

Grounding Techniques

Because of its focus on being present in the moment, grounding can be considered a variant of Mindfulness. It can also be a method of distraction to get you out of your head and away from upsetting thoughts, memories, or feelings. When your mind is racing, grounding brings you back into the here and now and is very helpful in managing overwhelming feelings or anxiety. It is a great way to calm down quickly.

How Grounding Works

Grounding techniques often use the five senses—sound, touch, smell, taste, and sight—to immediately connect you with the here and now. For example, singing a song, rubbing lotion on your hands, or sucking on a sour sweet are all grounding techniques that produce sensations that are difficult to ignore or distract you from what's going on in your mind. This helps you directly and instantaneously connect with the present moment at the same time.

Grounding basically means to bring your focus to what is happening to you physically, either in your body or in your surroundings, instead of being trapped by the thoughts in your mind that are causing you to feel anxious. It helps you stay in the present moment instead of worrying about things that may happen in the future or events that have already happened but you still find yourself going over and over them in your head.

When we start to think about something stressful, our amygdala, a section of the brain located in the temporal lobe, goes into action. The amygdala, simply put, is the part of our brain that is responsible for our emotional responses, especially fear. It is great for preparing for emergency events but sometimes it kicks in to action and detects a threat where there really isn't any.

Here is a typical process; we have a negative thought about a situation (remember a thought doesn't necessarily mean it is real), our amygdala says "emergency! emergency!" and initiates changes in our body such as increased muscle tension, rapid heartbeat and faster breathing. The amygdala then interprets these body changes as further evidence that something is actually wrong which of course further activates it and creates a vicious cycle where you become more and more anxious and physically and emotionally overwhelmed.

Grounding techniques can help us break out of this vicious cycle. By re-focusing on your body and what you're physically feeling, you get out of your head and divert your mind away from anxious or stressful thoughts and into the moment.

Grounding is highly personal. What may work for one person may trigger anxiety or flashbacks in another. You may need to do some trial and error before you figure out what grounding techniques work best for you. The nice thing about using grounding as a coping technique is that the techniques

can be done in any environment. You could be home alone or out in public, you can use grounding to move your focus back to the present.

Working on grounding takes practice and it becomes easier over time. If these particular grounding techniques don't work for you, try something else. For example, some people find that a rubber band on their wrist is useful to snap them back to the moment. The ultimate goal is to live in the now and focus on the present when the past starts coming up

Grounding Techniques

To connect with the here and now, do something (or several things) that will bring all your attention to the present moment. Be sure to keep your eyes open while you're grounding yourself so you're aware of everything that's going on around you. As you can see, grounding helps you get out of your brain and bring your focus to your body. Try them all when you are only slightly worried about something and then chose the ones that you like best and practice them so they are easy to remember when you really need them.

Sight

- Complete a crossword puzzle, sudoku, word search, or other puzzles.
- Count all the pieces of furniture around you.
- Play a distracting game on your tablet, computer, or smartphone.
- Put on your favourite film or TV show.
- Read a book or magazine.
- Take a mental inventory of everything around you, such as all the colours and patterns you see, the sounds you hear, and the scents you smell. Saying this out loud is helpful too.

Smell

- Get some essential oils that remind you of good times (freshly cut grass, rain, clean laundry, or sugar cookies, for example) and smell one.
- Light a scented candle or melt scented wax.
- Sniff strong peppermint, which also has the benefit of having a soothing effect.

Sound

- Call a loved one.
- Put on some nature sounds such as birds chirping or waves crashing.
- Read out loud, whether it's a favourite children's story, a blog article, or the latest novel.
- Talk out loud about what you see, hear, or what you're thinking or doing.
- Turn up the radio or blast your favourite song.

Taste

- Bite into a lemon or lime.

- Let a piece of chocolate melt in your mouth, noticing how it tastes and feels as you roll it around with your tongue.
- Suck on a mint or chew peppermint or cinnamon gum.
- Take a bite of pepper or some hot salsa.

Touch

- Cuddle and pet your dog or cat if you have one.
- Drink a hot or cold beverage.
- Grab an article of clothing, a blanket, or a towel and knead it in your hands or hold it to your cheek. Concentrate on what it feels like.
- Hold an ice cube and let it melt in your hand.
- Massage your temples.
- Pop some bubble wrap.
- Put your hands under running water.
- Rub your hand lightly over the carpet or a piece of furniture, noting the texture.
- Take a hot or cool shower.

Other

- Dance.
- Go for a walk or run.
- Send a letter or card to someone you care about.
- Sit in another room or area for a change of scenery.
- Stretch your arms, neck, and legs.
- Take 10 slow, deep breaths.
- Write in a journal about how you're feeling or keep a list of prompts handy that you can use to decide what to write about.

The 5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Technique

This technique gets you to use all your five senses to help you to get back to the present. It starts with you sitting comfortably, close your eyes and taking a couple of deep breathes. In through your nose (count to 3), out through your mouth (to the count of 3).

Now open your eyes and look around you. Name out loud:

5 – things you can see (you can look within the room and out of the window)

4 – things you can feel (the silkiness of your skin, the texture of the material on your chair, what does your hair feel like? What is in front of you that you can touch? A table perhaps?)

3 – things you can hear (traffic noise or birds outside, when you are quiet and actually listening things in your room constantly make a noise but typically we don't hear them).

2 – things you can smell (hopefully nothing awful!)

1 – thing you can taste (it might be a good idea to keep a piece of chocolate handy in case you are doing this grounding exercise! You can always leave your chair for this one and when you taste whatever it is that you have chosen, take a small bite and let it swirl around your mouth for a couple of seconds, really savoring the flavor).

Hold On To An Object and Really Focus On It

Look around your house for things that have a texture or are pretty or interesting to look at.

Hold an object in your hand and really bring your full focus to it, see the color variances. Look at where shadows may fall on parts of it or maybe there are shapes that form within the object. Feel how heavy or light it is in your hand and what the surface texture feels like under your fingers.

This can be done with any object you have lying around or if you know you are going into a stressful situation, take one of your favorite small objects and put it in your pocket or purse so you can do this calming exercise on the go.

The Grounding Chair

- Sit down in a comfortable chair, one where your feet reach the floor. Close your eyes and focus on your breath. Breathe in slowly for the count of three, then out slowly. Bring your mind's focus to your body. How does your body feel sitting in that chair? Scooch your bum right into the back of the seat so the whole length of your back is pressing into the back of the chair. Can you feel the contact between your body and the chair's surface? If the chair has arms, touch it, is the material smooth or textured? Press your arms down the length of the chair arm, notice how your hands hang off the end. If your chair doesn't have arms, touch the material on the seat, how does that feel?
- Next push your feet into the ground, imagine the energy draining down from your mind, down through your body and out through your feet into the ground. I picture it as a color filling my body as it goes from top to toe, but this is your image so choose whatever you want your energy to look like. As the energy drains from your head, feel how heavy each body part becomes, your torso feels heavy and now your arms as you relax those muscles. Lastly, feel the heaviness go down your legs, through your feet and down into the ground.

Let Your Thoughts Come and Go

When we are anxious our thoughts about our worries go around and around in our mind. Never ending and building on each other until we feel drained by them so we try not to worry. Whenever you try not to do something it is guaranteed to make you do it more so instead, observe your thoughts like you are an outside looking in. Just watch your thoughts for a minute. Imagines leaves floating on the surface of a stream. For each thought that comes to mind, allow that thought to take its place on a leaf and watch it blow away in the wind. Or allow the thought to turn into a fish and watch it float away down the stream. Allow those thoughts to come and go, you don't need to respond to them.

Distract Your Mind

There are several ways to distract your mind so it stops thinking about whatever it is that is worrying you and focuses on something that isn't emotionally driven. Here are some quick ways to do it.

Pick a color. How many things in different shades of that color can you see around the room or out of the window? Still feeling stressed? Pick another color.

Count backwards by 7, starting at 100. It isn't that easy and needs you to concentrate. This one can also be helpful to do when you are finding it hard to sleep.

Draw Around Your Feet in Your Own Mind

Place your feet on the ground and in your imagination pick your favorite color to draw an outline around each foot. Start at the heel and using your imaginary pencil slowly go up the side of your foot to your pinky toe and then make sure you draw around each toe and then go back towards the heel. Repeat on the other foot.

Another quick way to focus on your feet when you are in a stressful situation is just wiggle your toes inside your shoe. Pay attention to the sensation as you move each separate toe. Do some move independently of the others? Tense up your whole foot then stretch it out. Now do the other foot.

Get Your Adrenaline Fueled Energy Out

Sometimes you may not be able to concentrate enough to do any of these grounding exercises because their body seems too pumped full of adrenaline fueled energy. If this is happening to you, it

is good to kick-start the calming down process by doing something physical first to get that pent-up energy out and then come back to your favorite grounding techniques.

- Run on the treadmill/elliptical if you have one at home
- Run up and down the stairs
- Take a brisk walk or run outside
- Cleaning up the kitchen, house or backyard channels that extra energy into something useful
- Dance around the house while listening to loud music

When you are physically spent, you can return to trying these techniques to calm down your mind.

Which one of these grounding techniques works best for you? Maybe different ones help at different times. Whichever one you choose, once you have calmed down and your mind stops racing, you are then able to look at the situation more rationally and challenge the thoughts that made you anxious in the first place.