

Grow Your Happiness, Health, and Wellbeing



Grounding Techniques

Learn how to use grounding techniques to relieve stress, anxiety, or unwanted thoughts.



What Are Grounding Techniques?

Grounding techniques help you to distance yourself from an emotional experience. When you experience negative emotions – if you accidentally remember something incredibly painful for example, – the natural instinct of the brain is to start the involuntary physiological change known as the “fight or flight” response. Although this response keeps you safe by preparing you to face, escape from, or fight danger, sometimes the danger your brain tries to protect you from is not exactly what it seems. If you find yourself in moments like these, grounding techniques can help the body calm itself and realise that there isn’t an actual threat present.

How Do Grounding Techniques Work?

Grounding techniques work by “grounding” you in the present moment and pulling you away from intrusive thoughts or feelings. This refers not only to having your “feet on the ground” but also “the mind on the ground”. When you turn your attention away from thoughts, memories, or worries, you can refocus on the present moment (Fisher, 1999).

You can use grounding techniques to help manage various issues:

- Anxiety
- Stress
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Panic Attacks
- Dissociation
- Anger

Grounding can be categorised into three types:

- Mental, ie focusing your mind
- Physical, ie focusing your senses
- Soothing, ie talking to yourself in a compassionate way

Grounding Technique 1

The 5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Technique

The 5-4-3-2-1 technique is probably one of the most common grounding techniques, used in many cases and for many issues, including anxiety and PTSD. This technique helps by grounding you in the moment and reconnecting you to all five senses. To try it, name:

- **Five things you can see.** Look around you and name five things you can see, it can be anything that is in front of you, such as the phone or the wall. It can also be things that are further away, such as the buildings or sky.
- **Four things you can feel.** This is important because it makes you pay attention to your body. You can think about how your hair feels on your back, how your feet feel in your shoes, or even how the fabric of your clothes feels on your skin.
- **Three things you can hear.** Pay attention to your environment: do you hear birds, construction noise, or the heater blowing? Say any three things that you can hear.
- **Two things you can smell.** Smelling is a powerful sensation, yet sometimes we move through life without paying that much attention to it. If you can, walk around a bit and notice the smells. If you can't smell anything or can't move, you can name two smells that you particularly like.
- **One thing you can taste.** Can you still taste lunch, coffee after, or gum? If you want to, you can grab a candy or a mint and acknowledge how the flavours taste.

Next time you feel anxious or stressed, try the 5-4-3-2-1 grounding technique to become more present in the moment.

Grounding Technique 2:

Play a Categories Game

This grounding technique helps your mind to focus on something else, ideally something more pleasant or neutral. For this technique, create lists of things within categories. Here are a few questions to guide you:

- What are five authors that you like?
- Name five athletes.
- List ten movie stars.
- What are ten European countries?
- List all the types of flowers you can think of.
- What are all the fruits you can think of?
- What are some ice cream flavours?
- List as many animals as you can that start with the letter “B.”



Grounding Technique 3:

Focus on Your Breath

Focusing on breathing is a great tool for reducing stress and anxiety (Stefanaki et al., 2015). This breathing exercise works because it helps you disengage with your mind and not pay attention to distracting thoughts. You can do this simple exercise before bed, when you wake up in the morning, or even before an important meeting.

How To Do It

First, find a comfortable and quiet place to sit or lie down. Breathe in slowly through your nose with a count of 4. Notice how your chest and belly rise as you fill your lungs. Then, breathe out slowly through your mouth for a count of 8. Pause for as long as is comfortable between breaths. Do this a few times until you start to feel calm.



These grounding techniques may reconnect you with the present and overcome anxious feelings, unwanted thoughts or memories, or distressing emotions.

- Stefanaki, C., Bacopoulou, F., Livadas, S., Kandaraki, A., Karachalios, A., Chrousos, G. P., & Diamanti-Kandarakis, E. (2015). Impact of a mindfulness stress management program on stress, anxiety, depression and quality of life in women with polycystic ovary syndrome: a randomized controlled trial. *Stress*, 18(1), 57–66.