

HONEST BODY

The Happiness Checklist for Anxious People

Managing Anxiety in the Moment

If you struggle with anxiety, let me start by saying—*I feel you*. Anxiety sucks, sometimes it creeps up out of nowhere in the middle of the day, and other times you wake up with a racing heart that feels impossible to control.

When you're in the midst of an anxious day that you just can't seem to shake, it feels impossible to work, communicate or even be happy.

While we can't control everything in life, anxiety is one that we can get a handle on if we try. Like many other things, anxiety starts in the mind, and getting to a mentally stable place can help reduce the anxiety you're feeling in the moment. Luckily, you don't need a magic pill or doctor to do that—you just need to find out what works for you.

That's why I wanted to create the happiness checklist, based on my personal experience with anxiety. What works for me may not be perfect for you, but this is a good place to start. The key is choosing what feels most authentic to you, so it truly resonates and effectively diminishes that anxious feeling. In fact, my ideas may simply be a good starting place for you to create your own happiness checklist.

The Honest Body Happiness Checklist

Remind yourself of one simple thing.

I am in control of my feelings. I am in control of my day. I have the power to change the situation. Say this out loud or in your head.

No one else controls your reaction or happiness, only you. Remembering this in moments of stress and anxiety has been incredibly powerful for me.

Stop judging yourself.

When we're in the midst of an anxiety attack, it's easy to place blame on ourselves, or even feed into and let ourselves get lost in it: *This is awful; I'm never going to get rid of this; I can't get anything done, this is taking over.* Hello, panic attack, my old friend.

Instead, just *notice* the anxiety. Don't judge it, don't label it. Just let it be. Make note of how you feel and what thoughts are coming to mind. This has also been extremely helpful for me as of late, and I highly recommend practicing in all areas of life—when you're stressed at work, struggling through a yoga class, etc.

☐ **Tune into your breath.**

You don't need to find a quiet space, or even leave your desk if you're at work. Just take one minute to notice how you're breathing. Is your breath short and uneven? Likely, it is. In which case, repeat the following breathing pattern five or more times, noticing how your heart starts to slow to its natural rhythm:

Breathe in for 4 seconds, hold for 8 seconds, breathe out for 4 seconds.

☐ **Tune into your thoughts.**

What are you thinking about right now? Literally, what is on your mind at this very moment of anxiousness? Now think back to when the anxiety started—what were you doing or thinking? Really dig below the surface on this one.

For example, *"I was thinking about the work I have to do today" turns into, "I was thinking about that massive project that I'm way behind schedule on."* **BOOM**, there it is. The project.

Another good reason to dig into your thoughts in these anxious moments is that we have a habit of "borrowing tomorrow's trouble." In other words: We let worry about the future/unknown control our thoughts, which in many cases, is the direct cause of our anxiety. If this is what's happening, use variations of the mantra: *I am present. I will deal with tomorrow when it comes. I am here now.*

☐ **Put pen to paper.**

When you put pen to paper, you get the thoughts out of your head and onto something that feels more concrete—something you can put your arms around, which often makes it more manageable.

If you haven't quite nailed down the cause of your anxiety, write down anything that's stressing you out—anything at all. Deadlines at work, a sink full of dishes at home, a fight with your

significant other, the meeting you just got out of. List them all out and slowly, you'll gravitate toward the issue that's pushing your anxiety button the hardest. That's the one to focus on.

☐ **Make a plan.**

If you've determined the root of the day's anxiety, it's time to rectify the situation.

Be completely honest with yourself, and answer this question: *In a perfect world, what would make it better?* Now ask yourself: *How can I make that happen realistically?*

Can you get a deadline extension? Can you shuffle around your day to take care of something that's stressing you out now, instead of later? Can you find a quiet space to meditate for 1 to 5 minutes? Can you have, or plan to have, a conversation with someone who's causing your anxiety? Even just thinking of a solution can be relieving.

☐ **Take action.**

Instead of letting the anxiety spiral you down into a dark place, empower yourself to use your solution. If you still haven't been able to nail down the issue, step away from what you're doing, focus on taking deep breaths and get some fresh air, if possible.

With all of that said, let me say: I know what it feels like to be in the midst of anxiety, especially the kind that riddles your body, making you feel like you're physically shaking. In those moments, the number one goal is distraction. Take a walk, talk to someone, call your mom—anything to get your mind on something else. Work your way through this checklist if you can, and don't be upset if you can't. Give yourself grace.

If you find yourself struggling with anxiety on a regular basis, and haven't worked with a professional, I highly recommend you do. You'll learn more about yourself and gain a custom set of tools you can use to stop anxiety in the moment—and better yet, before it starts.

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