

Steadying The What-ifs: Grounding & Calming Exercises



A collection of simple tools to steady the mind and body during moments of worry, uncertainty, or emotional overwhelm.



These exercises can be done anytime, anywhere: at home, in the waiting room, or whenever thoughts feel hard to quiet. Try a few and notice which ones feel most grounding for you:

- Breathing Exercises
- Sensory Grounding
- Body Grounding
- Mind & Thought Anchoring

Breathing Exercises



When the mind races, the breath often shortens. Slowing and deepening your breath can calm your body's stress response and steady your thoughts.

Technique	How to Do It	When It Helps Most
4-6 Breathing	Inhale for 4 counts, exhale for 6.	When your body feels tense or on high alert. Helps release pressure and settle racing thoughts.
Box Breathing	Inhale 4 – hold 4 – exhale 4 – hold 4.	When you need focus or structure. Creates a steady rhythm to ground your attention.
Hand-Tracing Breath	Trace the outline of your hand. Breathe in as you move up each finger, out as you move down.	When you need a tactile, discreet way to ground yourself (e.g. in the waiting room).
4-7-8 Breathing	Inhale for 4, hold for 7, exhale for 8.	When you need deeper calm, such as before sleep or after an intense day.



Place a hand on your chest to feel your breath slow down. Even a minute or two can help shift your body out of “alert mode.”

**Sensory Grounding**

Using your senses helps bring your mind back to the present and away from spiralling thoughts.

Technique	How to Do It	When It Helps Most
5-4-3-2-1 Technique	Name 5 things you see, 4 you feel, 3 you hear, 2 you smell, 1 you taste.	When thoughts feel scattered and you need to re-focus on your surroundings.
Temperature Shift	Hold something warm or cool (a cup of tea, smooth stone) and focus on the sensation.	When you feel detached or frozen and need a quick physical reset.
Sound Focus	Tune in to one steady sound (clock ticking, wind, fridge hum).	When silence feels overwhelming and a steady rhythm helps you anchor.
Scent Anchor	Use a calming scent like hand cream or essential oil and take a slow inhale.	When worry builds and you need a soothing sensory cue to ground yourself.



Pair a sensory technique with breathing for a deeper sense of calm.

**Body Grounding**

Bringing attention back into your body helps release tension and restore a sense of safety and control.

Technique	How to Do It	When It Helps Most
Progressive Muscle Relaxation	Gently tense and release each muscle group from feet to face.	When you feel physically tight, restless, or jittery.
Gentle Movement	Stretch, roll your shoulders, or take a slow walk.	When your body feels heavy or stiff and you need to release energy.
Weighted Grounding	Use a weighted blanket or place a hand on your chest or shoulders.	When you need comfort or reassurance through physical pressure.
Body Scan	Bring awareness to each body part, noticing sensations without judgement.	When you need to reconnect with your body and slow your thoughts.



Try a short body scan before bed to help your body recognise it's safe to rest.

**Mind & Thought Anchoring**

Acknowledge anxious thoughts and gently redirect your mind toward balance and calm.

Technique	How to Do It	When It Helps Most
Affirmations	Repeat calming phrases such as "Right now, I am safe" or "This feeling will pass."	When your thoughts spiral into 'what-ifs' and you need reassurance.
Visual Anchors	Picture a peaceful place and imagine being there using all five senses.	When you feel emotionally flooded and need a safe mental space.
Label & Release	Silently name what you're feeling ("worry," "tension") and imagine it drifting away.	When emotions feel jumbled and naming them helps you find clarity.
Gentle Reflection	Ask yourself, "What could make this moment feel a little steadier?"	When you feel stuck and need to find a small step toward calm.



Pair affirmations with slow breathing to reinforce calm and focus.

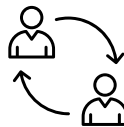
When to Seek More Support

If these exercises don't feel enough or your worry feels constant, know that more support is available.

ICA Support



Inherited Cancer Support Service



Peer Support Program



ICA National Online Support Groups

Other Support Pathways

- **Your GP:** ask about a mental health care plan
- **Cancer Council Helpline 13 11 20:** confidential information and support
- **Beyond Blue 1300 224 636:** mental health support line and online chat
- **Lifeline 13 11 14:** 24/7 crisis support if things feel overwhelming
- **13YARN 13 92 76:** 24/7 support line run by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Crisis Supporters