

ART  
NURSE'S

8

WAYS  
TO BEAT  
ANXIETY



## 1) Prioritize Your Needs

While it's obviously good to be kind and giving, some of us give so much that we neglect our own needs and push ourselves to constantly be productive.

The critical voice in your head saying you're not good enough is often the culprit, but self-care is actually essential for being able to have a happy life and give the best of yourself to others.

Failure to prioritize your needs can lead you to feeling resentful, drained of energy, and can contribute to anxiety and depression.

### Art Nurse Remedy

Do more of what you love and even schedule it in if you feel you don't have the time.

Make a list of all the pleasurable things you have always wanted to do, as well as all the little things that make you happy, but which you cast aside as unimportant in your over-achievement mode.

It can be as simple as delegating time to read a book in the bath, or sitting in the park watching the world go by. Whatever it is that floats your boat – resolve to do more of it every single day.

If you find it hard to do this and feel guilty taking time for yourself, start with small amounts of time, say ten minutes a day, working up to an hour or more.

Meeting your own needs is not selfish – it's a priority for good mental health. When we constantly put others first, we feel worn out, but when we do the things that energize us, we have more enthusiasm to give to others.

It's seen as acceptable to brag about being stressed or overworked, and that if you don't, you're a slacker. This is not the truth. Life is also for joy, wonder, laughter and being in the moment.

Once you get over the guilt, you'll eventually look forward to every day – because finally there's something in it for you.

## 2) Tackle Low Mood

It's normal to have a range of emotions, and everyone feels low occasionally, such as after an upsetting event or major life change.

However, low moods sometimes happen for no obvious reason and lead to anxiety, tiredness, anger and a loss of confidence.

It's important to be kind to yourself during these times and do things that improve your mental wellbeing. If your low mood lasts for several weeks, you may be experiencing depression, and should seek help from a medical professional.

## **Art Nurse Remedy**

The key to tackling low mood is self-care, routine, and a focus on your positive contributions.

Make a list of enjoyable activities and schedule in at least one of these per day. Force yourself to get some exercise, too. Even if you don't feel like moving, you'll feel better afterwards.

Often low mood is caused by unhelpful thoughts, so try to challenge these and reframe negative perceptions of events. Focus on what you're doing right, not what you're doing wrong, and at the end of each day write down three things you did well – no matter how small.

Worrying about the future causes anxiety and a lack of routine can exacerbate this. Create a plan for each day to give you a feeling of control over the direction of your life.

You may not have much time in the day for yourself, but even ten or 15 minutes snatched here or there is better than nothing.

Maybe you could get stuck in to a good novel during your work break, or take a pocket-sized sketchbook to draw the other passengers on public transport?

## **3) Beat Insomnia**

We've all had those nights where we've tossed and turned for hours, unable to get to sleep.

It could be bad sleeping habits, noise or medical conditions keeping you awake - but more commonly, it's something that's on your mind.

Being sleepless for one night is bad enough, but insomnia itself can be long-term, lasting for months or even years.

## **Art Nurse Remedy**

Make sure your bedroom is a quiet place to relax and sleep, and is properly dark when you turn out the light. If you have noisy neighbors, wear earplugs.

Wind down and relax at least an hour before bed, and don't use a smartphone, tablet or TV during that time, as the light from these devices causes you to stay awake.

If you've failed to fall asleep 20 minutes after lights out, get up and do a relaxing activity outside your bedroom, such as reading or crafting.

There are also calming exercises you can do to provoke sleep, such as tensing and relaxing every muscle in your body in turn from the feet up.

One therapist-recommended technique I found very effective is to imagine you're standing in a white room wearing your favorite clothes, and next to you is a large white box.

Into this box, you throw every worry that's on your mind – large and small – until you can't think of any more. It can include people, objects, situations, or anxieties – anything that keeps you awake.

Then you walk to a cartoon-style TNT detonator at the side of the room and push the plunger down, blowing up the box full of worries.

## 4) Create a Relaxation Technique

Anxiety is the fear of something going wrong in the future, rather than the present, and it can really affect your ability to enjoy life.

Perhaps you feel anxious prior to particular situations, such as going on a date, or starting a new job? Or maybe you have an overwhelming sense of doom that affects your whole day and even your sleep?

Whatever the cause, there are solutions to this problem and you are entitled to enjoy your life without the burden of anxiety.

### Art Nurse Remedy

It can help to write down what triggers your anxiety, so that you can begin to notice patterns and take steps to tackle it before it gets out of hand.

At the same time, you should also note the good things in your life too and make efforts to increase the amount of time you spend on activities that bring you joy.

Relaxation goes hand-in-hand with this and many find that yoga, mindfulness or meditation decreases their anxiety and helps them cope.

Having an effective relaxation technique is essential in overcoming anxiety. Close your eyes and imagine you are at the top of a sweeping staircase. Beneath your bare feet is a carpet made of red velvet, and the handrail you are holding on to is made of gold.

As you slowly walk down each of the ten steps, you feel yourself becoming more and more relaxed. Notice how nice the velvet feels on the soles of your feet and what the gold handrail feels like under your fingers.

At the bottom of the stairs is a pair of grand carved wooden doors with golden handles. You open these and walk right out on to a deserted beach, feeling the warmth of the sun on your skin, breathing the smell of salt water, and hearing the sound of waves lapping gently at the shore. You can stay on this beach noticing the pleasant aspects for as long as you like.

This is a great technique to use in bed if your worries are preventing you from falling asleep. But you can also take ten or 20 minutes during the day to close your eyes and visualize this scene to calm you down.

## **5) Boost Low Self-esteem**

Many people suffer from low self-esteem, and one of the most common causes of it is having parents who criticized you too often when you were a child.

This kind of upbringing can make people really anxious about failure and making mistakes. Rather than fearing failure, those with normal self-esteem have growth and improvement as their goals.

Those with low self-esteem tend to have little confidence, being very self-critical and viewing events and the opinions of others as being negative.

### **Art Nurse Remedy**

To boost your self-esteem, identify the negative beliefs you have about yourself by writing them down and challenging them with the truth.

For example, if you've internalized the thought that you're stupid, write down instances of when you exhibited intelligence or insight, as well as all the nice things that people have said about you.

Talk to yourself the way you would talk to a much-loved friend – with kindness and compassion – and distance yourself from people who try to bring you down.

Remember that you are as entitled as anyone to have your needs and opinions respected. Assertiveness is a skill you must practise, and the best way to do this

is to notice when other people calmly say 'no' or ask for their needs to be met, and copy what they do.

## 6) Get Over Guilt

Guilt is a tricky emotion that is both good and bad. On one hand, it can motivate people to treat others with respect and pull their weight, but on the other, it can become a damaging habit that spoils your enjoyment of life.

People often exaggerate guilt-causing offences in their minds and think they deserve to feel bad for a long time – months or even years – but this is usually far too severe a response to the original misconduct.

If you had a childhood where your parents didn't meet some or all of your basic needs, you may feel guilt over prioritizing yourself. Now you're an adult, it's important that you nurture those needs and show yourself compassion.

### Art Nurse Remedy

No one is perfect all the time – all human beings fail and act in unflattering ways occasionally.

Feeling remorse instead of guilt is a useful way to move forward, as it focuses solely on what you did, rather than on you being a bad person in general.

If you feel guilty, it is better to accept that the incident happened, apologize to the person you mistreated – even if it's yourself – and work out how to avoid doing it again.

But be sure to apologize for what the *other person* thinks you did wrong, rather than what *you* think you did wrong.

Question whether the length of time you've felt guilty for is appropriate to your wrongdoing.

If you notice you feel guilty over the smallest things, it can be useful to write down all the things that you do to help people each day, as evidence of your qualities.

If your guilt is centered around not achieving what you feel you should, maybe consider that the standards that were set by your family when you were a child were just too high.

Perhaps these family ideals are not even within your abilities to achieve – and there's nothing wrong with that. We don't all have the same skills, and it would be a very boring world if we did.

Guilt may even rear its ugly head when you're doing things you enjoy. If this is the case, acknowledge the feeling, but do the pleasurable activity anyway. Make this a daily practise and slowly the feelings of guilt will be overtaken by joy at doing the things you love.

## 7) Move on From Shame

Feelings of shame can result in trying to be perfect, holding on to a lot of anger, and being unable to accept any love, positivity, or praise from others – or ourselves.

Most shame originates in childhood when caregivers scold us not for *doing* something wrong, but for *being* something wrong.

Shaming is toxic and can take many forms, but it's often done by expressing disgust, belittling efforts, ideas, or achievements.

### Art Nurse Remedy

Research shows that the more we think or do something, the more those thoughts or actions become habits. So, to begin, change the habit of thinking you're defective.

Become more compassionate towards yourself and accept yourself as a normal human being with flaws.

Try to challenge that critical voice in your head and think about how you would have liked your caregivers to talk to you as a child. Use that soothing language as your inner voice instead.

The last thing most people want to do is talk about shame – if they even acknowledge it. But discussing it with kind people you trust can help you put it in perspective and show you that you're loved just as you are.

If you've been carrying shame around your entire life, it can be hard to challenge the dysfunctional thinking patterns that lead to self-sabotage and imposter syndrome.

You may have internalized messages from society about how you should look or act, but you can set yourself free from these expectations by rejecting them and accepting yourself as you are.

To be able to move on, you need to recognize that there's a problem, discuss it with someone sympathetic, then move on by forgiving yourself and those who made you feel shamed.

## 8) Switch off Social Media

People can become so involved in social networking sites that it causes them psychological distress to have them taken away, resulting in anxiety, insecurity, restlessness and anger.

But aside from the habit-forming nature of the apps themselves, the underlying reasons for the overuse of social media include loneliness, approval-seeking and low self-esteem.

This constant connectivity actually exacerbates these problems, impacting negatively on relationships, sleep, work, and other responsibilities, as well as preventing us from reaching our goals.

### Art Nurse Remedy

Social media is consciously designed to encourage addictive behaviors, giving us a hit of dopamine whenever we get a like or a comment. This, in turn, fires feelings of pleasure and reward.

Getting this reward in a more productive, healthy manner is the key to beating social media addiction.

Work out why you use social media in the first place. Perhaps you don't get enough attention in other areas of your life, you're bored or you feel lonely – write a list of other ways you could solve these issues in the real world.

It takes three weeks to break a habit, so you could go cold turkey for that length of time, or try it in smaller steps, such as turning off notifications, deactivating your accounts, or taking the apps off your phone.

The pull-to-refresh and red notification buttons in particular have been shown to increase interaction with these platforms. And it's particularly telling that the majority of people who create and control social media rarely use it, or let their kids use it.

Every click you make gives the companies more information that they can sell to advertisers. You need to ask yourself why you're doing marketing for billionaires for free.

Replace your checking habit with something else, such as reading a book, sketching, hand-writing a letter, or some other absorbing past-time that can be dipped into when you'd usually be scrolling through your feed.

If you can't quit completely, only use social media for predetermined amounts of time – 30 minutes at lunch hour, for example.

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