Ease Your AFib With These Easy Relaxation Tips

by ANGELA FINLAY

Long-Term and Fast-Acting Solutions for Your AFib Anxiety

Feeling anxious is never fun, but it can be particularly troublesome when you also live with atrial fibrillation. After all, the heart palpitations of AFib are a major source of anxiety, and at the same time, anxiety surrounding your heart condition can make AFib symptoms worse. Anxiety feeds AFib, and vice versa.

So, how do you interrupt this uncomfortable cycle? The first step is to recognize the situations that tend to make you anxious, and then figure out how to avoid them (or handle them in healthier ways). Fortunately, you don't have to live in a constant state of worry and fear — there are daily exercises to help you keep calm and collected, and clever rescue treatments for those times when your AFib anxiety takes over.

Learning to Relax for Long-Term Comfort

AFib may be a physical phenomenon, but there's a whole lot of psychological distress involved. In fact, studies have shown that psychological strain can significantly worsen AFib symptoms, yet the emotional dimension of the disorder is often ignored.

Indeed, it may seem like the better you can ignore your AFib, the more comfortable you'll be, but that's not the solution. In reality, most people need to get in deeper touch with their AFib before they can get over the distracting symptoms and worries.

Facing Your Fears

Allowing yourself to feel and process your AFib worries can be very empowering, and reading about other AFib patient's fears can be surprisingly comforting. When you face your own fears, you'll see they aren't as big or imposing as you thought; sharing stories with other people inspires hope instead of fear.

Consider starting an anxiety journal to record when and how your anxious thoughts arise. When you return to your notes in a more reasonable mindset, the fears will seem much less oppressive. Carry that reassurance with you to fight future fearful episodes with reason, self-confidence, and the knowledge that every fear is simply a feeling that will pass.

Mind Over Matter

Turning your fear into a mantra can help you regain control, too. If you can't overcome a nagging thought, try putting it into words and then repeat the phrase to yourself over and over. Eventually, it will just be a set of words, the rhythm will be pleasantly distracting, and your mind will wander to happier places.

There are two other proven ways to help your mind overcome your anxious thoughts and physical reactions:

- **Mindfulness meditation.** Focusing on your physical sensations without commenting or reacting to them can be tough at first, but once you get the hang of what's known as "mindfulness" mediation, it can be an incredibly helpful tool. The idea is to turn your attention inward and quietly observe your AFib symptoms; eventually they will run their course, and in the meantime, you'll keep your body relaxed and your symptoms from escalating. Speak to your doctor, therapist, or meditation guide to get started on the right track.
- **Yoga**. Excellent for reducing stress, relieving muscle tension, and improving mood, yoga has helped many patients improve their quality of life. Luckily, there are dozens of types and variations to explore, from vinyasa flow to more static yin yoga, so you should have no trouble finding a class that suits your exercise personality and physical capabilities.

Next page: one more way to relax day-to-day, and calming an anxiety attack.

Learning to Relax for Long-Term Comfort

Feeding Your Senses

Switching your focus to different senses and sensations can be happily distracting and relaxing. If your racing heart, light-headedness, trembling, and other discomforts are too much to handle, perhaps a strong taste or smell can bring your mind to better places.

Lavender oil is a particularly relaxing aroma — it's been used for centuries to relieve anxiety, insomnia, and stress. Bergamot and camomile are other notoriously calming herbs, and you can dissolve either essential oil in some water and breathe it in, or else brew the dried herb in a tea.

What you choose to eat and drink can have far-reaching effects on your body, too. Everyone has a unique set of triggers, but caffeine, alcohol, and spicy foods commonly aggravate AFib symptoms. Try to stay away from all your known triggers, and pay close attention to what you've eaten before an AFib attack to see if there's a cause-and-effect relationship.

Calming an Anxiety Attack

Although a healthy daily routine will help keep AFib in check, it won't come to your rescue when your adrenaline is rushing, your heart is fluttering, and those feelings of doom and gloom begin to grow. For those times, you'll need some different physical and psychological maneuvers to get relief.

When anxiety symptoms hit hard and fast, they call for a quick response. You can reduce the severity of your AFib anxiety symptoms, and hopefully shorten or eliminate the attack altogether, with these simple techniques:

Gentle Exercise

Movement is one of the best ways to gently bring your racing heart back to a comfortable level. Strenuous exercise can make things worse for some people, but walking seems to relieve the discomfort and anxiety, perhaps because it stimulates blood flow and uses up some of the adrenaline that's coursing through your body.

Happy Conversation

If you find it difficult to distract yourself, recruit a conversational companion. Talking on the phone to someone you care about will take your mind off some of your symptoms, and the comfort of connecting with someone may be enough to relieve the anxiety. Keep conversation light — positive thoughts and a happy tone will bring better results than a charged debate.

A Good Night's Sleep

Sleep is one of the most important things you can do for stress and anxiety. In fact, there’s a strong connection between AFib and sleep disorders, which suggests that improving your sleep habits could improve your AFib symptoms. Laying down, closing your eyes and breathing evenly may even be enough to calm your AFib attack, and if you can fall asleep, a nap may restore and reset your body nicely.

Your AFib symptoms, anxiety triggers, and psychological reactions are very personal, but you don’t have to deal with them alone. Make the effort to find a support group for AFib sufferers, or reach out to your doctor regularly with your questions and concerns. Lean on the people around you to take off some of the pressure, and you will surely notice that your symptoms become easier to handle.