



## **Index**

Introduction	3
About Anxiety Disorders	4
Seasonal Anxiety	6
Overcoming Anxiety Strategies	11
Conscious Relaxation	11
Yoga	14
Meditation	15
Exercise	18
Nutritional Supplements	19
Positive Visualization	20
Conclusion	22

## Introduction

For those of us already suffering from anxiety, the holiday season presents its own special challenges. Typically, anxiety increases during this time as the weight of expectation and seemingly endless 'to do' list combine to provoke or intensify symptoms.

Even for people who have not been diagnosed with a pre-existing anxiety disorder, the prospect of Thanksgiving, Christmas and the host of other celebrations that occur around this time can bring on a first attack.

This is especially true if there are other stressors already in place which, combined with the particular conditions caused by these festivities, result in an overload on an already fraught nervous system. The good news is that there are techniques which you can use to ward off or lessen the impact of an anxiety attack.

In this report you will learn how to both recognise and manage symptoms of seasonal anxiety. You will find out the best ways to cope in otherwise stressful family and social situations and you will come away equipped with knowledge and exercises that will enable you to successfully deal with anxiety at any time of year.

## About Anxiety Disorders

First, we will take a look at anxiety disorders in general before we then go on to see just why seasonal anxiety affects so many sufferers and how it differs from ordinary anxious anticipation.

All of us tend to suffer from some anxiety before an important event such as an exam, a big work event or a large social gathering such as a wedding or Christmas. This is perfectly normal and to be expected. When, however, this anxiety becomes chronic, obsessive and overwhelming for the sufferer then this is classified as an illness known as an anxiety disorder.

Anxiety disorders as a whole are the most common mental illness in America. Over 19 million adults are affected each year in the US while children and adolescents can also develop the illness. Some of the different kinds of anxiety disorders include:

**Panic Disorder** – Repeated episodes of intense panic that happen frequently and without prior warning. Physical symptoms include shortness of breath, palpitations, chest pain, dizziness, abdominal discomfort and feelings of being disconnected from reality.

**Phobias** – These can be considered social or specific. Specific phobias experience an irrational and extreme fear of something that

---

causes them to avoid that particular object or scenario. Social phobia, often prevalent at times such as Christmas, afflicts upon its sufferers an extreme fear of social humiliation, scrutiny or embarrassment and therefore causes them to avoid any situation in which something like this might occur.

**Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder** – Sufferers of this form of anxiety disorder engage in obsessive, often repetitive thoughts or behavior which they find impossible to control.

**Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder** – This can occur after a sufferer has witnessed or experienced a highly traumatic event such as a criminal assault, a bad accident, war, child abuse or a naturally occurring or human-inflicted disaster. Many servicemen and women have reported suffering from its symptoms which include flashbacks, nightmares, overwhelming anger or depression as well as feeling irritable and easily distracted. Families of victims can also develop this disorder.

**Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)** – This is characterized by constant worries and anxieties about everyday events and activities which extend over a period of at least 6 months. Sufferers tend to anticipate the worst even when there is little or no reason to do so and can experience physical symptoms such as headaches, muscle tension resulting in aches and pains, fatigue and nausea.

---

## Seasonal Anxiety

As you can imagine, all of these disorders can be triggered or intensified by the stressful period leading up to the holidays. If you are wondering why what is supposed to be such a joyful and enjoyable period could be considered stressful, bear in mind that any event or series of events outside the norm brings with it some stress, good and bad.

It is how we handle that stress that matters and this is particularly important when it comes to people who suffer from anxiety disorders.

### Be Accepting

First of all, you need to accept that there will be stress during this period. Everyone gets stressed during the holiday season when there seems so much to do and so little time to do it in.

Simply accepting this will lessen the impact of stress and help you manage your anxiety. By knowing and accepting that there will be anxiety-provoking situations, you can actually reduce some of the fear element through being prepared.

### **Manage Your Expectations**

This is crucial when it comes to lessening anxiety during the run up to the holidays. For many people, expectations become a burden as they feel that everything should be perfect or that everyone will be full of seasonal cheer at all times.

The truth is that, at this time of year more than any other, things can, and often do, go wrong. Even more so for people who may not have a large family with whom to celebrate or, worse, any family at all. The fractures that appear with divorce or separation can seem all the wider at times like this, when most of the images we see in the media are of apparently perfect families having a wonderful time.

Even when there are no overwhelming family issues, tensions can arise amongst the happiest of folk. Families who may spend much of the year apart are forced to spend extended periods of time together and so differences become magnified. These tensions often remain unspoken with the result that situations fester and simmer, stoking the embers of underlying anxiety until it erupts.

Lowering your expectations when it comes to social interaction and events can result in fewer anxiety attacks and a far more peaceful festive season. It is simply unrealistic to expect everything to be perfect and for everyone to behave perfectly all of the time.

---

There will always be family members or friends who annoy or aggravate you. The trick is to change your response and shrug off any criticisms or comments so that they no longer impact upon you. Later on in this report, you will learn a couple of techniques that can help you do just that.

For now, simply understand that, for you to lessen the possibility of panic disorder symptoms occurring during the holiday season, it is vital that you take control of your reactions to events and people. Setting your expectations lower will help achieve this.

### **Take Time For Yourself**

Another very important tactic to help you overcome anxiety during the holiday season is to make sure that you take enough time out just for you. This is essential for all of us during this busy period but even more so for those of us suffering from panic disorders.

Even if you only have 15 minutes for a breather, use this time to do something soothing such as taking a walk, meditating or relaxing with a book. You could also try yoga or other gentle exercise or simply go soak in the tub. The point is that this is genuinely time out for you away from the seasonal stressors that may trigger an anxiety or panic attack.



### **Look After Your Health**

At this time of year, minor ailments are all too common, particularly if you are suffering from seasonal stress. It is crucial that you make sure you eat healthily and maintain your regular exercise regimen. If you do not exercise regularly then this is a great time to start.

Avoid stimulants such as caffeine and excess sugar and bear in mind that alcohol is a depressant that can interfere with your sleep patterns. Remember: moderation in everything. The less you overload your system, the more it will be able to cope.

Think of the old saying – ‘a healthy body equals a healthy mind.’ This is especially true when it comes to anxiety sufferers. Treat your body with respect and aim to achieve balance between your mental and physical needs. A perfect way to do this is to practice yoga and you can find more about this later on in this report.

Keep vitamin and mineral intake at optimum levels by eating as much fruit and vegetables as possible alongside all that rich seasonal food. Ensure that you remain hydrated by drinking at least 8 glasses of water a day and get as much sleep as possible – a minimum of 7 hours per night.

### **Set Boundaries**

Setting adequate boundaries is another essential if you are to get through the seasonal period unscathed. Always remember that it is OK to say no. If you don't want to go to that big office party then say so and similarly if you cannot face another family dinner or gathering.

It is far worse to say yes and then feel your anxiety build as you force yourself to attend an event you are not enjoying. Forget about people pleasing – it is more important to please yourself so that you can stay calm and relaxed.

### **Talk It Over**

Try to talk to friends and family before the winter holiday season starts so that you can set those boundaries ahead of time and gain their support. If they know about your concerns, they are far more likely to be understanding of your choices. Similarly, they can then help you through situations they know you might find stressful.

If you are seeing a therapist, make sure you talk over your concerns about the holidays. Find out what hours they will be working over this period and if they have any emergency contact details. If your particular therapist is going to be away, then ask for the contact details of the therapist who will be on call.

## Overcoming Anxiety Strategies

There are a number of excellent techniques you can use to help you manage and overcome your seasonal anxiety. These include:

- Conscious Relaxation
- Yoga
- Meditation
- Exercise
- Nutritional Supplements
- Positive Visualisation

### Conscious Relaxation

This is simply another name for setting aside time to consciously relax your body and mind. There are plenty of effective ways to do this but a couple of my favorite techniques are:

#### Major Muscle Relaxation

1. Take off your shoes, loosen your clothing and lie comfortably on your back on the floor, bed or couch somewhere you will remain undisturbed. Arms should be down by your sides and legs stretched out. Shut your eyes.

2. Begin to breathe deeply and slowly, allowing yourself to let go with every breath. If any thoughts pop into your head, simply let them drift past.
3. Shift your focus to your feet. Tense them up as tight as you can and then relax them. Allow them to flop and feel heavy. Now move on up your legs, doing the same with your calves and then your knees and thighs.
4. Move your focus up to your pelvic region, keeping your breathing deep and even. Enjoy that feeling of tensing and then relaxing. Really let those muscles flop and sink into the floor.
5. When you get to your chest, breathe into it, inhaling deeply as you tense up and exhaling as you let go. Open up your ribs and relax before moving on to your shoulder region.
6. Once your shoulders are nice and relaxed, consciously allow your head and neck to loll heavy. Now scrunch up your face tight, really squeezing those features. Feel your scalp tighten and tingle. Then let everything go.
7. Relax, sink and drift off as you let the floor, bed or couch cradle you. Keep your breathing slow and even but don't worry too much about it. Keep letting those thoughts come and go and simply sink more and more so that you feel safe, relaxed and supported by the surface beneath you.
8. Slowly open your eyes and wriggle your limbs and torso. Gently come up to sitting and then standing, allowing yourself all the time you need. Take a few big breaths, swing your arms –

whatever it takes to celebrate that feeling of deep relaxation and openness. Carry that feeling around with you for the rest of the day/evening and enjoy.

### Staring Into Space

Exactly what it sounds like and far more effective than you might think for such a simple exercise. This one is especially useful if you only have a short time for relaxation or if you want to take a few moments out of a busy day at work and have nowhere to lie or sit as in the exercise above.

1. Start by closing your eyes and taking slow, deep breaths as in the exercise above.
2. With your eyes still gently closed, look straight ahead and stare into space as if you are looking at a distant black spot.
3. Keep staring at this spot and allow your thoughts to float away from you. If they keep racing or you find you can't control them, concentrate on slowing your breathing even further as you focus on that spot.
4. If you like, you can place your thoughts in front of you where the spot is located, enlarging it so it seems as if your thoughts are on a black screen. Then imagine taking an eraser and simply rubbing them out.

5. Always, however, return to that simple black spot and the feeling of staring into nothing. When you achieve that pleasant sensation of total peace, enjoy it and float with it.
6. Slowly bring your focus back in on yourself when you are ready. Open your eyes and blink a few times. Perform a few shoulder rolls or gentle neck bends if necessary. Keep that pleasant, calm sensation with you as you get on with your day.

## Yoga

Practising yoga is a popular way of combating anxiety and its combination of physical and mental discipline really does help calm body and mind.

Yoga has many styles and forms – some more intense than others. Hatha yoga, one of the most commonly available forms, is also one of the best for anxiety management. It is particularly popular with beginners because of its slower, easier movements and it is precisely these attributes that make it so suitable for anxiety sufferers.

You can benefit, however, from almost any form of yoga although some dynamic forms, or styles such as Bikram yoga which is practised in a hot environment, might not be as suitable if you suffer from an anxiety disorder. The most beneficial elements of yoga are the

controlled breathing and the focus away from everyday concerns as your body is taken through poses that require calm concentration.

The increased fitness and resultant decrease in heart rate and blood pressure will also prove beneficial when managing anxiety. Classes are widely available and it is a good idea to at least start learning with an instructor rather than from a book or DVD. You should, of course, consult your health care practitioner before starting classes if you have any major health concerns.

Taking a few moments away from the busy seasonal period to practice yoga is an excellent way to give mind and body a mini vacation from all that stress. The combination of deep breathing and increased blood flow thanks to the poses will allow you to return to your routine refreshed and relaxed, allowing you to cope better with everyday concerns.

### **Meditation**

Another wonderful way to take time out and give yourself the space you need to retain your equilibrium. There is no big mystery to meditation and no need to over-complicate it. Put simply, it is deep relaxation for both mind and body.

Just a few moments a day will produce a real sense of calm and tranquility. It is especially useful during busy, stressful periods such as the winter holidays because it allows you to untangle and eliminate all those jumbled thoughts that are crowding your mind.

Anyone can practise meditation anywhere: while waiting in line, at work, at home or while simply out for a walk. If you are in a more controlled environment, say at home, you could choose to follow a guided meditation from a book, DVD or CD. Or you could try one of the methods outlined below:

### Mantra Meditation

With this form of meditation you choose a calming word, thought or phrase and silently repeat it over and over. This helps push away other, more distracting thoughts and produces a profound sense of calm. Transcendental Meditation is a form of Mantra Meditation and is highly recommended for those who suffer from anxiety.

### Mindfulness Meditation

This form of meditation may seem unusual in that, instead of closing your eyes and drifting away from your environment, you choose to become more aware of it and therefore more accepting.

This works by allowing you to accept thoughts or distractions and simply let them flow over you, much as you learned to do in the

---



section in this report on Major Muscle Relaxation. Focusing on your breath and observing its flow helps you to achieve this state of relaxed mindfulness.

Mindfulness Meditation is particularly useful during hectic festivities or stressful occasions such as a Christmas party. You can do this without anyone even noticing, simply observing, accepting and letting everything flow over you while keeping your attention on your breathing until you feel calmer and in control.

### Walking Meditation

Another method which is well suited to helping combat seasonal anxiety as it allows you to withdraw from stress-inducing situations while also giving yourself a real physical and mental treat.

During a walking meditation you adopt the principles of the Mindfulness Meditation in that you notice and appreciate everything around you as you pass by at a steady, even pace, concentrating on the motion of your legs and feet. You can even combine this with a Mantra Meditation, silently repeating a calming word, thought or phrase in your head as you breathe deeply and regularly.

The benefit of this kind of meditation is that you reap the rewards of both physical exercise and mental calming while giving yourself a proper psychological boost. This sort of 'me time' is vital during the

---

festive season and particularly if you suffer from anxiety. Again, it need only be a few minutes, although 30 is optimum. Take a walking meditation a few times a week during the holidays and you will quickly start to see and feel the benefits.

### **Exercise**

Starting or keeping to a suitable exercise routine during the holidays will bring many of the same benefits as you can experience from yoga and walking meditation.

Whether you choose to practice a martial art such as Tai Chi or Qi Gong, both excellent for combating anxiety, or instead prefer jogging or the gym, the trick is to work within your personal limits and to listen to your body. Pushing yourself too hard will only stress you even more and will counteract many of the benefits of exercise.

The direct anxiety-relieving benefits of exercise are that it is:

- **Mood boosting** – Regular exercise increases self-confidence and improves sleep, which is often disrupted by stress or anxiety.
- **Endorphin producing** – Physical activity boosts production of the brain's feel-good neurotransmitters which are known as endorphins.

- **Calming** - As a meditation in motion, the focus on a single activity takes you away from everyday stresses and cares. While shedding tension and engaging in the task at hand, you also experience the increased energy and optimism that comes with physical activity (see above).

### **Nutritional Supplements**

Combined with a balanced, healthy diet, there are some specific herbs and supplements which can actively help you manage anxiety. These are ideal to take during a period such as the winter holidays, when your body's defences are generally lower and you need to boost yourself for a few weeks or months.

A recent study conducted by Nutrition Journal concluded that, based on the available evidence, “nutritional and herbal supplementation is an effective method for treating anxiety and anxiety-related conditions without the risk of serious side effects.”

It went on to state that strong evidence exists for the use of herbal supplements containing extracts of passionflower or kava and combinations of L-lysine or L-arginine in the treatment of anxiety disorders and symptoms.

The report also cited valerian as being effective although the jury is still out on St John's Wort. Magnesium, a mineral often recommended as supplementation for anxiety disorders, was also found to show promise.

A safe and effective option would be to take a good general multivitamin and mineral supplement alongside your normal, healthy diet. That way you can ensure that your body's nutritional needs are properly met during a time which is often filled with fatty, sugary, unhealthy food that can play havoc with a system already afflicted by anxiety.

### **Positive Visualization**

Positive visualization can really help when both planning and dealing with holiday events and situations. Often, the expectation of things going wrong can produce more anxiety than the actual event or situation itself.

To combat this, try sitting quietly and comfortably with your eyes closed, breathing slow and even. If you like, perform one of the relaxation exercises outlined earlier in this report before you begin.

Imagine a large, white screen in front of you and fill that screen with a picture of a forthcoming event or situation. Try to bring to your

visualization all the color, sound and texture that you can. Feel, see and hear what is happening. Make it really vivid and when your picture is as clear as possible, visualise yourself stepping in to that image.

See yourself handling it – even enjoying it. Imagine yourself calmly and peacefully dealing with that situation or event. If you like, you can add what is known in NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming) as an anchor in the form of a small gesture such as a gently curled fist or a finger tap. Make this gesture as you visualise yourself confidently moving through the picture in front of you. Enjoy that sense of being able to handle things. Now open your eyes.

You may need to repeat this exercise a few times but ultimately it will work on your subconscious, dramatically reducing your expectant anxiety and therefore helping to ensure that the actual event or situation goes well for you.

As a further boost, make that small gesture you came up with just before or as you enter the event or situation. This will work as a form of muscle memory, jogging your subconscious to remember that you are fine – that you can more than handle this.

## Conclusion

Having read this report and practised the exercises and techniques as described, you will be well equipped to manage your seasonal anxiety.

I recommend that you print out a copy and carry it with you so that you can refer back to it whenever necessary. Above all, remember that the message of the season is joy and goodwill to all men and women. Nowhere should this be more true than when it comes to the most important person here - you.

Treat yourself with the utmost kindness and respect during what is often a trying time for many people. Give yourself the gift of self-care and enough space so that you can remain as anxiety free as possible.

If you do experience symptoms, don't beat yourself up but simply use one of the techniques given to you in this report to soothe and ultimately overcome your anxiety. Remember that repetition of a technique or exercise on a regular basis will yield the best results.

I wish you a calm, happy and anxiety free holiday season and I know you can do it. Enjoy in the knowledge that you can handle anything that comes your way with serenity thanks to the knowledge you have gained in this report.

**The Serenity Prayer**

Lord, help me to change  
the things I can change,  
to live with the things  
I can't change,  
and to have the wisdom  
to know the difference.