

Techniques to reduce anxiety and stress

As the impact of COVID-19 (coronavirus) is being felt across the country, particularly by people who are living with a lung disease or lung cancer, Lung Foundation Australia, in collaboration with Clinical Psychologist Debra Sandford, offers the following advice to reduce anxiety and stress during this time.

When you are feeling anxious or stressed, you may find yourself breathing quicker. While slow deep breathing techniques are useful for most people, they may not be relaxing for someone with a lung condition. Below is another technique which you may find helpful.

The five senses exercise

The goal of this exercise is to calm your mind by using your five senses to focus on your environment instead of your thoughts.

- First, notice 5 things that you can see. Look around you and become aware of your environment. Try to pick out something that you wouldn't usually notice.
- Second, notice 4 things you can feel. Bring your attention to the things that you're currently feeling, such as the texture of your clothing or the smooth surface of the table you're resting your hands on.
- Third, notice 3 things that you can hear. Listen for and notice things in the background that you don't normally notice. It could be the birds chirping outside or an appliance humming in the next room.
- Fourth, notice 2 things you can smell. Bring attention to scents that you usually filter out, either pleasant or unpleasant. Catch a whiff of the pine trees outside or food cooking in the kitchen.
- Finally, notice 1 thing you can taste. Take a sip of a drink, chew gum, or notice the current taste in your mouth.

"The more descriptive information you include during this exercise the better it will work. It also usually works better if you can talk out loud because your ear will hear your voice and create a feedback loop which helps your mind to come back to the present moment. This exercise can be shortened or lengthened until you notice you are feeling calmer. To shorten the exercise just name 3 things you can see, hear and feel, and repeat until you feel calmer. To lengthen, name 5 things you can see, hear and feel adding in smell and taste if appropriate and keep repeating until you feel calmer," Debra advises.

For this exercise it doesn't matter whether you are breathing slowly, rapidly or in short bursts, just focus on your body and the space you are in. If you are looking for more mindfulness techniques, perhaps try a meditation class on YouTube.