

5 Tips to Manage Social Anxiety

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Social anxiety, also called social phobia, is the fear of being around people. A person suffering from social anxiety often has unreasonable or excessive fear of social interactions or situations, and would rather be alone than interact with other people. It arises from the fear of being judged, criticized, or closely watched by others. *It is estimated that social anxiety disorder affects roughly 15 million adults in the U.S* and is the most common mental illness in the United States. It is as common in men as it is in women but often affects people around the age of 13.

1. Learn the Facts About Social Anxiety Disorder

Learning the facts about social anxiety can help you realize what is going on with your own body. ***It is important to note that anxiety is a normal response to danger***, so the goal is to learn how to properly manage your anxiety to normal levels that don't negatively affect your daily life versus eliminating anxiety entirely. Anxiety disorders are treatable, yet only a third of those suffering from the condition seek treatment. Another notable thing is that anxiety disorders develop from very complex risk factors like brain chemistry, genetics, and life events.

2. Practice Relaxation Techniques

Practicing relaxation techniques can help you to remain calm. When we are anxious, we may be tensing our muscles and taking short, shallow breaths that can leave us lightheaded and more anxious.

Two common ways to relax when you are anxious are to practice calm breathing and muscle relaxation.

- **Calm Breathing** – this technique involves taking deep, slow breaths in through the nose for about four seconds, holding it for a second or two, and then slowly exhaling through the mouth for about four seconds. You will want to wait a few seconds before taking another calming breath, and repeating this process for 6-8 cycles. It is best to practice this while in a sitting position so your lungs can fill with air, and to breath from your abdomen.
- **Muscle Relaxation** – This is a two-step process that can help you relax by eliminating physical symptoms such as stomachaches and headaches. People with high levels of anxiety are often very tense throughout the day, they may not even realize what it feels like to have relaxed muscles. You will want to find a place you will not be disturbed for about 15 minutes; an ideal place is a reclining arm chair. You do NOT need to wait until you have feelings of anxiety to practice this exercise.

The first step is to choose a muscle group to target such as your hands; take a big, slow breath, and then tense your muscle group for about five seconds. It is important to really feel the tension in your desired muscle group, and to only tense the target muscle group. After the tension phase comes the relaxation phase. This involves releasing your tensed muscle group as you slowly exhale and the muscles become loose, allowing the tension to flow out. You will want to remain in this relaxed state for approximately fifteen seconds, and then move on to a new muscle group. Repeat this tension-relaxation steps until you have completed all your muscle groups.

3. Challenge Social Anxiety Gradually

Avoiding social situations actually makes your anxiety worse as you are not allowing yourself to practice your social skills. It is helpful to create an exposure hierarchy where you write down situations that cause anxiety to you. For example, if socializing with strangers makes you anxious, you might start by accompanying an outgoing friend to a party. Once you're comfortable with that step, you might try introducing yourself to one new person, and so on. Another helpful tip is to ask questions, and let others talk while you listen. Before you know, you will feel more

comfortable in social places and situations.

4. Lifestyle Changes

A change in lifestyle can also go a long way in keeping social anxiety disorder at bay. While changing your way of life alone cannot help you overcome social anxiety problem, it can support your treatment progress. For instance, it is advisable that you limit or avoid caffeine. [Caffeinated soda, tea, coffee, and energy drinks are known to trigger or increase anxiety symptoms](#). On the same note, drink alcohol only in moderation. You may think that drinking before attending a social event may calm your nerves. The truth is that alcohol actually increases your risk of having an anxiety attack. Another helpful lifestyle change is to get enough sleep. Being well rested will help you stay calm in social places.

5. Shift Your Way of Thinking

The way you perceive things around you has a pronounced impact on your social anxiety. Not many people think of worrying as self-programming. The truth is that it is. When you worry so much about upcoming social situations, you are linking anxiety to these events without knowing it. When you finally go to the event itself, you feel anxious because you had programmed yourself to feel this way. Symptoms of anxiety and excitement are almost identical. If you feel revved up and think, "I'm getting anxious", it creates a destructive spiral. But if you try to focus your attention outward instead of inward, you'll feel more prepared and capable. When in social settings, make a mental note of three aspects of the situation you're in, such as the color of the room or pictures on the wall.

When to Seek Help for Social Anxiety

Remember that anxiety is treatable. If your anxiety is affecting your normal way of life, it is imperative that you seek professional help. [Pathways Real Life Recovery in Utah offers anxiety treatment for adolescents and adults alike](#). Your specific cause of anxiety will determine treatment. For example, if the cause is difficulty in a marriage, the doctor may suggest marital counseling. Withdrawal from a substance of abuse is often addressed with drug-abuse treatment.

With the right approach, social anxiety is treatable. Pathways can help you deal with anxiety to enable you to live the life you want. We offer common anxiety treatments, such as talk therapy and cognitive behavioral therapy among others. Contact us today for free assessment. We also take insurance and are open 24 hours a day.