

# Grounding exercises

How to use your five senses to relieve your anxiety

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TU Dublin Student Counselling Service

**WORKBOOK**

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# 5 4 3 2 1 Technique

Using your 5 senses to calm anxiety

One popular grounding method is called the 5-4-3-2-1 calming technique.

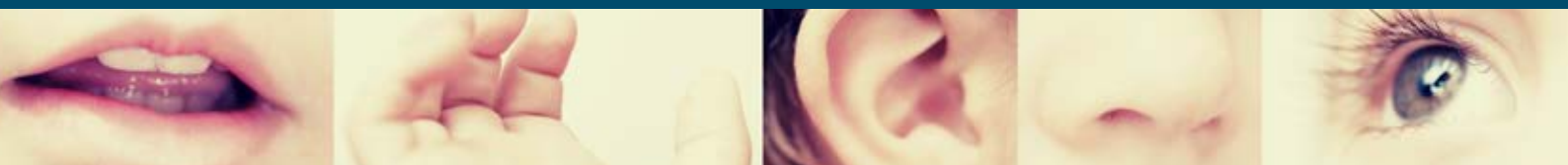
First, you may want to start with a simple deep breathing exercise called the 5-5-5 method. To do this, you breathe in for 5 seconds, hold your breath for 5 seconds, and then breathe out for 5 seconds.

You can continue this process until your thoughts slow down or you notice some relief.

When you can find your breath, try practicing the 5-4-3-2-1 technique. For that, you want to look around and focus on:

- 5 things you see
- 4 things you feel
- 3 things you hear
- 2 things you smell
- 1 thing you taste

The idea is that the 5-4-3-2-1 technique helps you shift your focus to what's currently happening around you instead of what's making you feel anxious.



# How to ground yourself using each of the 5 senses

Focusing on each of your senses is a simple way to distract yourself from those thoughts that may be causing your anxiety.

Consider choosing a couple of exercises for each sense and trying to focus all your attention on the sensations.

## Sight

To engage your sense of sight, here are some ideas:

- Look at every little detail on a family photo on the wall.
- Focus on a small object, such as a pencil or coffee mug, and identify every color and shape.
- Look at the sky for clouds, birds, sunrises, or anything else you can spot around.
- Focus your attention on a plant or flower and how it moves with the wind.
- Observe a pet while they play or rest.
- You can pick large or small items to focus on. Once you choose an object, try to notice the color, texture, and patterns.

## Touch

Activating your sense of touch can help distract you from anxious thoughts and may help you decrease the physical signs of anxiety.

You might want to try these exercises:

- Put your hands under running water, alternating between warm and cold temperatures every 30 seconds.
- Focus on how your clothing feels on your body or how your hair feels on your head.
- Touch different body parts by pressing down and holding for 30 seconds before moving to a different area.
- Touch the furniture in your living area and focus on its texture. For example, take notice of a smooth table.

# Hearing

Focusing on external sounds can help ground you in the moment.

Here are some noises to notice:

- a barking dog
- a stomach rumbling
- a clock ticking
- traffic outside
- a car or the luas/dart
- music
- conversation
- birds singing
- the wind blowing

# Smell

To incorporate smell into your grounding techniques, you may want to try these tips:

- Walk into your bathroom and sniff a bar of soap or shampoo.
- Light a scented candle.
- Diffuse a scented oil.
- Take in simple smells around you, such as the scent of a pillow on the couch or a pencil.
- Walk outside and breathe deeply through your nose. Maybe you will smell fresh cut grass or flowers blooming.

# Taste

Try to pick something that you can easily taste, such as:

- a piece of gum
- a mint
- coffee
- sugar and salt
- a piece of food
- You don't actually have to taste these items if you don't have them on hand. Instead, try thinking about the distinct flavors as you remember them.

## Mental grounding techniques for anxiety relief

Here are some additional tips to consider that can help when trying to engage your 5 senses to calm down:

- Begin grounding yourself in your senses as soon you realize you're experiencing strong emotions or a difficult mood.
- Don't make good or bad judgements. For instance, if you're focusing on a brown wall but don't like the color brown, simply tell yourself: "The wall is brown," instead of, "I don't like brown."
- Do your best to focus on the present, not the past or future. If your thoughts wander, softly bring them back to your senses.
- Notice your mood before and after using a technique to see if it's working for you. You might want to use a scale of 0 to 10 to rate your symptoms. Noticing relief may calm you down even more.
- Be flexible. If you notice one method is more successful than another, stick with that without judgement.
- Don't give up. It might take a few attempts before grounding methods are successful.

### 3-Minute breathing space

This exercise is one you can do in the middle of your busy day. It has you close your eyes and check in with your thoughts.

- Attend to what is: What are you thinking about? How are you feeling emotionally? What is your body feeling right now? Check on any tenseness or areas that feel different than they should.
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- Focus on your breath: The next step is to focus on your breathing and the present. If your mind wanders, bring your attention back to your breath.
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- Attend to the body: The last step is to expand outward with our senses. What do you smell, feel with touch, or hear around you? Continue to be aware of how you are feeling as you expand your attention.

