



## WHEN THE FUTURE FEELS TOO BIG

### A Practical Guide to Managing Anxiety During Uncertainty

Uncertainty affects everyone, but for people who live with anxiety, it can be especially hard to manage. It's not just worry — it's your whole body reacting to the unknown, even when nothing has happened yet. Whether you're facing a big life change or simply overwhelmed by everything around you, you might find yourself stuck in cycles of overthinking, avoiding decisions, or feeling physically on edge.

This guide is for those moments. It's not about fixing everything. It's about finding strategies that help you get through the next hour, the next day, the next difficult stretch — without burning out or losing yourself in the process.



#### RECOGNIZE WHAT YOU'VE ALREADY LIVED THROUGH

When anxiety takes over, it can feel like you're not capable of handling what's ahead. But anxiety is rarely about actual capacity—it's about perception. Remind yourself of times you've faced difficult things and made it through. They don't need to be dramatic milestones. Even small moments of persistence count. This reflection helps shift your thinking from "I can't do this" to "I've done hard things before."

#### FOCUS ON SMALL, DOABLE ACTIONS

Anxiety thrives in vagueness. If you're overwhelmed, narrow your focus. Choose something specific and concrete—like sending one email, walking for ten minutes, or writing down your top three priorities. When the big picture feels too much, doing one manageable thing can restore a sense of direction.



#### SET BOUNDARIES AROUND INFORMATION OVERLOAD

Staying informed is important, but constant updates can feed anxious thoughts. If you're regularly checking news or social media and noticing your mood drop afterward, it may be time to scale back. Try setting specific times to check the news. Avoid scrolling before bed. If needed, ask someone you trust to update you on anything urgent so you're not constantly on alert.



#### KEEP HUMAN CONNECTION IN THE MIX

Isolation makes anxiety worse, even if it feels safer in the short term. You don't have to talk about your feelings to benefit from connection. Watching a show with someone, sitting in a shared space, or sending a message to a friend can create a sense of support and normalcy. Some of the most grounding moments come from simply being around people who don't expect anything from you.





## REPETITION HELPS RETRAIN THE NERVOUS SYSTEM

Mindfulness isn't about shutting down thoughts or feeling instantly calm. It's about creating small moments of awareness that gradually help your brain shift out of a stress response. Breathing exercises, grounding techniques, and mindful attention to your surroundings all send a message to your nervous system: things are okay right now. The effect builds with repetition, not perfection.

Here's one simple breathing exercise you can try:

### 5-MINUTE GROUNDING BREATH

- Sit comfortably.
- Breathe in slowly through your nose for four seconds.
- Hold your breath for four seconds.
- Exhale slowly through your mouth for four seconds.
- Pause and repeat.
- If your mind wanders, bring your attention back to the rhythm of your breath.

Even if it doesn't feel like much at first, this small act can reduce physical tension and help you come back to the present.



## MAKE MOVEMENT WORK FOR YOU

You don't have to be still to be mindful. In fact, for many people, especially those with restlessness or trauma histories, movement feels safer and more accessible than seated meditation.

Mindful movement includes things like walking, stretching, yoga, or gentle practices like tai chi. The goal isn't exercise—it's awareness. When you pay attention to the sensation of your feet on the ground, the rhythm of your breath, or the way your arms move, you're practicing mindfulness.

Mindful movement supports anxiety management in several ways. It activates the part of your nervous system responsible for calming down. It shifts your focus away from intrusive thoughts. It helps regulate mood, supports memory and attention, and gives your body a way to release stress that has nowhere else to go.

Most importantly, it's adaptable. You can practice mindful movement while lying down, sitting in a chair, or walking slowly through your home. There's no single right way to do it—only what works for your body in this moment.

### TRY THIS:

Go for a short walk. Instead of reviewing your to-do list, focus on what you can feel—your steps on the ground, your breath moving in and out, the air on your skin. When your mind jumps to something else, gently return to what's around you. This is how you build presence.

## STICK TO A SIMPLE STRUCTURE

When anxiety is high, unstructured time can increase feelings of overwhelm. Having a basic routine—even one with lots of flexibility—can provide stability. Try to eat regularly, get some movement, and maintain consistent sleep and wake times as best you can. These are not fixes, but they do make it easier to cope with everything else.



## SHIFT THE INTERNAL DIALOGUE

Catastrophic thinking doesn't usually show up as "I'm being irrational." It shows up as "what if I fail?" or "this will never get better." It helps to name these thoughts for what they are—predictions, not facts.

You can practice reframing without pretending everything is fine. **For example:**

- "I don't have control over this, but I can decide how I respond today."
- "It's uncomfortable not knowing, but that doesn't mean something bad is happening."
- "I've been here before, and I made it through."

It may not change how you feel immediately. That's okay. Reframing builds a counterweight to the fear-based stories your brain tells under stress.



## SUPPORT YOURSELF IN SMALL, INTENTIONAL WAYS

What feels calming to your body may not look like a wellness routine. That's fine. Focus on what helps you feel 5% more settled or less tense. This might be wrapping yourself in a blanket, drinking something warm, stepping outside for a few minutes, listening to music you like, or doing something repetitive with your hands. These moments give your system a chance to reset.



## A FEW TECHNIQUES TO KEEP IN YOUR BACK POCKET

PRACTICE	WHAT IT HELPS WITH	HOW TO TRY IT
Box Breathing	Reduces physical tension	Breathe in 4s, hold 4s, out 4s, hold 4s
5-4-3-2-1 Grounding	Anchors you in the present	Name 5 things you see, 4 you can touch...
Body Scan	Increases bodily awareness	Notice sensations from toes to head
Mindful Walking	Redirects attention from racing thoughts	Focus on steps, breath, and surroundings
Journaling	Organizes and externalizes anxious thoughts	Write freely for a few minutes
Gratitude Listing	Shifts focus from fear to safety	List 3 things that feel okay right now
Mindful Eating or Drinking	Grounds you in sensory experience	Focus on texture, temperature, taste
Chair Yoga or Stretching	Releases tension and restores movement	Move gently in a way that feels safe

## Start Where You Are

You don't have to overhaul your life or follow a rigid plan. Start with what feels possible today — one practice, kept short, repeated when you can. Most of all, give yourself permission to respond to uncertainty in ways that make sense for your nervous system.

You're not doing this wrong if you still feel anxious. These are tools, not tests — and over time, they can help you build a steadier foundation.