**The 54321 Method: Benefits & How to Use It**



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Think of the 54321 method for anxiety as a full-sensory experience. When feeling overwhelmed or anxious, it’s beneficial to practice grounding techniques that bring your thoughts back to the present moment. This technique combines all five of your senses to practice mindfulness and grounding in a fun, easy way.

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What Is the 5 Senses Grounding Technique?

The 5 senses [grounding technique](https://www.choosingtherapy.com/grounding-techniques/), often referred to as the 54321 method or 54321 anxiety trick is a tool that helps relieve [anxiety symptoms](https://www.choosingtherapy.com/anxiety-symptoms-signs/) and [panic attacks](https://www.choosingtherapy.com/panic-attack/). The 54321 method can be used as a practical way to [calm anxiety](https://www.choosingtherapy.com/how-to-calm-anxiety/) by isolating each of your senses through observation. Using your senses is a great way to reconnect with your body when you feel overwhelmed, have difficulty concentrating, or feel anxious.

How to Use the 54321 Method

Using the 54321 [anxiety exercise](https://www.choosingtherapy.com/anxiety-exercises/), you are isolating each one of your senses and observing a certain number of things using that specific sense. Before you begin, practice some deep breathing and notice as your racing heart rate begins to slow. Don’t rush this exercise as it’s intended to help you become grounded and decrease your anxiety.

To use the 54321 rule for anxiety, do the following:

1.  Focus On 5 Things You Can See

Noticing and naming things you can see really helps you to become focused on where you are in the moment. Sure, you could most likely name more than 5 things you can see, however, zero in on five. Notice the size, shape, and color of things you see. Mentally, take note of each one and how it relates to the rest of the environment.

2. Focus On 4 Things You Can Touch

Touch is another great way to ground yourself. Focus on things that feel comforting, such as the top of your legs, your ring, your water bottle, or your pen. Notice what you feel when you touch the four things. Notice the texture – Is it soft? Rough? Flexible or hard? Heavy or light?

3. Focus On 3 Things You Can Hear

Sound is one of those senses that have different levels of stimulation and observation. Focusing on three things you can hear, you may notice yourself noticing the loudest sounds first, such as someone talking, a car honking, or music playing. While focusing on these sounds can be helpful, they may also be part of the reason you feel overstimulated, leading you to feel anxious.

Challenge yourself to listen to the more quiet sounds that tend to be in the background unnoticed. This will help you to become more mindful and isolate those sounds from the rest of the environment. Some sounds you may notice are the leaves blowing in the wind, the sound of someone scratching their head, or the hum of an air conditioner or refrigerator. Notice which sounds bring you a sense of comfort and calm.

Notice which sounds may be too loud and consider lowering them if it is within your control, such as the volume of the TV. Lastly, notice which sounds are rhythmic or abrupt; which do you prefer to pay attention to?

4. Focus On 2 Things You Can Smell

Finding two things you can smell may be challenging, but smell is a great tool to elicit emotions, memory, and even hunger. When calming and pleasant, it can ease anxiety and improve your mood. Other smells can help you feel relaxed, promoting a deeper sleep. Of course, you have unpleasant smells or smells that elicit feelings of grief or bad memories.

When practicing 54321 and identifying two things you can smell, you may want to put on your favorite lotion or use hand sanitizer. You may also choose to spritz your perfume or use an essential oil. You can also choose to smell other things like your hair, your shirt, or a book nearby. Notice if there are any other smells, such as someone’s cooking that you may not have observed prior.

5. Focus On 1 Thing You Can Taste

Lastly, focus on something you can taste. Consider popping in a piece of gum or a mint, or taking a sip of your drink. Similar to the sense of smell, taste can help you bring back memories (pleasant or unpleasant). If you don’t have anything nearby to create a noticeable taste, you can still be mindful of what the inside of your mouth tastes.

**Want to drink less?** [Sunnyside App – Free Trial](https://www.choosingtherapy.com/recommends/sunnyside-table-healthy/)

**Want to practice mindfulness and meditation?** [Mindfulness.com – Free Trial](https://www.choosingtherapy.com/recommends/mindfulness-com-table/)

**Want to lose weight?** Consult online with a doctor to see if medication may be a good option for you. [Visit Plushcare](https://www.choosingtherapy.com/recommends/plushcare-medical-weight-loss-cta/)

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Examples of the 54321 Anxiety Trick

The 54321 anxiety trick is useful in situations where you feel overwhelmed, overstimulated, or unfocused. There are no additional supplies or materials required for you to practice this exercise, making it quick and easy to apply. You may find it helpful when experiencing [social anxiety](https://www.choosingtherapy.com/social-anxiety-disorder/) in a large group of people, taking an exam, or constantly having to redirect your children or siblings.

Here are examples of using the 54321 anxiety method:

Feeling Anxious In a Large Group of People

Those that suffer from social anxiety know that large groups of people, even people that they know, may trigger feelings of anxiety. Being able to apply the 54321 anxiety trick will help interrupt your thoughts and feelings of nervousness. You don’t have to apply the entire exercise all at once. Just start by noting 5 things you can see and check-in with yourself.

Ask yourself if you are ready to re-engage and be more present in the conversation with the group of people. If not, take a few more moments until you feel grounded. Perhaps having something in your pocket that you can touch to bring you back to the present will be helpful.

Taking an Exam

[Test anxiety](https://www.choosingtherapy.com/test-anxiety/), in my opinion, is one of the hardest types of anxiety to overcome. You find yourself stressed and overwhelmed to the point where you can’t focus on or understand the questions. Simultaneously, you’re fixated on how much time is passing you by. Applying the 54321 method helps you to take a “brain break,” stopping the cycle of panic and hyper awareness.

While you still want to remain mindful of the time you spend practicing this tool, chances are you will be able to re-focus on your exam a lot sooner than if you try to apply other coping mechanisms.

Redirecting Children or Younger Siblings

Parenting or caring for young children is often exhausting. Parents commonly report feeling overwhelmed and anxious, especially if they have multiple children, or children who are still very dependent. A lot of sensory stimulation occurs outside of your control when you have young children running around. Using the 54321 method helps you isolate the senses in a way that allows you to regain control.

You may notice certain things that are in your control. Is the TV too loud? Are there too many toys everywhere? Are you thirsty? You can change these things to help you feel more grounded.

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Benefits of Using the 54321 Anxiety Trick

The 54321 is important because it is a [natural remedy for anxiety](https://www.choosingtherapy.com/natural-remedies-for-anxiety/). It is also easy to remember. Think of the 54321 anxiety trick as a sensory diet that has you focus on a little bit of each of your senses, allowing everything to come back into alignment so you can feel re-energized, grounded, and supported.

Some may feel overwhelmed by having to remember the order of the senses. They may choose to apply other coping mechanisms, such as the [333 rule for anxiety](https://www.choosingtherapy.com/333-rule-anxiety/). Note that you don’t necessarily have to complete all 5 to feel calmer. You may choose to find one for each of the senses, or only focus on the sense that feels under or overstimulated.

Is the 54321 Anxiety Exercise Effective?

Grounding is an effective strategy to detach from emotional pain. Clinical Director of *Sunspire Health*, Kevin Koffler, talks about the ability to detach yourself from the overwhelm of your emotional pain so you can gain control of your feelings and stay safe.1

Chief Editor for *Insight Timer Blog,*Isabelle Pikörn, states “There is only one way to reconnect to the present: through the body.”2,3Pikörn reminds us that your body can only ever be in one place, while the mind has the ability to wander – with and without our control. They recommend the 54321 grounding technique as an effective tool to manage problems such as: insomnia, cravings and addictions, stress management, PTSD flashbacks and panic disorders.

When to Get Professional Help

You may still find yourself in need of professional help despite regularly practicing the 54321 anxiety exercise. There are plenty of [anxiety treatments](https://www.choosingtherapy.com/anxiety-treatment/) and therapy options, as well as [medication for anxiety](https://www.choosingtherapy.com/medication-for-anxiety/). Anxiety, when left untreated, can become debilitating and interfere with daily functioning.

[Medication may be necessary](https://www.choosingtherapy.com/how-to-get-anxiety-medication/) if your symptoms feel uncontrollable and unmanageable, despite multiple attempts to apply coping strategies, such as the 54321 anxiety exercise. Understand that most mental health therapists cannot prescribe medication, so you will have to talk to your primary care physician or find a psychiatrist.

[Anxiety therapy](https://www.choosingtherapy.com/anxiety-therapy/) can help you understand the specific type of anxiety you’re experiencing and the best course of treatment for your situation. It also gives you a safe space to reflect and gain insight. If you’re ready [to find a therapist](https://www.choosingtherapy.com/how-to-find-a-therapist/), use an [online therapist directory](https://directory.choosingtherapy.com/directory) to find the right fit for you.

Final Thoughts

The 54321 anxiety exercise is a great way to calm anxious thoughts. While it may not be a cure-all for anxiety, it is a great tool to use in the moment. This exercise calls for you to integrate all of your senses to bring you back to the present moment. You may even want to consider having a quick little reference sheet that reminds you of how to do the exercise.

Additional Resources

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**Online Psychiatry**

[**Hims / Hers**](https://www.choosingtherapy.com/recommends/hims-hers-additional-resources/) If you’re living with anxiety or depression, finding the right medication match may make all the difference. Get FDA approved medication prescribed by your dedicated Hims / Hers Healthcare Provider and delivered right to your door. Plans start at $25 per month (first month)\*. [Get Started](https://www.choosingtherapy.com/recommends/hims-hers-additional-resources/)

**Journaling (with pen and paper)**

[**The 6-Minute Diary**](https://www.choosingtherapy.com/recommends/the-6-minute-diary/) – Keeping a journal promotes mindfulness, happiness, and gratitude. The 6-Minute Diary uses the principles of positive psychology to inspire and encourage you to live your best life. [Available in 7 Colors](https://www.choosingtherapy.com/recommends/the-6-minute-diary/)

**Reduce Drinking**

[**Sunnyside**](https://www.choosingtherapy.com/recommends/sunnyside-resources/) Want to drink less? Sunnyside helps you ease into mindful drinking at your own pace. Think lifestyle change, not a fad diet. Develop new daily routines, so you maintain your new habits for life**.** [Take a 3 Minute Quiz](https://www.choosingtherapy.com/recommends/sunnyside-resources/)

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For Further Reading

Here are additional resources:

* [Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA)](https://adaa.org/find-help/support)
* “[Detaching From Pain](http://www.vsias.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/DP070115_Kevin-Koffler-_Detaching-From-Pain_NoBranding.pdf)”
* [International Bipolar Foundation](https://ibpf.org/articles/9-tips-to-help-you-get-through-a-panic-attack/): [”9 Tips To Help You Get Through A Panic Attack”](https://ibpf.org/articles/9-tips-to-help-you-get-through-a-panic-attack/)
* [Mental Health America](https://mhanational.org/)
* [National Alliance on Mental Health](https://www.nami.org/Support-Education/Support-Groups)
* [MentalHealth.gov](https://www.mentalhealth.gov/)

**Stories You Might Like**

[**Why should I sit in discomfort?**](https://www.choosingtherapy.com/recommends/stories-ocd-and-anxiety-3/)

*When I first meet someone new for treatment, I start by saying that discomfort and anxiety are just feelings, like any other feelings. Anxiety, in and of itself, is not “bad”—it can even be very important when it works properly. It can teach us what might not be safe. If I am crossing a busy intersection, I need something that lets me know when I have to act. Discomfort helps us to learn, to decipher what we value, what we want, and what we would like to avoid.*[Read More](https://www.choosingtherapy.com/recommends/stories-ocd-and-anxiety-3/)

[**Is OCD a form of Anxiety?**](https://www.choosingtherapy.com/recommends/stories-ocd-and-anxiety/)

Everyone experiences anxiety or worry at some point in their lives. For people who have obsessive-compulsive disorder OCD, the anxiety of intrusive thoughts is what compels them toward compulsive rituals and/or avoidance. It often feels like they must do these things or else something bad will happen, which can lead to strong feelings of anxiety. But does that mean OCD is a type of anxiety disorder? If not, what’s the difference, and how are they connected? [Read More](https://www.choosingtherapy.com/recommends/stories-ocd-and-anxiety/)

[**“How OCD Turns Your Anxiety Against You”**](https://www.choosingtherapy.com/recommends/stories-ocd-and-anxiety-2/)

I know it may seem hard to believe, but anxiety is actually useful. It’s an important feeling to have. Anxiety serves to warn us of danger and should work as a protective agent. When the anxiety system in your brain is working correctly you can be alerted to potentially threatening situations and react accordingly. This helps you to survive things more effectively. This is often referred to as the fight, flight, or freeze response. [Read More](https://www.choosingtherapy.com/recommends/stories-ocd-and-anxiety-2/)

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