



# The Appetite Doctor

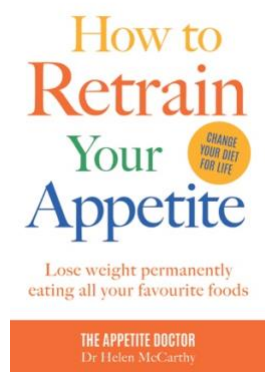
## **Anxiety and how to manage it**

**Effective techniques for reducing anxious feelings  
when they occur**

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## **Anxiety and how to manage it**

Anxiety is the state we experience when the body's biological survival system is activated but when there is no immediate danger. Although many modern-day threats are not physically dangerous, our ancient survival system doesn't know that. Whatever the type of threat, our bodies can react as if our life was in danger.

### ***Losing weight can trigger anxious feelings for a number of reasons:***

- Change in itself causes unease because it involves a step into the unknown.
- Feeling hungry naturally produces some anxiety, depending on its intensity. For some people this anxiety is triggered with very mild hunger.
- Relying on internal signals of hunger and fullness can feel scary if you haven't done this before.

### ***You are anxious if:***

- ❖ You feel fearful and threatened in the absence of physical danger
- ❖ You have physical sensations such as shortness of breath, increased heart rate, nausea, sweating and trembling

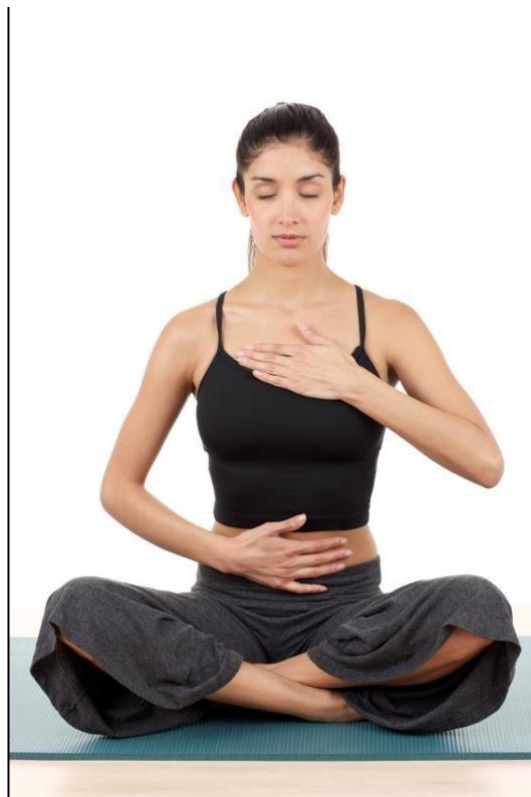
These physical sensations occur because the body enters a state of "fight or flight" as a surge of adrenaline is released. The heart pumps harder and breathing gets faster to supply the muscles with extra oxygen to run away or fight the threat. This is exactly what is required if you are faced with a physical threat, but if you aren't this reaction is a false alarm.

There are several ways to calm down the physical sensations of this false alarm. You only need one. Several are included here so you can discover which works best for you.

## **Breathing Techniques**

One of the physical changes produced by the adrenaline surge is faster, shallower breathing. Our breathing is of course usually automatic, but we can deliberately change the depth and speed of the breaths we take which means that we can change our breathing pattern back to the non-anxious one.

*Focus on the breath coming in and out of your lungs. Put your left hand on your chest and your right hand on your belly. When you are anxious your breathing may be all where your left hand is, shallow and tight. Move the centre of your breathing down towards your belly by making the in-breath a bit slower and deeper. Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose while you count to 5. Then release the breath gently and slowly through your mouth. Notice that your breathing is now reaching deeper, where your right hand is resting. Keep breathing like this until you feel the anxiety has gone.*



## **Progressive Muscular Relaxation**

When we are anxious, our muscles tense up. People seem to hold this tension in a particular part of their body. Some people hunch their shoulders, some their neck and head muscles. Others clench their fists while some hold their chest or stomach muscles tight. You may not even realise you are doing this until you start noticing it. We have conscious as well as automatic control over our muscles, and can use this to bring them back to a relaxed state. But it is often difficult to simply relax a tense muscle. Instead to begin with, increase the tension in your muscles deliberately. This is because when you tense a muscle on purpose and then release the tension you have deliberately produced, this release “overshoots” the original tension level, so you end up slightly less tense. When you repeat this a few times, your muscles progressively become more relaxed.

The technique can be learned when you have time to do the following exercise somewhere quiet and where you can relax sitting or lying down. Once you have learned the technique, you can apply it in situations where anxiety is triggered by tensing then relaxing just those muscles which tend to get most tense.

*First, concentrate on the muscles in your hands and arms. Make fists with both hands and tighten the muscles in your hands and arms as you breathe in, and then release this tension as you breathe out, saying the word “relax” to yourself silently as you do so. Repeat this twice. Next, move on to your shoulders and neck.*

*Next, tighten the muscles in your neck and shoulders by pulling your shoulders upwards and tipping your head back. Do this as you breathe in, and then release this tension as you breathe out, saying the word “relax” silently to yourself as you do so. Repeat this twice.*

*Next, move on to your abdomen. Tighten the muscles in your stomach area as you breathe in, and then release this tension as you breathe out, saying the word “relax” to yourself as you do so. Repeat this twice.*

*Finally, move on to your legs and feet. Tighten the muscles in your bottom, legs and feet as you breathe in, and then release this tension as you breathe out, saying the word “relax” to yourself as you do so. Repeat this twice.*

*As you develop this technique you may start to notice where in your body you tend to hold most tension. You can then shorten this exercise to just tense and relax that part of your body whenever and wherever you feel anxious and tense, rather than going through the whole exercise.*

## **Bilateral Stimulation**

Bilateral stimulation means alternate stimulation to left and right sides. This can be through tapping on the left and right sides of your body alternately. Dr Francine Shapiro discovered that bilateral stimulation of the body has the capacity to allow adaptive processing of disturbing feelings including anxiety. There are two simple versions of this:

- a) The Butterfly Hug is described in Dr Shapiro's book *Getting Past Your Past* (Rodale 2013).

Cross your arms in front of you with your right hand on your left shoulder and your left hand on your right shoulder. Then tap your hands alternately on each shoulder a number of times while you notice the anxious feelings in your body. As you notice the unpleasant feelings while simultaneously focusing on the tapping sensations you may notice the anxiety decreasing.



- b) Mark Grant, a Clinical Psychologist has produced an audio recording using bilateral stimulation. It is available as an App called "Anxiety Release with EMDR" which you can obtain via Dr Grant's website [www.overcomingpain.com](http://www.overcomingpain.com)

This is a series of short tracks to help reduce anxiety.

There are five tracks, including the Safe Place visualisation. In order to get the helpful effect of the alternating tones (left-right-left etc) you need to listen to the App through headphones.

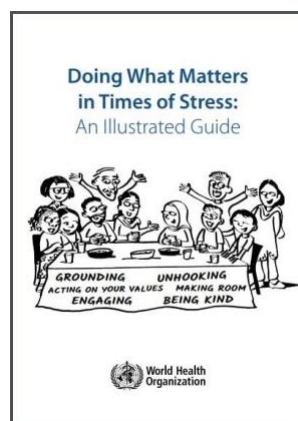
## **Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)**

ACT is one of the Third Wave of cognitive behavioural therapies which focuses on developing psychological flexibility.

Developed by Dr Steven Hayes and colleagues, the emphasis is on understanding symptoms such as anxiety as a product of our attempts to manage difficult feelings through avoiding them.

Hayes has developed a model and a range of practical techniques to help us move from experiential avoidance of uncomfortable feelings (because this avoidance maintains the problem in the long run), towards acceptance of what we are feeling and experiencing.

The World Health Organisation has produced a booklet based on ACT (written by Russ Harris who is one of the developers of ACT) called “Doing What Matters in Times of Stress” which is free to download here (click on picture)...



Included in the booklet is a series of audio tracks to help you with the steps outlined in the booklet (please refer to the Guide for information on how to use these)...

[Building awareness \(En\)](#)

[Grounding Exercise 1 \(En\)](#)

[Grounding Exercise 2 \(En\)](#)

[Grounding Exercise 3 \(En\)](#)

[Notice and Name \(En\)](#)

[Unhooking from Unkind Thoughts \(En\)](#)

[Making Room \(En\)](#)

[Being Kind to Yourself \(En\)](#)

## Visualisation

Visualisation can have a powerful effect on how we feel and can be used to reduce feelings of anxiety.

### 1. Surfing Visualisation

For quite intense anxiety, the experience of the adrenaline surge can feel like a sudden intense wave that overwhelms you. Many people find it useful to think of the anxiety a bit like a wave on the sea.

*Rather than being swept away by the wave, imagine that you are on a surfboard or in a small boat. When a wave comes, your job is just to surf it. Just hold on to the imaginary surfboard or boat and let the wave come and go. Remember that it is just a wave and it will subside. Because part of what fuels anxiety is a fear of anxiety, if you have a strategy for thinking about it which makes it less frightening, you will be fuelling it less. With your surfboard or boat, you will learn to ride the waves successfully. If you prefer, visualise the wave of adrenaline as like being on the Big Dipper at a fairground.*

*As you do this you may find it helpful to remember “This is just anxiety. My body has produced a surge of adrenaline, which is unpleasant but it’s not dangerous. I am learning to deal with anxiety feelings and I will overcome this. Right now I am surfing the wave and it will pass.”*



## 2. Calm Place Visualisation

This is the “Safe Place” technique developed by Dr Francine Shapiro for use with EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing). It is described in her book *Getting Past Your Past* (Rodale 2013). Here we are using Dr Shapiro’s visualisation technique to access feelings of calm. You cannot feel calm and anxious at the same time, so using your conscious mind to access a calm image can help reduce the anxious feelings.

*First, think of a place you associate with being calm. People often choose somewhere they have been on holiday, or somewhere in nature. It could be somewhere in your home if that is a calm place for you. It could be a favourite cafe or on a favourite journey. If you cannot think of anywhere, do not continue with this exercise but try other exercises in this booklet.*

*Bring this calm place to mind. Imagine yourself being there. Close your eyes if this helps. Use your mind’s eye to look around and notice what you can see in this place.*

*What time of day would you most like it to be?  
What would you choose the weather to be like?*

*Take in the most pleasing and calming visual elements of this scene.*

*Notice what sounds there are, particularly sounds that are relaxing to you.  
Notice what smells you associate with this place and really tune into these.*

*Finally, in this calm place, are you standing, sitting or lying down? Notice the feel of whatever you are standing, sitting or lying on and feel the sensations of your body against it. If you are sitting or lying down, allow your body to relax a bit more and feel slightly heavier. Notice how relaxed you feel in this place. If you are standing or walking, notice the ground beneath your feet and the sensations of your feet on the ground. Notice how grounded and calm you feel.*

*Bring this calm place to mind whenever you feel anxious*



### 3. Spiral Visualisation

This technique was developed by Francine Shapiro (*Getting Past Your Past*, Rodale 2013)

*In this technique, Dr Shapiro invites you to notice where you feel the anxiety in your body.*

*She suggests that you pretend that this feeling is “energy” and then guides you through a very simple exercise visualising the energy as a spiral moving clockwise and counter-clockwise. Some people find this simple technique very effective in reducing physical feelings of anxiety.*

For further details please see Dr Shapiro’s book.



## **Positive Self Talk**

How we talk to ourselves silently in our heads has a significant bearing on how we feel and how our bodies react. This is what Cognitive Therapy, a widely used and well-researched form of psychological therapy, is based on. Using positive, realistic ways of talking to yourself can significantly alter how you experience anxiety and can significantly reduce it. “Realistic” is important here. Cognitive Therapy does not use overly positive or unrealistic self-talk as it does not work.

A simple example would be, “This is a wave of anxiety. It is unpleasant but not dangerous. I can ride the wave of anxiety or use breathing or tapping to reduce it.”

Or alternatively, “I’m feeling uncomfortable because I’m changing how I eat but the discomfort will pass and as I learn to eat less I’ll lose weight and feel more in control around food and eating”.