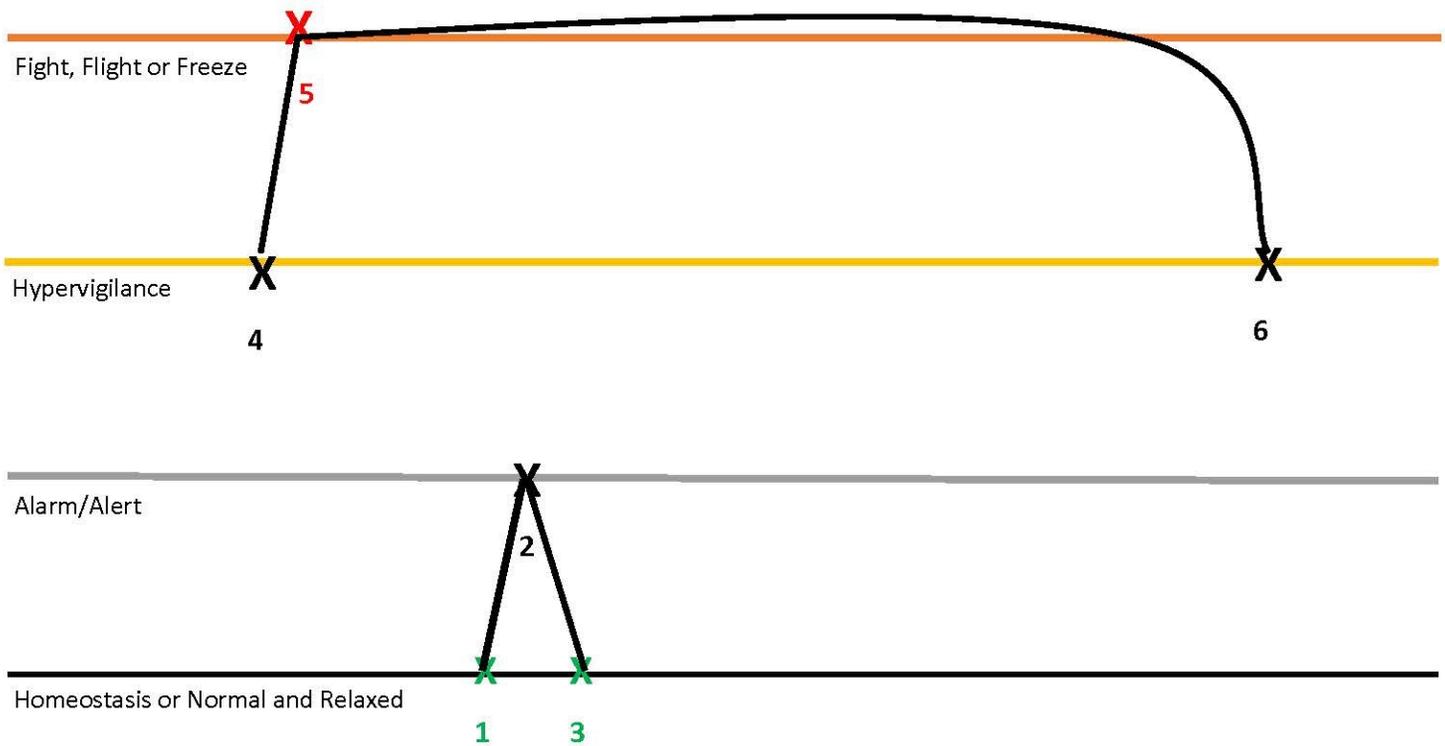
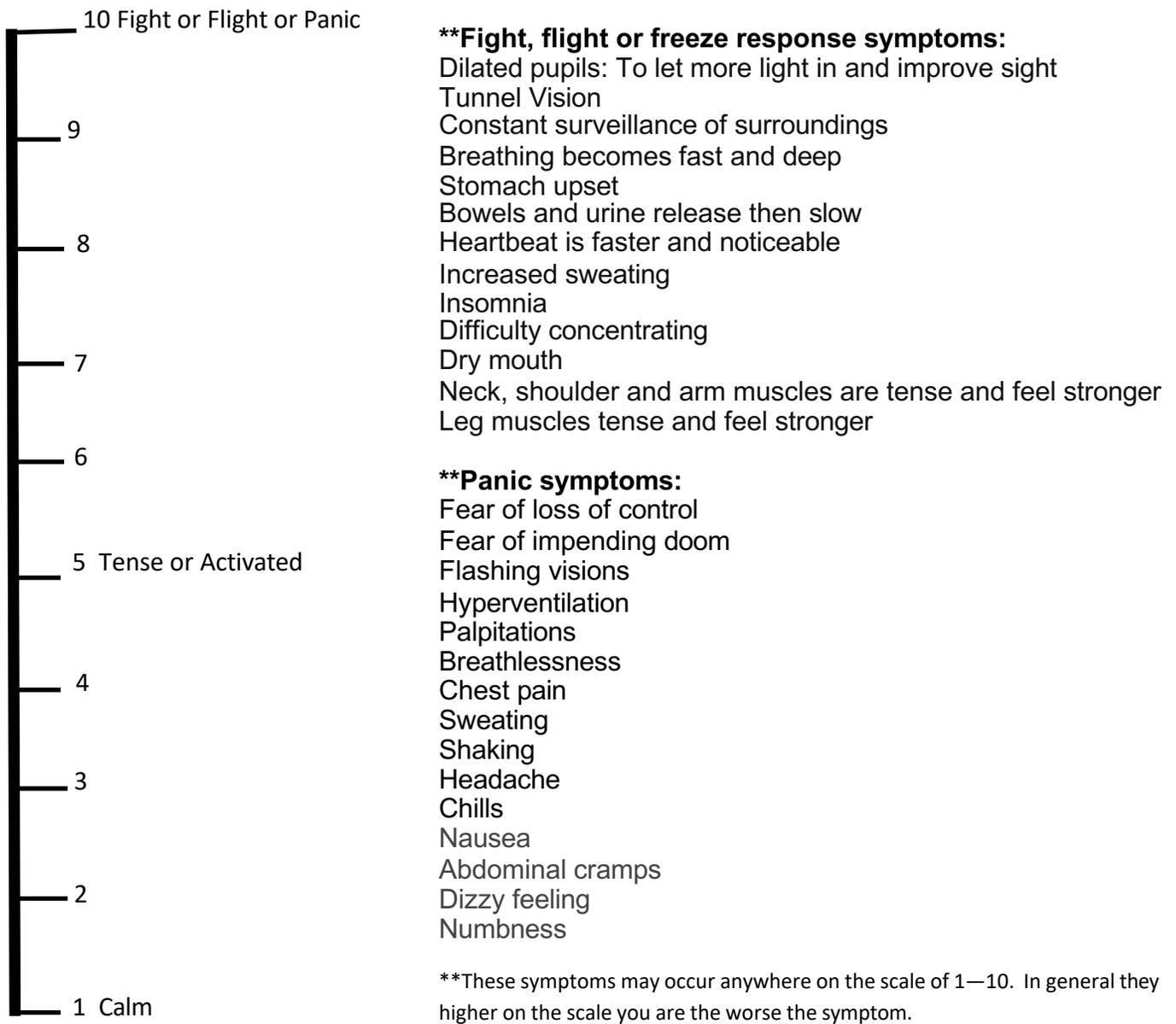


STATES OF ALARM



1. A person who has not experienced trauma lives in a NORMAL OR RELAXED state.
2. When they hear a loud noise or bang, their awareness increases to "ALERT or ALARM."
3. Once they determine the source of the noise they are able to return to a NORMAL or RELAXED state.
4. When we experience multiple traumas or live in conditions which require vigilance for extended periods of time, the chemicals released during the stress response cause our brain and body to be very sensitive to any real or perceived danger.
5. We hear a loud noise, bang or get a sense that something is wrong and our brain and body go into "FIGHT, FLIGHT, or FREEZE" response. Pupils dilate, heart rate and breathing increase, our muscles tense, and we have a surge of adrenaline which prepares our body to deal with a real or perceived threat. The jump from HYPERVIGILANCE to FIGHT, FLIGHT, OR FREEZE can happen very quickly.
6. In general it takes a long time to return to a state of "HYPERVIGILANCE." Afterward our body tries to recover from the adrenaline surge. One of two things tend to happen; either we have a very difficult time staying awake or it is very difficult for sleep to come. Using coping strategies like grounding, progressive muscle relaxation, listening to music with a slow beat count, etc., will help to teach the brain to return to HYPERVIGILANCE and recover faster.

PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR BODY



It is important to begin to pay attention to the cues your body tells you. First, rate yourself on the above scale of 1—10. Second, pay attention to the cues your body gives you. Finally, pay attention to the cues your body gives you the higher you go on the scale.

When you find yourself at a 5 or above use a coping strategy like grounding or progressive muscle relaxation, etc., to attempt to return to calm.

Note: When in the 8-10 range use progressive muscle relaxation because it becomes more difficult to concentrate when in this range.

Grounding Techniques

Grounding is a technique that helps keep someone in the present. They help reorient a person to the here-and-now and in reality. Grounding skills can be helpful in managing overwhelming feelings or intense anxiety. They help someone to regain their mental focus from an often intensely emotional state. Grounding skills occur within two specific approaches: Sensory Awareness and Cognitive Awareness.

Sensory Awareness Grounding Exercise #1:

Begin by touching each finger on your hand and label each finger as one of the five senses. Then take each finger and identify something special and safe representing each of those five senses. For example: Thumb represents sight and a label for sight might be butterflies or my middle finger represents the smell sense and it could be represented by lilacs. Write this list on a piece of paper you can carry with you. If you are able, memorize it. Whenever you get triggered, breathe deeply and slowly, and put your hand in front of your face where you can really see it – stare at your hand and then look at each finger and try to do the five senses exercise from memory. *Source:*

www.stardrift.net/survivor/senses.html

Grounding Exercise #2:

- Keep your eyes open, look around the room or wherever you are. Notice your surroundings, notice details. The leaves on the trees, or the colors in a picture on the wall
- Hold a pillow, a ball, or a rock. Notice the weight of the object. Is it warm or cool? What color is it?
- Place a cool cloth on your face, or hold something cool such as a can of soda or bottle of water
- Listen to soothing music. Music with a slow beat count helps your heartbeat to slow and match the beat of the music.
- Put your feet firmly on the ground. Curl your toes, hold for 10 seconds and release. Repeat 3 times. Squeeze your hands and tighten the muscles in your arms, hold for 10 seconds. Repeat 3 times.
- FOCUS on someone's voice or a neutral conversation.

Sensory Awareness Grounding Exercise #3: Here's the 54321 "game".

- Name 5 things you can see in the room or area around you.
- Name 4 things you can feel ("chair on my back" or "feet on floor")
- Name 3 things you can hear right now ("fingers tapping on keyboard" or "tv")
- Name 2 things you can smell right now (or, 2 things you like the smell of)
- Name 1 good thing about yourself

(Source: www.ibiblio.org/rcip//copingskills.html)

Cognitive Awareness Grounding Exercise:

Re-orient yourself in place and time by asking yourself some or all of these questions:

1. Where am I?
2. What is today?
3. What is the date?
4. What is the month?
5. What is the year?
6. How old am I?
7. What season is it?

HOW TO DO PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

Progressive Muscle Relaxation teaches you how to relax your muscles through a two-step process. First, you systematically tense particular muscle groups in your body, such as your neck and shoulders. Next, you release the tension and notice how your muscles feel when you relax them. This exercise will help you to lower your overall tension and stress levels, and help you relax when you are feeling anxious. It can also help reduce physical problems such as stomachaches and headaches, as well as improve your sleep.

People with anxiety difficulties are often so tense throughout the day that they don't even recognize what being relaxed feels like. Through practice you can learn to distinguish between the feelings of a tensed muscle and a completely relaxed muscle. Then, you can begin to "cue" this relaxed state at the first sign of the muscle tension that accompanies your feelings of anxiety. By tensing and releasing, you learn not only what relaxation feels like, but also to recognize when you are starting to get tense during the day.



HELPFUL HINTS:

- Set aside about 15 minutes to complete this exercise.
- Find a place where you can complete this exercise without being disturbed.
- For the first week or two, practise this exercise twice a day until you get the hang of it. The better you become at it, the quicker the relaxation response will "kick in" when you really need it!
- You do not need to be feeling anxious when you practise this exercise. In fact, it is better to first practice it when you are calm. That way, it will be easier to do when feeling anxious.

Getting ready

Find a quiet, comfortable place to sit, then close your eyes and let your body go loose. A reclining armchair is ideal. You can lie down, but this will increase your chances of falling asleep. Although relaxing before bed can improve your sleep, the goal of this exercise is to learn to relax while awake. Wear loose, comfortable clothing, and don't forget to remove your shoes. Take about five slow, deep breaths before you begin.

How To Do It

The Tension – Relaxation Response

STEP ONE: Tension

The first step is applying muscle tension to a specific part of the body. This step is essentially the same regardless of which muscle group you are targeting. First, focus on the target muscle group, for example, your left hand. Next, take a slow, deep breath and squeeze the muscles as hard as you can for about 5 seconds. It is important to *really feel* the tension in the muscles, which may even cause a bit of discomfort or shaking. In this instance, you would be making a tight fist with your left hand.

It is easy to accidentally tense other surrounding muscles (for example, the shoulder or arm), so try to **ONLY** tense the muscles you are targeting. Isolating muscle groups gets easier with practice.



Be Careful! Take care not to hurt yourself while tensing your muscles. You should never feel intense or shooting pain while completing this exercise. Make the muscle tension deliberate, yet gentle. If you have problems with pulled muscles, broken bones, or any medical issues that would hinder physical activity, consult your doctor first.

STEP TWO: Relaxing the Tense Muscles

This step involves quickly relaxing the tensed muscles. After about 5 seconds, let all the tightness flow out of the tensed muscles. Exhale as you do this step. You should feel the muscles become loose and limp, as the tension flows out. **It is important to very deliberately focus on and notice the difference between the tension and relaxation. This is the most important part of the whole exercise.**

Note: It can take time to learn to relax the body and notice the difference between tension and relaxation. At first, it can feel uncomfortable to be focusing on your body, but this can become quite enjoyable over time.

Remain in this relaxed state for about 15 seconds, and then move on to the next muscle group. Repeat the tension-relaxation steps. After completing all of the muscle groups, take some time to enjoy the deep state of relaxation.

The Different Muscle Groups

During this exercise, you will be working with almost all the major muscle groups in your body. To make it easier to remember, start with your feet and systematically move up (or if you prefer, you can do it in the reverse order, from your forehead down to your feet). For example:

- **Foot** (curl your toes downward)
- **Lower leg and foot** (tighten your calf muscle by pulling toes towards you)
- **Entire leg** (squeeze thigh muscles while doing above)

(Repeat on other side of body)

- **Hand** (clench your fist)
- **Entire right arm** (tighten your biceps by drawing your forearm up towards your shoulder and “make a muscle”, while clenching fist)

(Repeat on other side of body)

- **Buttocks** (tighten by pulling your buttocks together)
- **Stomach** (suck your stomach in)
- **Chest** (tighten by taking a deep breath)
- **Neck and shoulders** (raise your shoulders up to touch your ears)
- **Mouth** (open your mouth wide enough to stretch the hinges of your jaw)
- **Eyes** (clench your eyelids tightly shut)
- **Forehead** (raise your eyebrows as far as you can)

It can be helpful to listen to someone guide you through these steps. There are many relaxation CDs for sale that will take you through a progressive muscle relaxation (or something very similar). Alternatively, you can record a script of this process on a tape or CD, or ask a friend or relative with a calm, soothing voice to record it for you. It would sound something like this:

*Take a deep breath in through your nose...hold your breath for a few seconds...and now breathe out...take another deep breath through your nose... Now pay attention to your body and how it feels.... Start with your **right foot**... squeeze all the muscles in your right foot. Curl your toes as tight as you can, now hold it....hold it...good...now relax and exhale...let your foot go limp...notice the difference between the tension and relaxation....feel the tension flow out of your foot like water...(then repeat with **right lower leg and foot, entire right leg, etc...**)*

Quick Tense & Relax!

Once you have become familiar with the “tension and relaxation” technique, and have been practicing it for a couple weeks, you can begin to practise a very short version of progressive muscle relaxation. In this approach, you learn how to tense larger groups of muscles, which takes even less time. These muscle groups are:

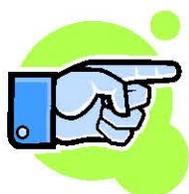
1. Lower limbs (feet and legs)
2. Stomach and chest
3. Arms, shoulders, and neck
4. Face

So instead of working with just one specific muscle group at a time (e.g., your stomach), you can focus on the complete group (your stomach AND chest). You can start by focusing on your breathing during the tension and relaxation. When doing this shortened version, it can be helpful to say a certain word or phrase to yourself as you slowly exhale (such as “*relax*”, “*let go*”, “*stay calm*”, “*peace*” “*it will pass*” etc...). This word or phrase will become associated with a relaxed state; eventually, saying this word alone can bring on a calm feeling. This can be handy during times when it would be hard to take the time to go through all the steps of progressive muscle relaxation.

Release Only

A good way to even further shorten the time you take to relax your muscles is to become familiar with the “release only” technique. One of the benefits of tensing and releasing muscles is that you learn to recognize what tense muscles feel like and what relaxed muscles feel like.

Once you feel comfortable with the tension and relaxation techniques, you can start doing “release only”, which involves **removing** the “tension” part of the exercise. For example, instead of tensing your stomach and chest before relaxing them, try just relaxing the muscles. At first, the feeling of relaxation might feel less intense than when you tensed the muscles beforehand, but with practice, the release-only technique can be just as relaxing.



Final Note: Remember to practise progressive muscle relaxation often, whether you are feeling anxious or not. This will make the exercise even more effective when you really do need to relax! Though it may feel a bit tedious at first, ultimately you will gain a skill that will probably become a very important part of managing your anxiety in your daily life.