What happens to our bodies and minds when we experience anxiety?

Feeling fear and anxiety in the face of danger simply means your body and brain are working together to protect you. A threat in the environment is prompting your sympathetic nervous system (the part of your nervous system in charge of the “fight/flight” response) to take all the necessary steps to protect you:

- Your heart rate increases
- You are more “on edge” and ready to quickly react to new threats
- You have the urge to withdraw to safety
- Fear and anxiety in the face of a real threat are not signs of weakness.
- They are signs of health

Some anxiety, especially as you complete risky tasks, keeps you alert and safe.

But too much can be paralyzing and can affect your concentration and wellness.

Take Time to Breathe!

There are simple activities you can try that have been shown to activate your parasympathetic nervous system (the part in charge of the “rest” response).

- Try these activities when you feel that fear is not protective, is interfering with tasks at work, or is getting in the way with family and friends.

Try Paced Breathing

Close your eyes

Breathe in through your nose for 5 seconds

Breathe out your mouth for 7 seconds

Breathe in through your nose for 5 seconds

Breathe out your mouth for 7 seconds

Repeat 5-6 times per minute for 2 minutes or more

Coping Skills

Both pressure (think massages!) and deep breathing can activate your parasympathetic nervous system and lower your fear and anxiety:

- Find a place where you can take a moment to concentrate without being interrupted: a bathroom, a corner, a hallway, anywhere
- Wrap your arms around yourself as if you were giving yourself a hug, bringing your hands to your shoulders and giving them a firm squeeze
- While squeezing your shoulders, try to take a deep breath. When you release your breath, release your shoulders and move your hands further down your arm
- Squeeze again, breathe again. Release, move down your arm
- Continue giving your arms gentle yet firm squeezes starting in the shoulder and leading to your elbows as you breathe

In a crisis?

Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255