

# Anxiety Management

Before you can manage your anxiety, you have to know what kind of anxiety you are dealing with:

**Real Threats:** Sometimes our anxiety is alerting us to a real threat (like a mountain lion headed your way or a dangerous person approaching you in a dark alley). While anxiety indicates that something might be right, sometimes something actually **is** wrong. Therefore, it makes sense to do a quick scan of what is going on to see if there are any real threats. Take a minute or two to see if there is a source of threat?.but not for too long. If you cannot identify an actual threat in one or two minutes, it's probably safe.

**False alarms/hypothetical worries:** This is the type of anxiety we experience when something bad **might** happen. For example, when you get anxious for a test, the worry may be ?I am going to fail.? Since the test hasn't happened yet, and I'm assuming you are not a fortune teller, we cannot be certain that you will ever actually fail. The worry is therefore hypothetical because it **may or may not** occur. To identify a hypothetical worry, look for anxiety about the future or things that haven't happened yet. They often start with ?What if.? Alternatively, sometimes we get anxious ?out of the blue? or for no identifiable reason. Anything from caffeine to exercise can trigger sensations similar to anxiety which, in turn, can make us believe something is actually wrong. In either scenario, our anxiety indicates as threat but there isn't actually one; it is a false alarm.

Once you've figured out the type of anxiety you are having, you can take action to help resolve it. Here is some helpful information about addressing each type of anxiety:

**Problem-Solve for Real Threats:** Real threats are real problems and therefore can have real solutions. If the threat is to your well-being or physical safety, get yourself safe (this is why we call it fight or flight)! For non-life threatening situations, problem-solving is an effective way to work towards resolving the anxiety-provoking situation.

**Learn the Right Skills for False Alarms:** False alarms are very common and the experts have come up with lots of effective ways to manage them. Since this type of anxiety is not about something happening now, problem-solving won't work. Skills that help manage hypothetical worry about the future include:

1. Identifying and modifying unhelpful thinking patterns
2. Learning to tolerate uncertainty

### 3. Learning to approach the feared situation

Regardless of the type of anxiety, learning how to calm your body down is a great skill to have when you are anxious. Techniques such as diaphragmatic breathing, grounding and progressive muscle relaxation are just a few ways to help your body calm down.

**[Counseling and Psychological Services](#) [1] offers both individual and group therapy options to help you learn these anxiety management skills. Come in for a walk-in appointment today to find the support that's right for you!**

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**Source URL:** <https://campushealth.unc.edu/health-topics/stress-and-anxiety/anxiety-management>

#### **Links**

[1] <http://caps.unc.edu>