

# Mental Wellbeing Toolkit

This simple toolkit has been designed to help you acquire rapidly a range of **self-regulating skills** during crisis times. It is not an alternative to therapy but can be used alongside any therapeutic treatment.

During turbulent times, each of us need to dig deeper into our **internal resources** to keep ourselves grounded and keep thinking straight. Self-regulating skills can be divided into two categories: emotional regulation and cognitive reframing.

**Emotional self-regulation** is our ability to manage disruptive **emotions** and **impulses**. It involves slowing down, pressing the “*pause*” button and taking the time to observe our feelings.

Please take a few minutes to think about how you, personally, react under stressful circumstances.

- Do you tend to get anxious, manic or angry? You need **down-regulation**.
- Do you tend to get depressed, lethargic or hopeless? You need **up-regulation**.
- Do you alternate between one state then the other? **Use both, as appropriate**.

**Cognitive reframing** involves changing our **thought patterns** and reinterpreting a situation in order to change our emotional response and our behaviours.

The first step is slowing down and observing our thoughts from a distance. Again, take a few minutes to reflect on your internal running commentary.

- Do you tend to have a purely pessimistic view of the world?
- Do you catastrophize or overgeneralize?
- Do you find difficult to keep things in perspective?
- Do you spend a vast amount of time and energy avoiding potential danger?
- Are your interactions with others mainly negative?

If you have responded “yes” to 2 out of 5 of these questions, you will benefit from reframing your thoughts patterns.

Be self-observant and start mapping out your emotions, your thoughts and your actions. Then choose which of the self-regulating tools below might be useful to you. This may change over time, there is no right and wrong. Do experiment and find out what works best for you.

You are almost certainly already using some of your own tools and techniques to self-regulate. Start listing them in order, from the most helpful and create your own very personal toolkit.

## Emotional Self-regulation for Anxiety

### How do I know if I am feeling anxious?

- Heart racing, sweaty palms, head spinning etc...
- Feeling on edge, thoughts racing in my head, difficulty concentrating,
- Feeling irritable
- Feeling angry with other people and wanting to shout
- Anxious crying
- Difficulty sleeping and change in appetite
- Migraines, headaches and tension in the body

### What can I do? Be present/Breathe/Stretch

ASK YOURSELF 3 TIMES A DAY: **How stressed am I feeling right now?** Score yourself on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is the most relaxed you have ever felt and 10 is the most stressed you have ever felt. Keep track and note your answers in a diary daily.

- If the answer is more than 5 but less than 7 use Exercise 1.
- If the answer is more than 7, use Exercise 2.
- If the answer is more than 5 and you feel a lot of tension in your body, use Exercise 3.
- If the answer is 10, use Exercise 4

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### Exercise 1: Guided Breathing (3 minutes)

**1. Inhale deeply for 5 seconds**

**2. Hold your breath for 5 seconds**

**1. Exhale for as long as you can until you have no air left in your body**

**REPEAT 5 TIMES...**

**Technical Note:** This exercise works by calming our amygdala. The amygdala is the alarm system in our brain that keeps us safe in case of danger. Under continuous stress our amygdala gets overactivated and our nervous system can get exhausted. This simple breathing exercise gives our nervous system a rest.

**Exercise 2: Guided Body Meditation**  
**(It takes between 15 to 45 minutes. You choose!)**

- 1. Sit in a chair or lie down, making yourself comfortable. Choose a place where you will be warm and undisturbed.**
- 2. Allow your eyes to close gently.**
- 3. Take a few moments to get in touch with the movement of your breath and the sensations in the body. When you are ready, bring your awareness to the physical sensations in your body, especially to the sensations of touch or pressure, where your body makes contact with the chair or bed.**
- 4. On each outbreath, allow yourself to let go, to sink a little deeper into the chair or bed.**

**[The intention of this practice is not to feel more relaxed or calm. This may happen or it may not. Instead, the intention of the practice is, as best you can, to bring awareness to any sensations you detect, as you focus your attention on each part of the body in turn]**

- 5. Now bring your awareness to the physical sensations in the lower abdomen, becoming aware of the changing patterns of sensations in the abdominal wall as you breathe in, and as you breathe out. Take a few minutes to feel the sensations as you breathe in and as you breathe out.**
- 6. Having connected with the sensations in the abdomen, bring the focus or "spotlight" of your awareness down the left leg, into the left foot, and out to the toes of the left foot. Focus on each of the toes of the left foot in turn, bringing a gentle curiosity to investigate the quality of the sensations you find, perhaps noticing the sense of contact between the toes, a sense of tingling, warmth, or no particular sensation.**

- 7. When you are ready, on an inbreath, feel or imagine the breath entering the lungs, and then passing down into the abdomen, into the left leg, the left foot, and out to the toes of the left foot. Then, on the outbreath, feel or imagine the breath coming all the way back up, out of the foot, into the leg, up through the abdomen, chest, and out through the nose. As best you can, continue this for a few breaths, breathing down into the toes, and back out from the toes. It may be difficult to get the hang of this just practice this "breathing into" as best you can, approaching it playfully.**
- 8. Now, when you are ready, on an outbreath, let go of awareness of the toes, and bring your awareness to the sensations on the bottom of your left foot—bringing a gentle, investigative awareness to the sole of the foot, the instep, the heel (e.g., noticing the sensations where the heel makes contact with the mat or bed). Experiment with "breathing with" the sensations—being aware of the breath in the background, as, in the foreground, you explore the sensations of the lower foot.**
- 9. Now allow the awareness to expand into the rest of the foot—to the ankle, the top of the foot, and right into the bones and joints. Then, taking a slightly deeper breath, directing it down into the whole of the left foot, and, as the breath lets go on the outbreath, let go of the left foot completely, allowing the focus of awareness to move into the lower left leg—the calf, shin, knee, and so on, in turn**
- 10. Continue to bring awareness, and a gentle curiosity, to the physical sensations in each part of the rest of the body in turn - to the upper left leg, the right toes, right foot, right leg, pelvic area, back, abdomen, chest, fingers, hands, arms, shoulders, neck, head, and face. In each area, as best you can, bring the same detailed level of awareness and gentle curiosity to the bodily sensations present. As you leave each major area, "breathe in" to it on the inbreath, and let go of that region on the outbreath.**

- 11. When you become aware of tension, or of other intense sensations in a particular part of the body, you can "breathe in" to them—using the inbreath gently to bring awareness right into the sensations, and, as best you can, have a sense of their letting go, or releasing, on the outbreath.**
  
- 12. The mind will inevitably wander away from the breath and the body from time to time. That is entirely normal. It is what minds do. When you notice it, gently acknowledge it, noticing where the mind has gone off to, and then gently return your attention to the part of the body you intended to focus on.**
  
- 13. After you have "scanned" the whole body in this way, spend a few minutes being aware of a sense of the body as a whole, and of the breath flowing freely in and out of the body.**
  
- 14. If you find yourself falling asleep, you might find it helpful to prop your head up with a pillow, open your eyes, or do the practice sitting up rather than lying down.**
  
- 15. You can adjust the time spent in this practice by using larger chunks of your body to become aware of or spending a shorter or longer time with each part.**

**Technical Note:** As per the previous one, this exercise works by calming our amygdala. The amygdala is the alarm system in our brain that keeps us safe in case of danger. Under continuous stress our amygdala gets overactivated and our nervous system can get exhausted. This simple breathing exercise gives our nervous system a rest.

### **Exercise 3: Stretching your muscles (10 to 15 minutes)**

- **Morning Yoga Full Body Stretch Routine**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4pKly2JojMw>

- **Neck and shoulder Releasing Routine**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4vTJHUB5ak>

- **Yoga avec Lili Barbery tous les jours à 18 heures. (En français)**

<https://instagram.com/lilibarbery?igshid=q3vymoa04gtt>

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## **Exercise 4: Shoulder Tapping**

**(10 minutes)**

- 1. Name what is happening. You are not dying; this is just a panic attack.**
- 2. Stand up**
- 3. Place your hands in a cross shape so that your left hand is touching your right shoulder and your right hand is touching your left shoulder. (See picture below)**
- 4. Start tapping each shoulder. One after the other (alternating) with medium strength.**
- 5. Carry for 10 minutes non-stop whilst walking at the same time.**
- 6. Shake your limbs one by one, right arm, left arm, right leg and left leg.**



**Technical Note:** This exercise allows for more connection between the left and right hemispheres of your brain. Your brain is reacting as if there is immediate danger when there is none. It is a false alarm. Shaking allows you to get rid of the adrenaline in your body.

# Cognitive Reframing for Anxious Thought Patterns

## How do I know if I have anxious thought patterns?

ASK YOURSELF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- Do I worry constantly about the future? Do my thoughts start with “What if...?”
- Do I expect something catastrophic to happen soon?
- Do I try to control my environment, including other people’s behaviours?
- Am I lost in my thoughts a lot of the time? Do I find it difficult to be in the here and now?

If the answer is “yes” more than 50% of the time, you need to reframe your anxious bias.

## What can I do?

### 1. Keep your distance from your negative thoughts.

- Remember you are not your thoughts.
- Be aware of your thoughts, observe them but do not engage!
- Imagine these thoughts as clouds far away in the sky. They will pass...
- Put these thoughts in a box and close the box.
- Postpone your worry until a later date. If it helps, write it down and leave for later.
- Create your own mantra and say it out aloud. Examples: “This is only one opinion”; “Wrong timing, I am busy right now”, etc.

### 2. Reframe your thoughts

- Imagine the most grounded person you know (this can be a real or fictional character) and look at the situation through his/her eyes.

**Examples:** What would the Dalai Lama do in this situation?

- Think of one or two positive facts about the situation.

**Example of anxious thought:** “Nobody cares about what is happening. I am totally alone in this.”

**Reframing:** “Many initiatives are taking place and many people want to act in solidarity.” or “We are all in this together. Many people are in a worse situation than me. What can I do to help myself and others?”

- Keep yourself firmly in the present.

**Example of anxious thought:** “I worry about my family. We may all die.”

**Reframing:** “Are they all dead now? No. Am I dead? No.”

**Technical note:** Unlike other animal species, humans do not only rely on their amygdala, the part of the brain that acts as an alarm, to protect themselves from danger. They also use their memory bank and their thinking. Therefore, during a stressful period, our thinking brain tends to look out for possible danger. When this happens over a long period, it can lead to ongoing anxious thinking patterns and it is important to correct this anxious bias.



## Emotional Self-regulation for Depressed Feelings

### How do I know if I have a low mood?

- Lack of energy, lethargy
- Change in sleeping patterns (usually sleeping more)
- Change in eating patterns (usually eating more)
- Ongoing pessimistic discourse about the present and the future
- Constantly dwelling on the past or ruminating
- Feeling angry at myself
- Feeling sad or low, wanting to cry
- Wanting to withdraw from the world and limiting social interactions

### What can I do? Be present/Focus on the Positive/Move

ASK YOURSELF SEVERAL TIMES A DAY: **How depressed am I feeling right now?** Score yourself on a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 is the most ecstatic you have ever felt and 10 is the saddest you have ever felt. Keep track and note your answers daily.

Depending on your answers throughout the day, take responsibility for your mood and make sure you use several strategies if needs be. Do not wait until you feel like it, you may not feel like it. Just do it...

You cannot choose how you feel and you should not beat yourself up about it. There is no "I should feel"! Nevertheless, nobody likes feeling gloomy and there are many strategies you can use to help regulated your mood. Try them out and see what works for you. Make sure you use at least one strategy that involves moving your body.

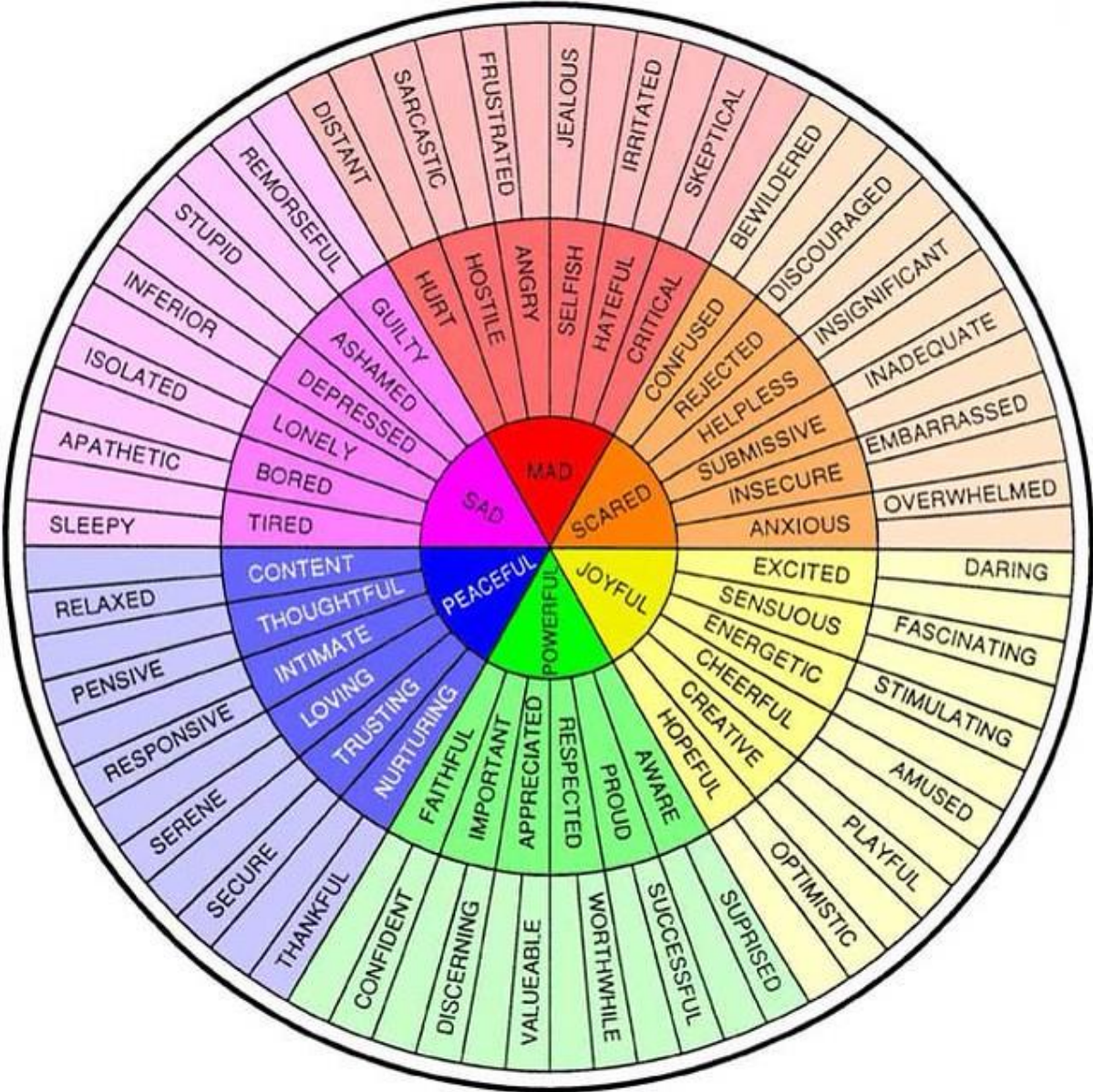
**TIPS: Download the [I-MOOD App](#), it is all set-up for you!**

**If you prefer writing, do it on the go in your phone or carry your own special pocket notebook with you and use colours describing each of your mood.**

**Use the feelings wheel inserted in this document and try to find the most appropriate adjective for your mood.**

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# FEELINGS WHEEL



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**Exercise 1: Smile at Yourself  
(20 seconds)**

**Smile at yourself several times a day even if you are not feeling like it. It may sound silly, but it works!**



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**Technical Note:** A 2010 study found that making yourself smile when you're feeling down helps improve your mood and increases positive thoughts. In fact, when smiling, it is difficult to think about something sad at the same time. The body is sending a message to the brain that this is happy time and the brain reacts accordingly. Dopamine, endorphins and serotonin — neurotransmitters associated with pleasure — are released when you smile.

## Exercise 2: Work on Your Positive Bias

Learned realistic optimism is one of the key factors in growing resilience. This means accepting what we cannot change whilst changing our view of the world and the running commentary (inside our heads) that goes with it.

### 1) Choose to read and watch light-hearted and funny fiction.

Look out for jokes and funny memes.

List here your favourite comedies, comical books, jokes and memes:

...

...

...



### 2) Manage Media Influence

Whilst it is important to stay informed, the news coverage tends to be negative (See technical Note) and can become overwhelming. Consider carefully your sources of information and opt for factual and useful pieces of information as opposed to sensational ones. Watch or listen to the news twice a day at most.

### **3) Scatter your day with small joys and brief moments of pleasure:**

Enjoying the taste of fresh coffee,  
Feeling the warm sun on my face through the window,  
Listening to a beautiful song,  
Exchanging a funny video with a friend etc...

### **4) Press on “Replay”**

Negative experiences get more readily imprinted in memory. In contrast, positive experiences require to be kept in mind for 10 to 12 seconds to get from short-term memory to long-term memory. So, when something positive happens to you, replay it in your mind a few times to ensure you can retrieve it from your long-term memory. (See exercise 4)

### **5) Every day write 5 things, big or small, you are grateful for.**

...  
...  
...  
...  
...

### **6) Keep a ratio of 5 to 1.**

When interacting with others, challenge yourself to have five times more positive interactions than negative ones. This is particularly important with anyone in your household or anyone you are in regular contact with. Others, like you, react more strongly to negative comments than positive ones so make it your mission to create a positive emotional atmosphere around you. This includes smiling, complimenting, being thankful and grateful to others for what they do, naming the positive in any given situation.

**Technical Note: The brain reacts more strongly to stimuli it deems negative. There is a greater surge in electrical activity when we are shown negative images than when we are shown positive ones. Thus, our attitudes are more heavily influenced by downbeat news than good news. Our capacity to weigh negative input so heavily most likely evolved for a good reason—to keep us out of harm's way. From the dawn of human history, our very survival depended on our skill at dodging danger. The brain developed systems that would make it unavoidable for us not to notice danger and, hopefully, respond to it.**

### Exercise 3: Look at it through somebody else's eyes

- Imagine the most positive person you know (this can be a real or fictional character) and look at the situation through his/her eyes.

**Example:** What would Buddha/Paddington Bear/ Pollyanna think of this situation?

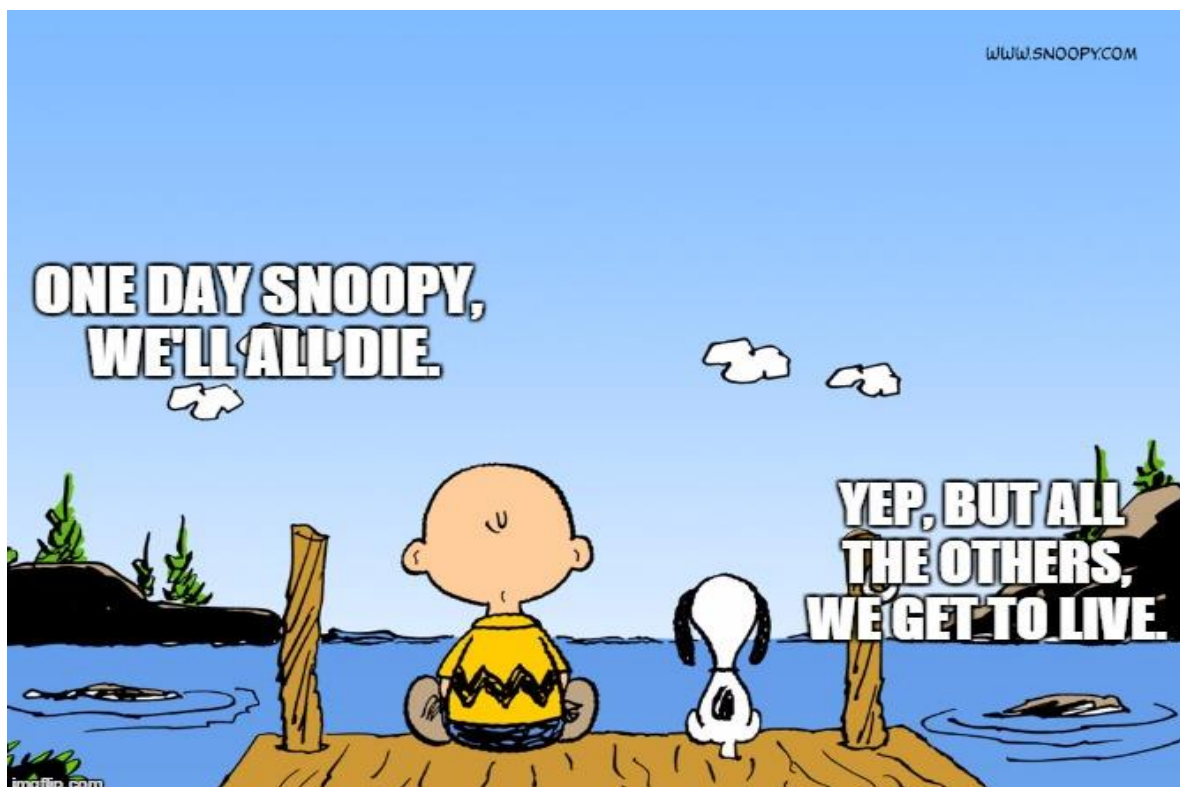
- Think of one or two alternative and more positive aspects in every situation. Even if the situation seems to only bring hardship and unhappiness.

**Example:** *"Other people are having an easier time than me. This is so unfair! Why does it happen to me?"*

**Reframing:** *"Some people have it easier; some people have it harder." or "I am so lucky that I have a comfortable place to live in and more time to spend with my children."*

If you struggle letting go of your pessimistic view, ask yourself:

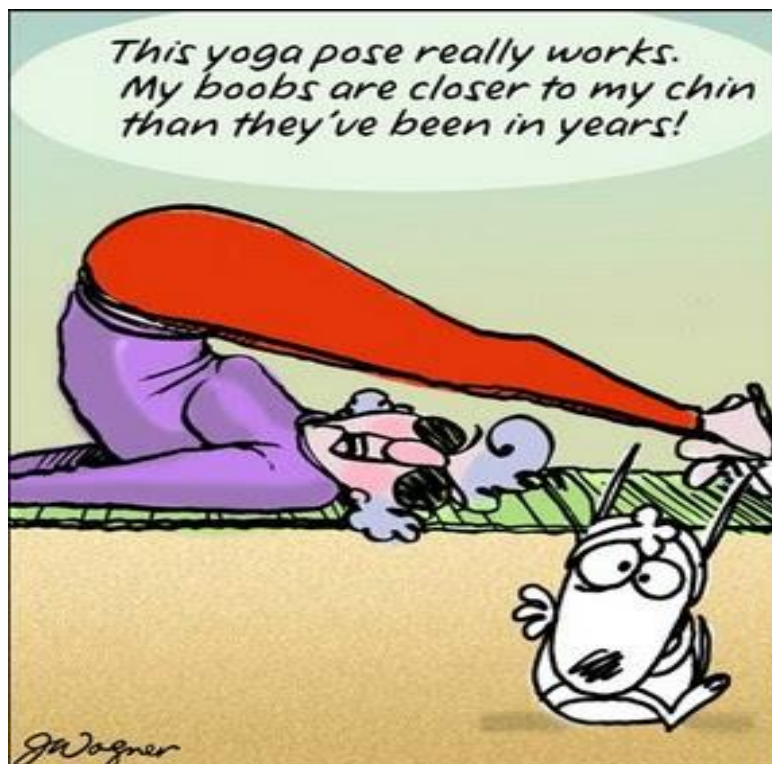
- Is my thinking based on facts or emotions?
- Am I generalizing here?
- Am I catastrophizing?
- What evidence do I have that my thinking is accurate?
- What is the worst that could happen to me right now? How does this situation compare?
- Is this really a black-and-white situation or are there shades of grey?



## Exercise 4: Move, move, move...

Any form of exercise will release feel-good neurotransmitters like endorphins and serotonin that improve your mood. Any form of exercise is beneficial, the idea is simply to sit less and be as active as you can. It does not need to involve training at the gym or learning a sport. There are numerous activities you can add to your daily routine. Remember no gain is too small, each step counts. Here are a few examples:

- Walk as much as you can, including inside your house.
- Walk up and down the stairs.
- Put the music on and dance.
- Jump rope like a kid.
- Do a few jumping jacks during ad breaks.
- Clean your house.
- Bring your knees high, repeat...
- Try to do a plank
- Find your favourite online or DVD exercise routine. Here are a few examples:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IEWcBlvqiDk> PE with Joe good for beginners and kids.  
<https://www.youtube.com/user/TheFitnessMarshall> With music and people of all shapes.



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