FREE GUIDE

5 exercises to calm *anxiety* in 5 minutes

Science-based somatic techniques to activate your vagus nerve and get out of alert mode, anytime, anywhere.

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Why your body won't calm down

If you feel anxious for no clear reason, carry constant tension in your neck and shoulders, feel tired no matter how much you rest, or can't sleep even though you're exhausted, it's not an attitude problem. It's your nervous system.

When your body stays in alert mode for too long (chronic stress, work, conflict, or simply the pace of modern life), your autonomic nervous system gets stuck in survival mode. Your mind wants to relax, but your biology won't let it.

The good news: your nervous system is trainable. With the right body signals, you can bring it out of alert mode and back into safety. That's exactly what somatic exercises do.

This guide gives you 5 neuroscience-backed techniques that work directly on the vagus nerve, the communication highway between your brain and your organs. They're quick, need no equipment, and you can do them any time of day.

> **Important**
>
> These exercises don't replace medical or psychological treatment. They're a somatic complement that works where words can't reach: directly on your autonomic nervous system.

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01 Vagal breathing 4-6

2 minutes Anytime. Ideal before bed or when anxiety spikes.

Why it works

Breathing out for longer than you breathe in directly activates the parasympathetic branch of your nervous system through the vagus nerve. It slows your heart rate, lowers cortisol and sends a safety signal to your brain. It's the tool with the strongest scientific evidence for immediate autonomic regulation.

How to do it

1. Sit comfortably or lie down. Place one hand on your belly.
2. Breathe in through your nose for a slow count of 4. Feel your belly expand (not your chest).
3. Breathe out through your mouth for a count of 6, as if blowing through a straw.
4. Repeat for 5 to 8 full cycles.

Key: If 4-6 feels hard, start with 3-5. What matters is that the exhale is LONGER than the inhale.

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02 Humming and throat vibration

1-2 minutes When you feel tension, anxiety or a "lump in your throat."

Why it works

The vagus nerve runs through your throat. Humming creates a mechanical vibration that directly stimulates its fibers and activates the ventral branch (the branch of calm and social connection). It's one of the simplest and least known ways to shift your nervous system state.

How to do it

1. Close your lips gently.
2. Hum a low, steady note: "Mmmmmmm..."
3. Feel the vibration in your throat, chest and face.
4. Hold each hum for 10 to 15 seconds.
5. Repeat 5 or 6 times. Don't force it: it should feel comfortable.

Variation: Singing softly, gargling vigorously with water, or chanting "Om" have a similar effect.

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03 Slow visual orienting

1 minute When you feel hypervigilant, your mind is racing, or you "can't switch off."

Why it works

Your nervous system constantly scans your surroundings for threats (a process called neuroception). Slow visual orienting tells it clearly: "this place is safe." It switches off hypervigilance and lets your nervous system lower its guard. It's especially helpful for anticipatory anxiety.

How to do it

1. From wherever you are, turn your head VERY slowly to the right. Let your eyes travel across the space.
2. Let your gaze rest on whatever catches your attention: a color, a texture, an object.
3. Look at it for 3 to 5 seconds. No judging, just looking.
4. Keep turning slowly until you've covered your whole field of vision. Then repeat to the left.

Key: Slowness is essential. If you move fast, you activate the threat-scanning system instead of calming it.

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04 Cold water on your face

30 seconds During acute anxiety, a racing heart or a sense of panic.

Why it works

Cold water on your face triggers the mammalian dive reflex: an ancient biological response that slows your heart rate, redirects blood to your vital organs and strongly activates the vagus nerve. It's the fastest technique in this guide for breaking an anxiety spiral.

How to do it

1. Turn on the cold tap (it doesn't need to be ice cold).
2. Lean over and splash your whole face with both hands: forehead, cheeks, chin. Repeat 3 or 4 times.
3. Alternative: soak a towel in cold water and hold it over your face for 15 to 20 seconds.
4. Keep breathing normally throughout.

SOS: If panic hits when you're out, running cold water over your wrists helps. Less powerful, but doable in any restroom.

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05 Body shaking

1-2 minutes After a stressful situation, an argument or an intense day.

Why it works

Animals instinctively shake after a dangerous experience to release the survival energy stored in their bodies. Humans have lost this natural reflex. Shaking lets you complete the stress cycle that was left unfinished, so tension doesn't build up chronically in your muscles and tissues.

How to do it

1. Stand with your knees slightly bent.
2. Start shaking your hands gently. Let the vibration travel up your arms and shoulders.
3. Add a light bounce in your knees, as if gently bouncing. No jumping.
4. Let your whole body shake: legs, torso, arms, head. 1 to 2 minutes.
5. Slow down gradually. Stand still for a few seconds and notice how you feel.

Key: Don't control the movement. Let your body find its own shaking pattern.

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Your next step

These 5 exercises are a starting point. They're the quickest, most accessible tools for sending your nervous system a safety signal at any moment of the day.

But deep regulation, the kind that changes your baseline vagal tone and gives you real resilience against stress, takes a complete, progressive protocol. A plan that builds, day by day and week by week, the neural pathways that lead you back to calm.

That's exactly what you'll find in my books:

BOOK 1 · 28 DAYS

Unlock Your Nervous System

Somatic exercises to heal trauma, release anxiety, and activate your vagus nerve. Daily 5-to-12-minute practices, no equipment needed.

BOOK 2 · 21 DAYS

Reset Your Gut

Somatic healing to beat bloating, relieve SIBO, and calm your gut-brain axis, with warm, gentle recipes and no food fear.

Available on Amazon › elenavives.com/en

"*Every book I write is the manual I wish I'd had.*"

— Elena Vives

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