

Distraction Techniques

Distraction techniques can be a useful way to manage your anxiety symptoms in the short-term. At its simplest, distraction involves simply choosing to redirect your attention to something other than what is causing your anxiety. Most people with anxiety, however, have the problem that it is extremely hard for them to think about anything other than what they are fearful of. A person with a spider phobia, for example, is likely to have a lot of trouble distracting themselves from the fact that there is a spider in a jar in their hands (or crawling on their arm!)

This is where distraction techniques can be useful. The techniques listed below are some suggestions on ways to enhance your ability to distract yourself from the feared object or situation. Remember though that these are only suggestions, and that distraction techniques are limited only by your imagination. Be sure to let your psychologist know if you have any distraction techniques that you find particularly useful so that these can be shared with other people with anxiety problems. Distraction works in the following ways:

- By providing something other than the feared object or situation to think about;
- By providing an increased sense of control over anxiety; and
- By showing you that you are able to cope in the face of anxiety.

It is important to note that distraction techniques may be useful in the short-term to help manage your anxiety, but that they may not be the best techniques to use in the longer term. The problems with distraction techniques are:

- While you are distracted from the feared object or situation, you are not really participating fully in exposure. There is little point setting up exposure exercised if you are going to be imagining yourself somewhere else!
- Using distraction does nothing to reduce your fear of the situation or object, and when the distraction stops, the fear is still just as strong.
- Sometimes people can use distraction so much that they do not use some of the other more powerful techniques to assist them in overcoming their fears.

Some suggested Distraction Techniques

1. Close your eyes, move them around randomly, and then open them again. Describe to yourself in excruciating detail the first object that you see when you open them.
2. Focus on the second-hand (or seconds display) of your watch. Use the passing seconds to ensure that your breathing is regular and calm. Say the word "*relax*" to yourself each time you exhale.
3. Count backwards from 100 in sevens.
4. Choose a category of objects (e.g. fruits) and try to name one for each letter of the alphabet (e.g. apple, banana, cherry...etc.)
5. Think of a place where you have felt calm and relaxed in the past. Describe the details of the situation or place to yourself.
6. Think of an event where you have felt positive in the past. Describe the event to yourself in exacting detail.