

BRAIN TRAINING

MH | 06

Making new mental pathways that aren't guided by depression and anxiety.

"The moment you change your perception, is the moment you rewrite the chemistry of your body." –Dr. Bruce H. Lipton





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WRITER'S NOTE

When you hear a siren, what's your first thought? Maybe an ambulance just wove around you on its way to the scene of an accident. Maybe a firetruck raced past on the highway below your apartment window. Whatever the source of the siren, your first thought was most likely something like "Oh no!!!" But...why is that our first thought? Why do we leap so quickly to the negative? Isn't it also the case that someone's getting help? Wouldn't it be just as honest for our first thought to be "Yay!!!"?

Brains require a LOT of energy to work well. One of the many ways our brains save energy is by using existing connections instead of making new ones. Unfortunately, traveling these energy-saving well-worn pathways sometimes means we get stuck in unhelpful ways of thinking. It's much easier to take the freeway than a winding road, but freeways don't always take us where we need to go. Sometimes it's better to take the winding road, or even to build a new one. The cognitive techniques recommended in this brochure work in much the same way—by shifting our thoughts from their automatic routes into healthier patterns. Read them. Practice them. They just might change your life.

-Jon

You're Never Alone

God was with Elijah as the prophet faced his fears and negative thoughts. He'll be there for you, too.

"Talk to yourself like you would to someone you love." -Brené Brown

Some days, depression and anxiety can leave you feeling like the whole world is against you. And you're not the only one. That's how the prophet Elijah felt after his day on Mt. Carmel. God had won a tremendous victory against the prophets of Baal, but Elijah still felt alone. And even though his God was victorious, the lonely prophet ran away to hide from Queen Jezebel. The queen had threatened to kill Elijah, but when God had just sent a firestorm that devoured a solid-rock altar, logic says Jezebel wouldn't have been able to do the prophet much harm. Feelings aren't always logical, though. And when negative thoughts take over, sometimes we can't see the positive side. So Elijah, who had the God of everything on his side, ran away and hid.

God begins by asking Elijah a simple question: "What are you doing here Elijah?" -1 Kings 19:9, NIV

God had patience

Elijah wasn't quite the picture of a fearless warrior prophet when he curled up under a bush, but God didn't get angry at his tired prophet. He had patience. We can learn a lot from what happened next. First, God cared for Elijah's physical needs. The prophet needed rest and food before he could address his feelings. And then, once Elijah was rested and ready, the Spirit led him to Horeb, the holy mountain, where God helped the prophet face the negative thoughts that had started him on the run.

God listened to Elijah

God began by asking his prophet a simple question. "What are you doing here, Elijah?" (1 Kings 19:9, NIV). And then, God listened as Elijah answered in a torrent of frustrated words.

"He replied, 'I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too'" (1 Kings 19:10, NIV).

Elijah wasn't in any danger. He had God to protect him from the evil queen. But loneliness and loss were weighing the prophet down. He felt like the last person alive who worshiped the Lord. Elijah felt completely and desperately alone.

God comforted Elijah

After God listened to Elijah's feelings, he gently, so gently, guided his tired prophet to confront the holes in his argument. First, God showed Elijah an incredible display of his power with a surprisingly soft

ending: "The Lord said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by'" 1 Kings 19:11 (NIV).

As Elijah watched, God sent a wind that shattered rocks and tore mountains into pieces. Next came an earthquake, that shook the desert landscape. "After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave" (1 Kings 19:12-13). In this beautiful, earthshaking moment, Elijah caught a glimpse of the

The Lord said "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord for the Lord is about to pass by" -1 Kings 19: 11 (NIV)

Lord's unstoppable power. Just in case the firestorm was fading from the prophet's memory, he witnessed, once again, that God was strong enough to protect him. But God didn't bring his power down on Elijah. Instead, God showed kindness and understanding. He spoke softly, and Elijah knew the sound of his voice.

Then, once the prophet was listening, God asked the same question again: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" Elijah gave the same answer as before, but this time, he had thought about it. He'd had time to understand what he was saying. And that's when God finally answered: "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet" (1 Kings 19:15-16).

Elijah had never been alone. God had been with him all along. And here, God helped him to see that. By directing Elijah to anoint new kings over Israel and other places, and by promising justice, God addressed his prophet's fears. And by sending Elijah to choose a future successor, God gave the prophet a friend who would stay alongside him for the rest of Elijah's life on earth.

God helped Elijah to confront his negative thoughts

Elijah's fears may have been irrational. God had been speaking through him for years. Still, God didn't discount the worries of his child. Instead, he comforted his prophet, promised justice was coming, and sent a friend so Elijah wouldn't be alone anymore. Then, finally, once Elijah was fully listening, God helped the prophet see the lies he believed. Elijah thought he was alone, but God told him "I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him" (1 Kings 19:18, NIV).

Elijah wasn't the last worshiper of God. There were thousands like him all around his country. The prophet had it wrong, but God wasn't angry with him.

God will be gentle with you, too

You may not have had the same experiences as Elijah, but we all have fears and negative thoughts to face. The great news is that, whatever your worries may be, God will be gentle with you, just as he was with Elijah. And like Elijah, when you are ready to look your darkest thoughts in the face, you may find that they aren't as terrifying as they seem. After all, you have a fire-breathing, mountain splitting God of power on your side. And when he talks to you, he whispers.



When the God saw that his child was hurting, he cared for Elijah and listened to him. We all have fears and negative thoughts to face. This booklet is full of techniques for learning to think differently. Find what works for you, and get one step closer to the happiness God wants you to have. You're never alone. Photo Kadettmann. Opposite photo by Mykola Sosiukin. Via Dreamstime.com.

This booklet is full of techniques for learning to think differently, spot negative thoughts, and train your brain to look past the lies that depression and anxiety tell. Try them. Find what works for you. And get one step closer to the life of happiness God wants you to have. You are valued, you are loved, and you are never alone.

God already knew what Elijah was thinking, but he still asked Elijah to explain. Why did Elijah need to hear his feelings out loud? Are there any feelings you'd like to talk through?

Read about God's display of power in 1 Kings 19:11-12. How does it feel knowing that's the God who has your back?

Is there something you've believed about God or yourself that might not be true? Keep an open mind, just in case.

Do you ever feel alone? Ask God to help you spot the people who will have your back when you need them. Just like Elisha for Elijah, they're out there.



Photo credits, clockwise from left: Mimage Photography, Woraphon Banchobdi, and Radoslav Radev. Via Dreamstime.com.

Identifying Negative Thoughts: How to spot the lies that depression and anxiety tell you



The first step to thinking differently is learning to hear and confront false beliefs

Depression and anxiety can put some heavy thoughts into your head. And the more you believe those negative ideas, the more anxious or depressed you become. The good news is that you don't have to stay in that cycle of negativity. Every time you confront a negative thought and replace it with something true, your depression or anxiety loses a piece of its power.

Types of Negative Thoughts

The first step to confronting these sneaky negative thoughts, or cognitive distortions, is learning how to spot them. Here are a few cognitive distortions to watch out for:

Mental Filtering: Magnifying the negatives and ignoring, or filtering out all the positives. Example: "That party was awful; one of the people there didn't want to talk to me."

All or Nothing Thinking: Everything is wonderful or terrible, you're either a success or a failure, and there's no in-between. Example: "There are good people and bad people. If he did a bad thing, then he must be a bad person."

Overgeneralization: One unpleasant moment is proof of an ongoing cycle of failure. Example: "I got a bad grade on

my first assignment. I must be an awful student. I should quit school before it gets any worse."

Mind Reading: Assuming you know what other people are thinking when you haven't talked with them. Example: "I don't have to ask Steve if he's mad at me. I just know."

Catastrophizing: Expecting disaster to strike or the worst-case scenario to happen. Example: "What if the airplane engines die? What if there's a tsunami?"

Personalization: Believing that everything is all about you, or taking everything personally. Example: "Julie looks nice today. She probably did that to get revenge on me." OR "If only I hadn't been late to the party. Everyone had a bad time because of me."

Control Fallacies: We either feel controlled by others (example: "I'm just fated to be unhappy, there's nothing I can do"), or we feel responsible for things outside our control, such as other people's feelings. Example: "You look so sad. What did I do?"

Should statements: These distortions tell you that if you don't meet the standard, you deserve to feel guilty. Example: "I'm so lazy! I only walked for 30 minutes when I

should have exercised for an hour."

Emotional Reasoning: Believing that if you feel a certain way, it must be the truth. Examples: "I feel like I got a bad grade, so I did" or "I feel stupid and lazy, so I really am."

Negative Thoughts Are Learned

All those negative thoughts that jump into your head were learned – possibly from someone important to you when you were younger. You've heard people say these things often enough that you accepted them without question. And by now, you've probably repeated them so many times that they're automatic – they pop into your head before you even realize it.

You can unlearn and replace negative thinking

It might be tricky at first. Once thoughts have become automatic, they can be slippery and slide into your head before you notice. But with time and patience, you can learn to spot them and retrain your brain to think differently. And one day, they won't be automatic anymore. You'll have completely replaced them with new, positive thought processes. You can learn more about fighting these kinds of thoughts in the articles on confronting negative thoughts (page 8), and CBT strategies for anxiety (page 10).

Confront Negative Thoughts

- Ask yourself what belief is behind your negative emotions. Example: "I did badly on my test - I am such a failure."
- Identify which negative thought caused the belief. Example: Overgeneralization.
- Replace with affirmation. Example: "I am valuable no matter what my grades are. I am smart and a hard worker, and I will learn from this and succeed."



Tips for Confronting Negative Thoughts



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Dreamstime.com.

Confronting distorted thinking is hard work, but don't give up! Maybe these techniques will make it a little easier.

How do you unlearn negative thinking? In theory, it's simple. You learn to identify negative thoughts, and then each time one pops up, you stop and replace it with the belief you want to have instead. For example: "That party was awful – one of the people there didn't want to talk to me... No. Wait. That was mental filtering – I was filtering out all the positives. Sure, one person didn't want to talk to me, but the party was great – I had lots of other conversations that I enjoyed!"

Facing your distortions might sound simple, but simple doesn't mean easy. It takes practice just to notice that you're having those automatic thoughts. It's a good idea to talk with a mental health professional, especially one who specializes in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, so she or he can help you identify your distortions, and build new thought processes to replace them. In

addition, here are two techniques that you can try on your own.

One Negative, Many Positives

Get a piece of paper and a pencil and draw a line down the center of the page. On one side, write the negative thought that you're trying to confront. On the other side of the dividing line, write as many positive thoughts to dispel that negative thought as you can come up with. This exercise can help you to find what best replaces your most common negative thoughts.

Try a Thought Diary

In a journal, or on a piece of paper, write down the questions on page 9. Then, when a situation leaves you feeling down or anxious, take a moment to answer the questions in your diary. Thought journaling might help you to discover the negative thoughts behind an unpleasant event.

Once you're done journaling, ask yourself if you feel slightly better or more optimistic. And keep at it, you're making progress.

- 1 What Happened?**
Briefly describe the situation that led to your unpleasant feelings, so your notes will make sense to you later.
- 2 Initial Thought**
What thought crossed your mind in the difficult situation? It was probably one that you've had before.
- 3 Type of Negative Thinking?**
If you can, try to determine what kind of negative thoughts led to what popped into your head. All or nothing? Mind reading? If you aren't sure, just try to find any illogical or untrue thoughts.
- 4 Where Did That Thought Come From?**
How long ago did you first have this negative thought? Where did it start? Do you know anyone else who has views like this one? How has it worked for him or her?
- 5 Alternative Thinking**
If you find that negative thinking influenced your reaction, imagine the situation again, without any negative assumptions, and ask yourself how you could have handled it differently? Are there any possibilities that you might have overlooked?
- 6 Positive Belief and Affirmation**
Write down the positive statement that will replace your negative thought and create a new, healthier approach for times like this. Use affirming language. Come up with a way to remind yourself of your new, positive belief.
- 7 Action plan**
What can you do if you run into another situation like this one? Make a list of your strengths, ones that will help you handle these kinds of occurrences. You can do it!

CBT STRATEGIES FOR ANXIETY

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, or CBT, is often beneficial for anxiety. Try these expert tips when you feel anxious.

Seeing a therapist who specializes in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy can be incredibly helpful in learning to manage your anxiety symptoms. Whether you're currently seeing a CBT specialist for treatment or not, these simple techniques can help you center yourself when anxiety strikes. Use what works well for you.

Focus on how your feelings will change when you start to feel better

Talk with a friend, or write down on a piece of paper, the way you feel now, and the way you'll feel once your anxiety recedes. Just visualizing how you feel when you are calm can help you to get there. For example: "I am very anxious about my math test. I feel nervous and shaky, and it's hard to think. This feeling will get better, though, and when it does, I expect to feel calm and relaxed, and be able to think much more clearly."

Look for the silver lining

When you feel anxious, you're probably worried about something negative, or afraid that something terrible might happen. But stop for a moment and ask yourself if this cloud has a silver lining. If you are worried that you don't have time to clean up often, for example, you could remind yourself that you have a job and financial security, or the opportunity to go to school. These things are good, even if they sometimes keep you from cleaning up as much as you'd like.

Ask yourself what you're worried about

If you're too anxious to go to a friend's house, ask yourself why that worries you. If you're afraid there will be too many people there, ask why that number of people is a problem. If the answer is that some of them don't like you, ask why it matters what other people think. Keep on asking yourself questions until you get to the underlying assumption behind your worry, then challenge that assumption. If you're afraid of having no friends, for example, remind

yourself that going to your friend's house is helping you make friends, not the other way around. Feel free to use the tools from the article on "Confronting Negative Thoughts" to help you process the assumptions that might be guiding your beliefs.

Remember that you don't have to worry

"You don't have to worry" might seem like a strange thing to say, but it's important because our society sends out some pretty mixed messages, and sometimes, we talk about worrying like it's good, or even necessary. Conventional wisdom says that people who "care a lot" or are "extra conscientious" do better at their jobs and other areas of life. And often, when we say someone "cares," we really mean that they worry. But the problem is that it's not anxiety that helps people do a good job – it's the actions they take. When you see a problem, do something about it if you can. But if you can't, then let it go. There's no benefit to stressing about things beyond your control.

Find something else to think about

We humans have a pretty cool skill. We can consciously decide to put a thought down and pick up a different one. Imagine you're busily studying for a test, for example, and an ad for your favorite show pops up on your computer screen. For a minute, you might be distracted thinking about the next episode, but when you do get back to focusing on your work, you tell your brain to put the TV show thoughts on hold and think about the test instead. It might take a few tries, but eventually, you shift mental gears and can study again. Sometimes, worrying less can be as simple as deciding to put the worries down, for a while, and pick up a different train of thought.

Do something that engages your brain

For worries that are harder to shake off, give yourself a break from the anxiety by engaging your brain in something important to you. Play a sport that you enjoy, create art, if that's your passion, volunteer on an exciting project, or spend time with people you love. You can even just take a walk and focus on



Give yourself permission to relax. Photo by Bogdan Sonyachny on Dreamstime.com.

By doing things you'd do when you feel calm, you send a signal to your brain that it's safe to relax.

the nature around you or the sound of your breathing. You'll learn more about focusing on the present in the mindfulness article on page 15. For now, the important thing is to engage your brain completely and get a break from all those anxious thoughts.

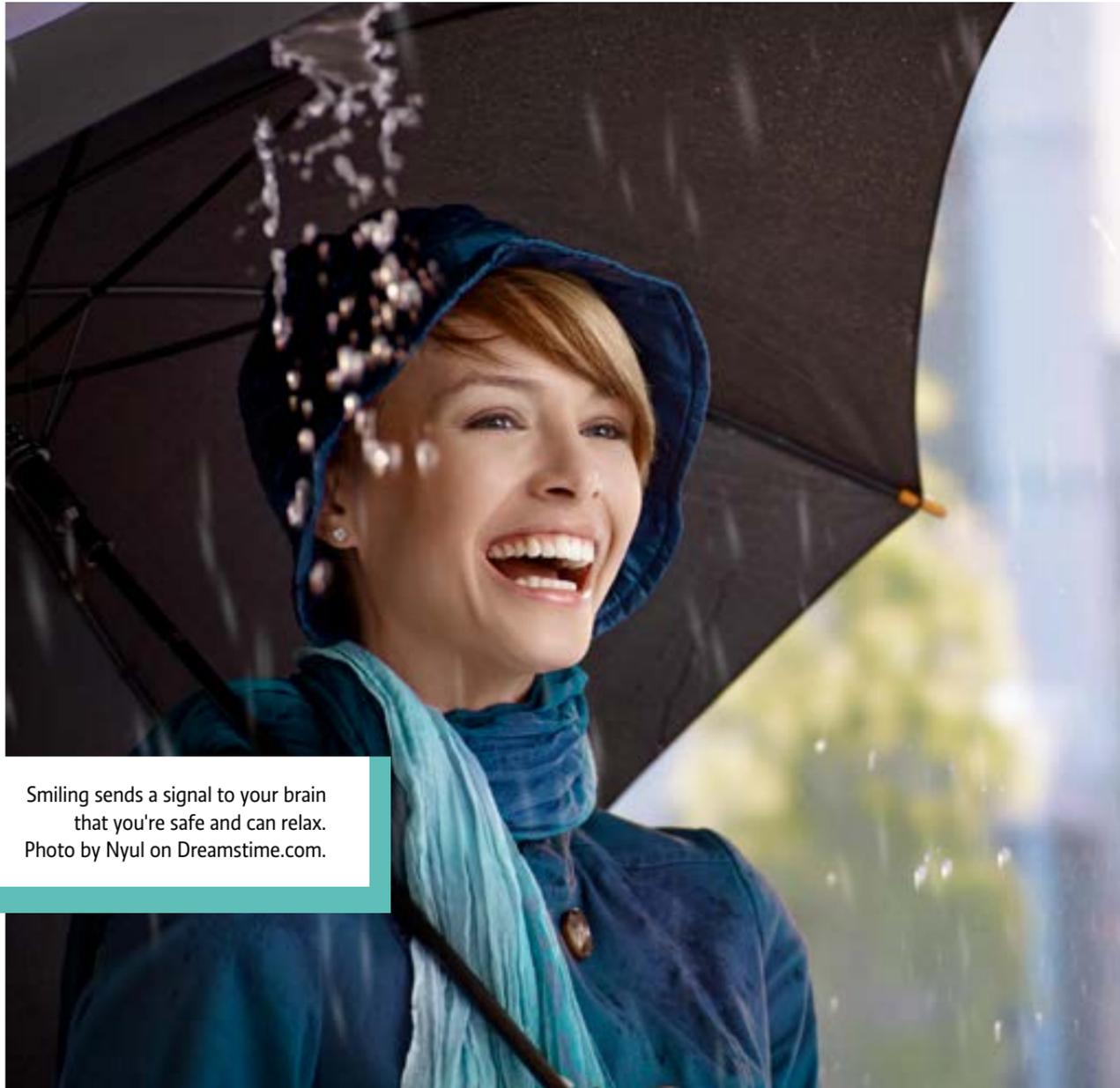
Turn off your brain's emergency signals

Sometimes your brain gets stuck in full emergency mode, and no matter how illogical it might be, you just can't stop feeling stressed

out and anxious. The good news is that you can send a signal back up through your nervous system and tell your brain that this is not an actual emergency. How? By doing things that you'd never do in a real emergency.

• **Talk softly and calmly.** Your brain knows that there's no time for pleasantries in a life-threatening moment, so the more you speak in a soft, calm voice, the more your mind starts to come back to normal function mode.

• **Smile.** People don't smile in four-alarm



Smiling sends a signal to your brain that you're safe and can relax. Photo by Nyul on Dreamstime.com.

emergencies, so stretching those smile muscles is another signal that all is well.

• **Chew gum.** People don't have time to eat when they're running for their lives, and chewing gum produces saliva, which gets your body thinking about food and shows you're not in danger.

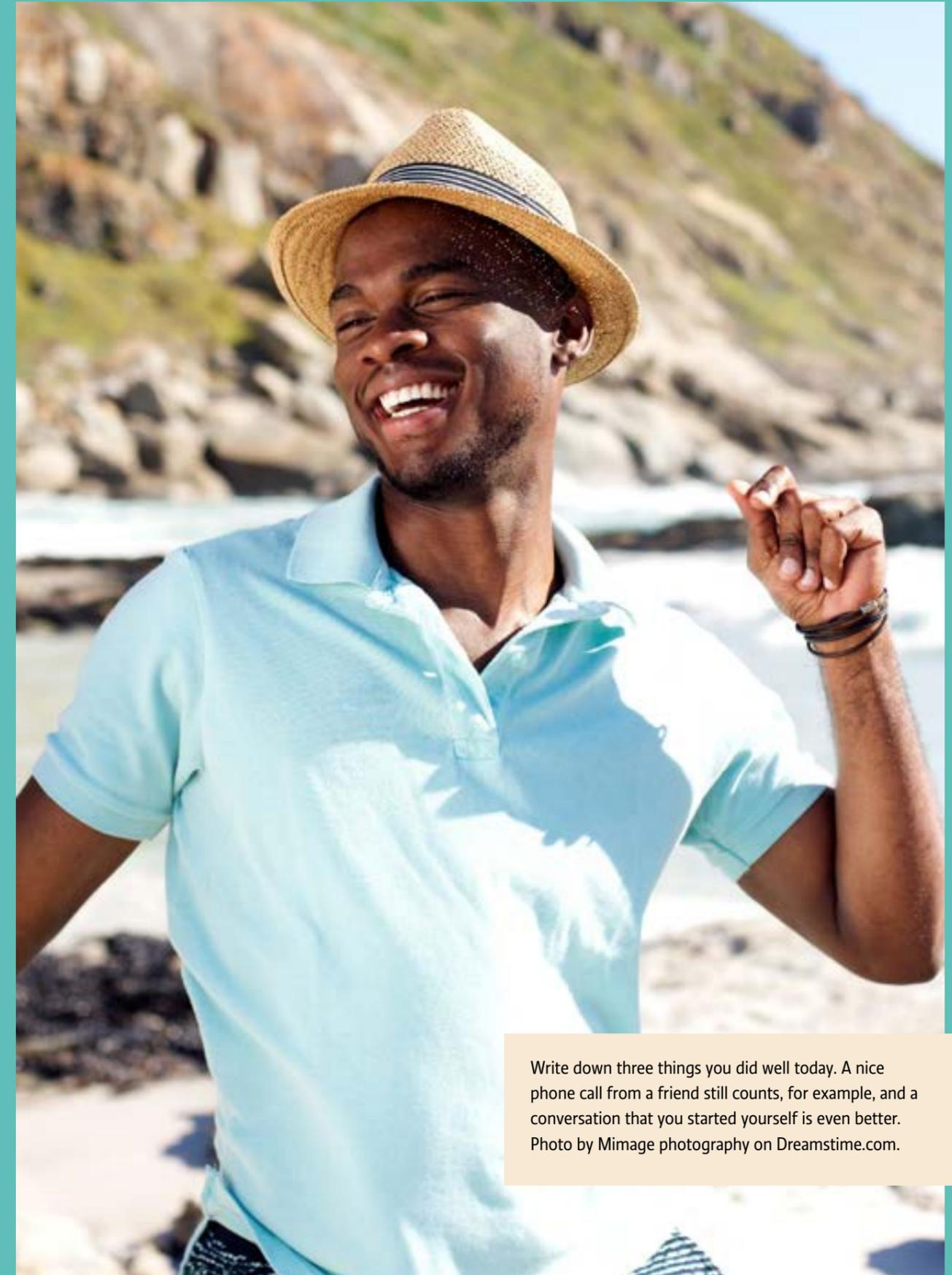
• **Breathe Deeply.** Panic leads to rapid, shallow breathing, and it can be easy to breathe that way when you're anxious, but if you force your breathing to be slower and deeper, your brain starts to slow the panic alarms

• **Use open body posture.** In danger, we curl up to protect our organs or tense up to run away, so if you can force yourself to sit or a stand in a

relaxed, open posture, your brain might start to realize that it misread the situation.

Write down three good things you did

This technique works better and better over time. Each day, take a moment to write down three good things that happened to you. The best choices are actions that you took yourself, but any good thing qualifies. A nice phone call from a friend still counts, for example, while a conversation that you started yourself is even better. Things you initiated on your own are best because you can do them again whenever you'd like a boost of positivity in your day.



Write down three things you did well today. A nice phone call from a friend still counts, for example, and a conversation that you started yourself is even better. Photo by Mimage photography on Dreamstime.com.

Mindfulness helps you make the most out of the present moment, which is huge help in overcoming depression and anxiety. Photo by Peterpaunchev on Dreamstime.com.



MINDFULNESS: LIVING IN THE MOMENT

Both anxiety and depression can keep you worrying about the future or stressing about the past. Fight back with mindfulness.

Anxiety and depression are very different illnesses, but they have some things in common.

Depression and anxiety take your focus away from the present moment

Anxiety often brings worries about future events, while depression often causes people to relive the negative parts of their past.

Depression and anxiety tell you that you can't control your thoughts and feelings

And that out-of-control feeling leaves you hopeless, stressed-out, and overwhelmed.

Depression and anxiety create thought patterns or cycles that keep you down

Worries about the future or negative thoughts about the past become a habit that's hard to break. Thankfully, there are things you can do to break the cycle.

Learn to focus on what's happening now

Because depression and anxiety keep you in the past or future, grounding yourself in the present moment takes away their power. Mindfulness is a term some people use to describe the act of paying attention to the present.

With practice, mindfulness can help you to observe your inner thoughts, without

assuming they are correct. You can take a step back, listen to what your brain is saying, and choose thoughts that are true. Keep reading to learn mindfulness techniques so you can stay in the here and now.

Pay attention to your breathing

Anxiety or negative thoughts can speed up your heart rate and make fast, shallow breaths seem natural, but these things send anxious signals back to your brain and can make your anxiety worse. To practice mindful breathing:

- Find a safe space where you feel comfortable or go for a relaxing walk
- Breathe in through your nose, in a slow, relaxed manner for four seconds
- Pause and hold your breath for one second
- Breathe out through your mouth for four seconds
- Pause for one more second
- Repeat the process until you start to feel more relaxed

Stay as focused on breathing as you can. Count the seconds. Make sure your stomach expands when you breathe in. If you can keep your attention centered on what you're doing, there won't be much room in your mind for worries or negative thoughts.

(More on next page)

(Continued from page 15)

Focus on your five senses

This technique helps you pay more attention to your surroundings. You'll get more out of what is happening, and keep your brain from spinning in a negative cycle:

- Take several deep breaths
- Notice the world around you
- Name five things you can see
- Name four things you can touch
- Name three things you can hear
- Name two things you can smell
- Name one thing you can taste

Create a personal grounding statement

A personal statement is a reminder you can use to center yourself when fears or negative thoughts try to take over. You'll want to remind yourself of:

- Today's date
- Where you are right now

- The fact that you are safe here
- Why this moment is different from the past, or scenarios you're worried about
- A positive affirmation

Here's an example grounding statement: Today is Monday, and the year is 2022. I am safe at my new job. I am having thoughts about harassment at my previous job, but that is over now. I got through it and found something better, which shows that I am strong.

Be mindful of simple tasks

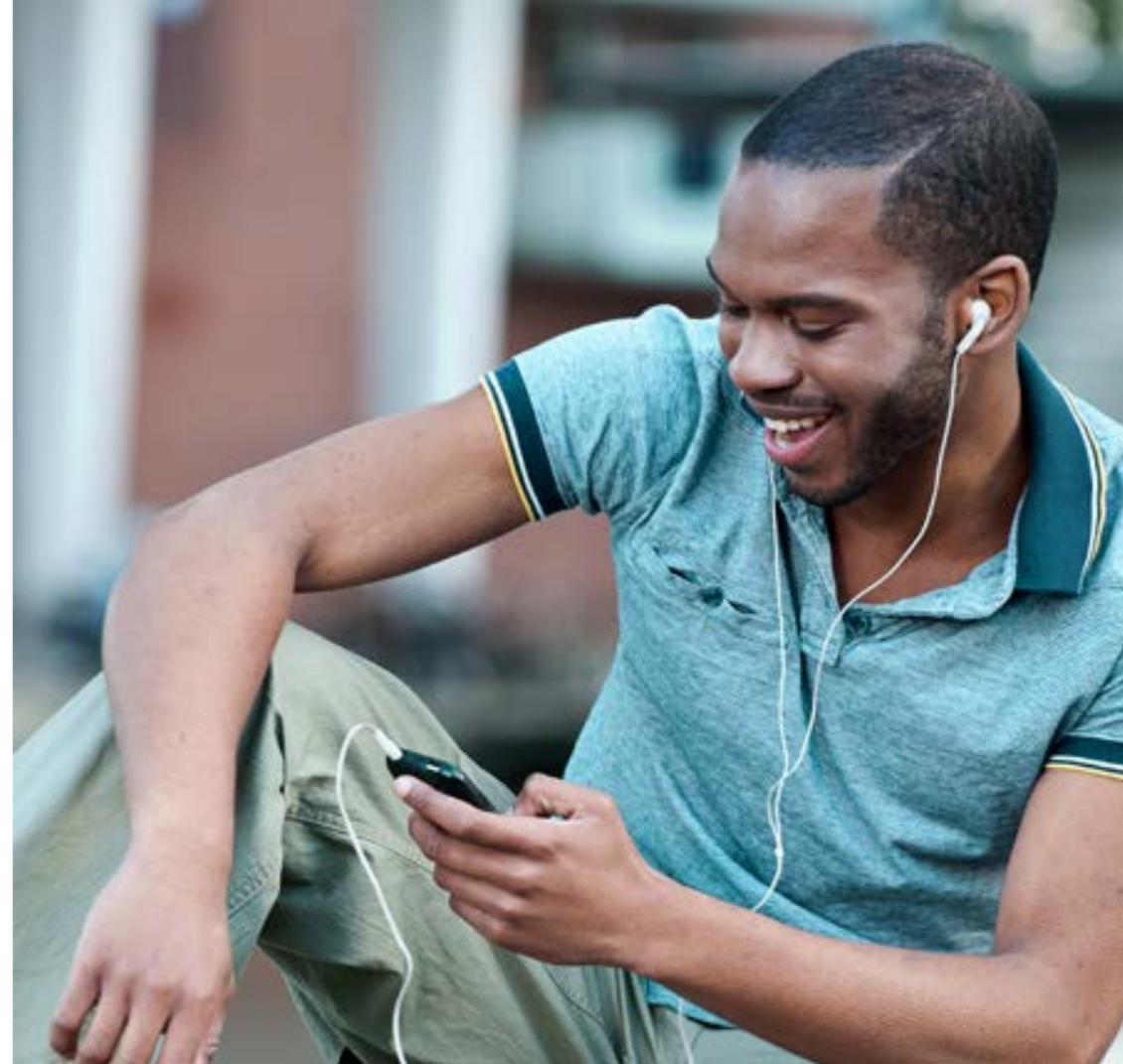
Learning to appreciate the little things that happen during the day can help you to feel less numb, and prevent you from getting lost in anxious or negative thoughts. For example, if you're folding laundry, focus on the way the clothes feel on your hands, and the shapes you create as you fold. If



you're driving, pause to breathe at red lights instead of worrying you'll be late. Take a moment, as your computer boots up, to think about how much you will accomplish because your computer is on.

Practice focus as you listen to music

This technique is an excellent chance to try listening without biases or pre-conceived ideas getting in the way. Put on headphones and listen to a song you don't know. Try not to think about whether you



Above photo by Mimagephotography.
Top left photo by Евгений Баранов.
Dreamstime.com.

Being grateful helps you to notice the positives. What do you appreciate?

like this genre of music or this artist. Go in without expectations, then close your eyes and immerse yourself in the song. Listen to each instrument in the song and how they interact with each other. Pay attention to the vocals and how they sound with the backing track. Try not to let preconceptions get in the way, and just focus on listening.

Practice gratitude

Gratitude, and thanking God for things that you might otherwise take for granted, helps you to notice the positive parts of life. Try thinking of five things or people you appreciate, and ask yourself the following questions:

1. How did this person or thing become part of my life?
2. What do I appreciate about this person or thing?
3. What would life be like without it or them?
4. What role does this person or thing have in the larger world?

Be mindful sometimes, not constantly

Mindfulness is helpful, but keeping it up 24 hours a day would be exhausting. And since exhaustion and stress aren't good for depression or anxiety, use these tools with moderation. Keep mindfulness from causing stress by choosing times to practice being in the present, and times to relax, let your mind wander, watch a TV show, or do nothing at all. Mental rest is vital. Remember that mindfulness isn't a task to stress about; it's a tool to help you feel better. Enjoy the experience of every moment of your life.



Photo by Dmytro Zinkevych on Dreamstime.com.

Resources for Positive Thinking And Building Mental Health



Retraining your brain takes time. Be patient, and use these resources. Photo by Vquang90 on Dreamstime.com.

Afraid you might hurt yourself?

Talk to someone right now. Call 1-800-273-8255, go to suicidepreventionlifeline.org to chat online, or in Canada, call 1-833-456-4566. Someone is always ready to listen.

Interested in self-help resources?

Find free mental health courses online at keltyskey.com/self-help. Australia's Centre for Clinical Intervention has more self-help resources available at cci.health.wa.gov.au/en/Resources/Looking-After-Yourself.

Need help with healthcare costs or options?

Find a therapist using the registry at findtreatment.samhsa.gov. And for help with costs, the Health Resources and Services Administration in the US federal government has a nationwide directory. Go to findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov/Search_HCC.aspx to find a clinic near you that offers low or no-cost health care

Interested in joining a support or education group?

The National Alliance on Mental Illness, or NAMI, has almost 1,000 different local chapters, and many offer free support and education. Visit nami.org/Find-Your-Local-NAMI to

There are a total of seven booklets in this series. The topics are listed below. To read more, please visit us at OneTeamMentalHealth.org, or write to AdventSource at the address on the back cover.

find a NAMI chapter in your area.

Ready to read more of these booklets?

There are seven booklets in the series. For More, visit OneTeamMentalHealth.org, or write to AdventSource at the address on the back cover. The topics in this series are:

- 1. Depression** (information about major depressive disorder)
- 2. Anxiety** (information about GAD and other anxiety disorders)
- 3. Suicide/Harm** (tools for those dealing

with thoughts of suicide or non-suicidal self-injury)

- 4. Getting Help** (types of treatment and where to find them)
- 5. Recovery Tools** (behavioral strategies you can use to start feeling better)
- 6. Brain Training** (mental strategies to push back against depression and anxiety)
- 7. Staying Healthy** (how to maintain your recovery once you are feeling better)

Youth and Young Adult Ministries
North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists
Mental Health Series: Issue 06 - Brain Training
Jonathan Betlinski, MD; Rachel Scribner, MA; Gary Parks, MDiv

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