

Getting grounded through sensory exercises

Grounding exercises are a ways to manage anxiety, panic and dissociative symptoms. They work by re-establishing the connection between mind and body, and body and environment.

Not all techniques work for every person or situation, so it's important to test which ones are best for you and to have a range of options. Start by exploring exercises that focus on one of two of the senses, such as sight and sound. We recommend keeping a list of useful techniques on hand and up to date. Here are a few common sensory techniques to get you started:

Smell

Look to calming, strong smells like lavender oil, coffee beans, eucalyptus or naturally scented candles to help bring you into the present.

Find a place that feels quiet and safe, close your eyes and notice what scents you pick up that environment.

Sound

Pay attention to the sounds you can hear from one spot, noting things might not normally hear, such as birds chirping or the wind in the trees.

Use headphones to introduce calm, natural sounds like rain or the lapping ocean.

Touch

Explore soft (i.e. fleece, silk, water) and hard (i.e. timber, smooth metal) materials and see if certain items help ground you in the moment.

Bring your attention to the things you can feel – the texture of clothing on skin, the warmth of the sun, a cool breeze on your face or the surface of a table or chair.

Sight

Note the different colours you can see in the room or all of the items of one particular colour.

Focus your awareness on a calming object like a photo, artwork or view, and try and notice something about it that you haven't before.

Take a more active approach like colouring or painting, and observing the shapes and hues you choose to use.

Taste

Sensory stimuli through taste can help trigger bodily and environmental awareness; sample small amounts of strong foods like spicy hot sauce, sour candy or sweet lollies.

Make an herbal tea like peppermint, rooibos or chamomile and notice how each flavour tastes.

