

Self-Regulation & TMS Techniques

A Practical Toolkit for Calming the Nervous System & Managing Chronic Symptoms

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Understanding Stress & Anxiety

The Nature of Arousal

- Arousal is a normal, healthy state essential to mammalian and human thriving.
- Optimal arousal (healthy stress) is different for each person and falls somewhere in the middle of a spectrum between stagnation and unhealthy stress.
- **Stress / Arousal** — demands on the organism and its resources, which is necessary for engagement, strength, and growth.

When Stress Becomes Unhealthy

- **Unhealthy stress (distress)** — the fact or perception that demands will overwhelm the organism and/or its resources (“I will not be okay”).
- **Anxiety** — the conscious or unconscious perception that one will not be safe (demands will overwhelm resources).
- Anxiety is always future-focused, never rooted in the present.
- Anxiety leads to unhealthy stress.
- Unhealthy stress activates the sympathetic nervous system and dampens vagal tone.

The Common Goal of All Techniques

Every technique for healing trauma, reducing anxiety, or relieving stress works toward the same ends:

- Activating the parasympathetic system and strengthening vagal tone.
- Creating the perception that one is safe.
- Relaxing the body physiologically.
- Reminding the mind of safety, confidence, and self-compassion.

Video & Media Resources

For Relieving Anxiety

- [Several techniques \(YouTube\)](#)
 - *Breathing for vagal tone, peripheral vision, chest pressure, yawning.*
- [Multiple anxiety techniques \(YouTube\)](#)
 - *EFT tapping, laughter, inversions, cold-water face dunk, mono-tasking, mindfulness, slowing down, intimacy, hugging, and willingness to feel both the anxiety and the calm parts of you.*
- [30-video playlist \(YouTube\)](#)
 - *Processing emotions and regulating the stress response.*
- [Anxiety skills playlist \(YouTube\)](#)
 - *Skills for rewiring the anxious brain.*
- [Two techniques to relax the nervous system \(YouTube\)](#)
- [Messages of safety to your body \(YouTube\)](#)
- [The mind-body approach to pain and anxiety \(YouTube\)](#)

Anxiety Release Meditation

- [Anxiety release meditation \(YouTube\)](#)

Vagus Nerve Stimulation

- [Vagus nerve stimulation — part 1 \(YouTube\)](#)
- [Vagus nerve stimulation — part 2 \(YouTube\)](#)
- [Vagus nerve stimulation — part 3 \(YouTube\)](#)

Using Internal Family Systems (IFS)

- [Understanding our anxious parts \(YouTube\)](#)
 - *Includes a 10-minute meditation on calming anxious parts at the end of the video.*

Articles & Further Reading

- [“Anxiety Is a Liar” — discovering the truths that set you free](#)
- [Research on interoception \(Google Doc\)](#)

Behavioral Techniques

Do the things you would normally do, regardless of the sensations.

Life Scan and Action

- For a few moments, place all your dislike, frustration, and anger about your symptoms into a mental box. You can pick it up again later.
- Scan each important category of your life one at a time — home, work, purpose, health, relationships, yourself — and ask: Do I like this?
- If you don't like something, identify specifically what about it you don't like.
- Write a plan to start addressing and changing the things you don't like. Otherwise you remain in a constant state of internal or external conflict that likely perpetuates nervous system activity.

Physiological Techniques

Self-Regulation During Exposure to Stimuli / Symptoms

- Do something to stimulate nervous system symptoms while listening to 20–45 minutes of guided self-regulation practice.
 - [Guided self-regulation playlist \(YouTube\)](#)

Breathwork

- **Wim Hof breathing** in the morning.
- **Deep belly breathing** — inhale 2, hold 4 while bearing down (slight pressure in the chest), exhale 4; breathe normally between rounds.

Body-Based Practices

- **Cold exposure** — dunk your face in ice-cold water, or expose the body to cold.
- Neck and trapezius massage.
- Singing or chanting.
- **Soften the front gaze** — relax your central focus and attend to your peripheral vision.
- **Yawn** — a large “dog yawn.”
- Body shaking.
- EFT (Emotional Freedom Technique) tapping.
- Laughter.
- **Inversion** — turning upside down.
- **Wet noodle** — let everything relax and go limp.
- Stretching, yoga, and core-strength work.
- Chiropractic care and massage.
- **EMDR** — for single, acute events causing fear or trauma.

Mindful Movement & Presence

- Mindfulness.
- **Mindful speaking** — slow down your speech.
- Slow, mindful movement.

Lifestyle Foundations

- Smile frequently.
- Prioritize sleep, exercise, and diet.
- Hugging.
- Intimacy / sex.

Cognitive Techniques

Self-Perspective Switching (Objective Perception)

- Imagine standing in the corner of the room, looking at yourself. Imagine knowing nothing about that person except what you can see. From this objective view, does it seem like that person should feel calm and safe? Does anything in the environment actually seem dangerous?

Switch from Interoception to Exteroception

Most worry comes from focusing on ourselves. If constantly tracking how we feel and what might happen to us is making us anxious, we can deliberately shift attention outward (exteroception), turning inward only at chosen times of inner exploration. This requires a major focus shift for most people, since neuroticism is fundamentally inward-facing.

De-identify from the Symptoms or Experience

- “There is a part of me that is feeling...”
- That which observes the experience is not experiencing it — that which observes the dizziness is not dizzy.
- There is always a central part of you that is not dizzy; the one who knows you are dizzy is not the dizzy one.
- You will never be swallowed by it.

Compassionate Curiosity

- What am I feeling right now?
- What am I not feeling right now?
- What am I afraid of? Why is that scary? If that happens, then what am I afraid of? (Then sit with the fear and give it space.)

Allowance and Acceptance

- Practice mindfulness — a non-judgmental stance toward sensations and emotions.
- Allow even the fear and frustration. Give them space without resisting, avoiding, or feeding the stories — simply allow the present-moment feelings.

COMMON DANGER-FEAR THOUGHTS

- This will hurt me.
- It will never go away.
- Something is seriously wrong with me.

COMMON CONTROL-FRUSTRATION THOUGHTS

- I hate this.
- Why is this taking so long to get better?
- This is the worst.

Present-Moment Awareness and Relaxation

Practice being present — not in the past or future. Feel your body from the inside, notice your breath, and observe how your body feels right now. Breathe and let your body relax.

Others' Success Stories

- Know that others have recovered.

Not Trying to Fix It

- The symptoms are secondary. Return focus to the present feeling, and be gentle, compassionate, and accepting of your whole self in this moment.
- **Outcome independence** — release attachment to a particular result.

Fear Extinction and Reassociation

- [Fear extinction \(YouTube\)](#)
- Use gradual exposure while accepting/allowing the anxiety and applying self-regulation techniques.
- Recite the traumatic event repeatedly — write or speak it in full, detailed sentences, over and over, until it becomes boring or benign.
- **New associations** — do the task that feels stressful while reminding yourself you are safe and using the calming activities above.
- Create a new positive memory tied to the original event — a new context, a sense of reward or enjoyment attached to the old memory.
- **Clinical approaches** — prolonged exposure therapy, cognitive processing therapy, and CBT.

Connotation

- Change the meaning of the experience — “I feel alive, intense, excited, ready, energized; amazing what my body can do” rather than “scared, nervous, something’s wrong.”
- Ask what you can appreciate: “I am grateful that my body is trying to protect me.”

Refocus to Enjoyment

- Instead of focusing on sensations you dislike, refocus as often as possible on small enjoyments — a breeze on your skin, sun on your shoulders, a self-administered hand massage.
- Feel grateful that you can choose, in each moment, to shift focus to something more enjoyable.

Reframing the External Stimulus

- Separate the situation from your response: “I’m not in danger; this will go away.”
- Cultivate love or gratitude for the things that provoke the stress response.
- **Examples** — “I enjoy my job / boss / meetings”; “I love my bed and my sleep”; “Money and I have a great relationship.”

Reframe the Internal Stimulus / Symptoms

- Instead of naming symptoms (dizziness, pain, etc.), refer to all of it as “nervous system activity.” Stop labeling sensations as if they signal structural damage; label them as what they are — products of neural circuitry.

Self-Compassion

- Imagine visiting yourself in your current state. Where is that self? What does she or he look like? What would you say or do to comfort that version of you?
- Don’t try to solve the problem or give advice. Simply be there to offer care, compassion, sympathy, and love.

Journaling

- Free-associate: write out all your fears with no filter — your deepest, hardest-to-admit thoughts.
- Then write the soothing messages you would offer a friend with those same fears. Don't solve; just be caring.

Somatic Vocalization & Soothing

- Say out loud what you're feeling — "I feel hot, swaying, red" — followed by "And that's okay."

Incremental Reintegration & Exposure

- For anxiety around particular scenarios, expose yourself to one small element at a time until you feel comfortable, then introduce another — rather than jumping all in.

Short, Intense Exposure

- For just a few minutes a day (no more than five), expose yourself to the stimulus to create the stress response.
- This deliberately induces the physiological state alongside the cognitive/narrative state — a self-directed method of briefly raising adrenaline. Be very careful; this is best done under the supervision of a clinician.

Self-Care Lifestyle

- Create boundaries around the things that trigger the stress response. Be disciplined in setting new terms for behavior and for how much you're willing to think or worry about things.
- Give yourself dedicated space to think about the targets of stress or worry — then be disciplined about keeping them out of mind otherwise.

Emotional Processing

- Uncover subconscious fears and unprocessed emotions through CBT, IFS, ACT, or EMDR.

Stay Positive

- Believe this will get better. Do not give up on yourself. Everything changes, including this. Just keep practicing.

The Art of the Pause

- Interrupt the cognitive pattern associated with anxiety.
- Pause — just stop. Don't keep riding the bus. Get off and watch it drive down the road without you. Don't take the ride.

Engaged Focus

- Do interesting, engaging work that requires concentration.

Indifference Practice

- Be indifferent to the symptoms.
- You may acknowledge them, but pay little or no attention to them.
- **Mantra** — "I choose indifference."

Affirmations

Talk to yourself out loud with calm prosody — the way you would soothe a frightened child.

- Everything's fine. This is just a false alarm.
- I can handle this.

- I trust myself.
- I'm okay. I'm not in any danger.
- I know this feels uncomfortable, but it's not dangerous.
- It's okay to be anxious or calm, to feel sick or healthy. Either way, no matter what, I love myself.

FOR A SPECIFIC PLACE OR SITUATION YOU WANT TO ENJOY

- I love this place / situation.
- I feel relaxed here.
- I'm totally safe here.
- I have fun here.
- This is totally fine. I'm okay here.

TMS / PDS / FND Coaching

Managing chronic symptoms such as anxiety or pain.

Teach the Brain That You Are Safe

- Symptoms — including anxiety and pain — are simply the body’s way of alerting you to danger. If they fire while you are actually safe, the brain needs to be taught that you are safe.
- Pain and other chronic symptoms are not a reliable indicator of actual danger — only of the brain’s perception of danger.
- **Symptoms persist due to** fear and attention.
- Dial down the fear and stop paying so much attention to the symptoms — don’t ignore them, but be indifferent: acknowledgment without attention.
- **Take a three-pronged approach** — emotions, body, and mind.

1. Feel Your Feelings (teach your body that feelings are safe)

- **Fear** — It’s okay to be afraid. Everyone gets afraid. It’s totally normal.
- **Sadness** — It’s normal and healthy to feel sad sometimes. Everyone, even strong people, can feel sad, and that’s okay.
- **Anger** — It’s okay to feel angry. It doesn’t mean you’ll lose control or that you’re bad. Anger is healthy; give it space to be.
- **Disgust** — Everyone feels disgust sometimes. It’s okay, and it’s only temporary.
- **Joy** — Joy is healthy and wonderful to feel and express. You’re allowed and encouraged to feel it. It will never be “too much.”
- **Love** — Love is wonderful. Feel it all and let it fill your heart. It is not needy or burdensome; it is lovely and welcomed.

2. Relax Your Body (teach your body it’s not in danger)

- Notice tension anywhere in your body, and relax that area.
- Breathe with long exhales.
- Smile.

3. Teach Your Mind That You Are Safe

- **Use accurate knowledge** — the body is working perfectly; it’s just operating on false information.
- This may be uncomfortable or weird, but it is not dangerous.
- **Reframe triggers** — “I love [trigger]. I feel good when [trigger].” (e.g., “I love nighttime. I feel relaxed in my bed.”)
- Imagine negative thoughts as mud in a river. Watch them pass; the water soon runs clear again. You don’t have to fix anything — just let them go by.
- Remind yourself: “I’m safe. I’m okay. I know exactly what this is. It’s not dangerous. It’s no big deal.”

LIVE MORE, FIX LESS.

Mantras & Scripts

Important Mantra for Chronic Pain / Symptoms

I choose indifference.

Safety Script

Repeat twice — once out loud, once quietly.

I know exactly what this is. It's just my brain sending alert signals because it thinks we're in danger. My body and brain are working perfectly. They are just trying to protect me. Unfortunately, they are operating on false information, so they're sending false danger-alert signals.

I don't need to fix myself or heal my body. I am already healthy and whole.

The only thing I need to do is give my brain and body accurate information. When I experience a false alert signal, I just have to breathe and remind my brain and body that I am safe.

The false alert signals, which show up as symptoms, are not dangerous. They may feel uncomfortable, but in reality they are just normal sensations — and normal sensations are always safe.

It's okay and safe to feel whatever I feel. Feelings are not dangerous. Feelings are welcomed and encouraged.

I can live a normal life while paying attention and being compassionate to myself.

Statement When Parts Are Triggered

I know exactly what this is. It's just my child feeling very afraid because he thinks we're in danger.

My child is just trying to protect me. Unfortunately, he is operating on false information — that he or she is the one who needs to figure this out.

She or he is doing exactly what a child would do if that were true. But it's not true. Figuring this out is not his or her job.

The only thing I need to do is give my child accurate information. When I experience this fear and self-criticism, I just have to breathe and remind my child that he is safe and that I, the adult, will handle all of this. He or she can relax and go play.

Then I can step into strategy as an adult.

I can live a happy, healthy, prosperous life while being compassionate to and patient with myself and my child.

Notes for Treating Clients

- Recognize the link between the symptoms and how clients treat themselves — with criticism, worry, pressure, fear, and threat.
- Help instill motivation to care about how they treat themselves: “Does this seem right? How do you treat your children? Did you deserve that when you were a child?”
- Help them change how they treat themselves — toward self-compassion, care, love, soothing, gentleness, patience, understanding, and acceptance.

Neuro-Technical Notes

Hypervigilant Interoceptive Signal Amplification Error

Functional Neurological Disorder · Perceived Danger Symptoms · Tension Myositis Syndrome

How the Error Forms

Symptoms manifest from hyperawareness of normal sensations. Such hyperawareness feels frightening because it becomes associated with the acute stress response. The brain reasons that if it is hyper-aware of something, that thing must be dangerous — and so it releases stress chemicals on every contact, driving sympathetic activation that becomes bound to those otherwise normal sensations.

As anxiety sets in through the acute stress response (ASR), whatever sensation or experience is most prevalent at that moment may form a neural pathway that associates it with danger — since the stress response exists to flag danger. The ASR can also bind multiple sensations, experiences, or environmental cues at once. These become conditioned stimuli (CS), and the resulting ASR becomes a conditioned response (CR). Thereafter, encountering any one CS triggers the CR, which can in turn activate the other linked stimuli, producing a self-compounding cycle.

How to Disrupt and Recondition the Pathway

To change the pathway, you must teach the brain that the sensations and experiences (CS) are not dangerous and do not require the ASR (CR).

- **Cognitively** — remind yourself these sensations are neutral, benign, and safe. Use the conscious mind to drive messages of safety and ultimately indifference into the unconscious, autonomic system.
- **Physiologically** — practice self-regulation and calming techniques to activate the parasympathetic circuits, especially while the CR is active. Teach the body a new response to the conditioned stimuli.

MESSAGES OF SAFETY

- Acceptance, allowance, compassion, confidence, and indifference.

MESSAGES OF DANGER

- Resistance, disliking, frustration, fear, and hypervigilance.

The Role of Attention

The nervous system is designed to direct attention toward perceived danger and to produce the corresponding symptoms. Everything the brain ignores, it implicitly treats as benign. So we must teach the brain to once again pay no attention to the CS — to be indifferent — signaling that they are safe. Going further: when the brain is not in hypervigilance, it naturally attends to what it finds helpful, pleasurable, or desirable. It is therefore powerful to train attention toward desirable elements rather than remaining fixed on perceived danger.

References

- [NCBI — PMC4507149](#)
- [ScienceDirect — S0301051123002107](#)
- [DOI: 10.1027/2512-8442/a000063](#)

Neuroplasticity

- The brain can always change — always form new associations and new neural circuits.
- The longer a circuit operates uninterrupted, and the more it is reinforced, the harder it can be to change. Even once changed, it retains a synaptic memory that can reignite the old circuit, so it's important to set realistic expectations.
- The key is to intervene and disrupt the circuit as soon as you notice the old pattern operating. Doing so can desensitize the response (requiring a stronger stimulus to activate it) and diminish it (so that even when reactivated, it is less intense in amplitude and duration, and easier to manage).