with a mental health professional, such as a licensed psychologist, psychiatrist, or counselor?