

# Using the 5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Technique

## Objective

To practice a calming technique that connects you with the present by exploring your five senses.

## What to Know

Finding presence by getting grounded when you are overwhelmed with emotions and anxious thoughts is a coping skill you can learn and practice. Following a trauma, it is normal to experience flashbacks, anxiety, or other uncomfortable symptoms. Grounding techniques help you manage symptoms by turning your attention away from thoughts, memories, or worries, and refocusing on the present moment.

Anxiety pulls you out of the present moment. If you are consumed by stress and worry, your mind might pull up many possible scenarios, scary outcomes, fears, or “what ifs.” Most of these thoughts inhabit the past or the future – not the present. If you can remain aware of and connected to the present with your body, you can cultivate better emotional health. While your mind runs wild with anxious thoughts, your body is never anywhere else but here, with your breath.

To calm anxious thoughts and reorient to the present, you can do so via your five senses using the 5-4-3-2-1 grounding technique. This technique can help pull anxious mental energy back into your body, grounding and calming you to release stress and focus on the here and now.

Follow these steps and notice small details your mind would usually tune out. It can be helpful to state each awareness out loud.

- 1. Become mindful of your breath.** Take 5 slow, deep belly breaths to invite your body back into the moment. As everything slows down, become aware of your environment.
- 2. Look for 5 things you can see.** Take your time to observe and acknowledge what you see around you.
- 3. Become aware of 4 things you can touch.** Spend a moment touching these things. Maybe notice the sensation of gravity itself, or the floor beneath you.
- 4. Acknowledge 3 things you can hear.** Simply listen and pay attention to the space between sounds.
- 5. Notice 2 things you can smell.** If you cannot smell anything, try to sense the subtle aroma of the air around you, or the fragrance of your own skin.
- 6. Become aware of 1 thing you can taste.** Notice the lingering suggestion of what you last ate, or toothpaste, perhaps.

Repeat this process as many times as necessary. Take your time and notice how you feel afterward.

[Evidence](#) suggests the brain works better when relaxed. The limbic, or emotional brain, is like a “router” for incoming information. If you are stressed, incoming information is passed to the unconscious mind, causing you to respond in a reactive way. If you are calm and composed, your amygdala and hippocampus feed sensory information through your “higher” brain, allowing you to think and behave with calm rationality. So even if you face a crisis, the best option is to cultivate tranquility and composure.

If you practice the 5-4-3-2-1 technique frequently, you may notice long-term benefits. When you fully inhabit the present moment, you feel safer and calmer, and you are much less likely to be triggered.

### What to Do

Practice the 5-4-3-2-1 technique each day for the next two weeks to help remind you to get grounded and remain present. Note the date and describe a stressful or annoying situation you encounter. Write down whether you practice the technique, and if it was helpful, or how you felt afterward, in the outcome column.

Date	What happened?	Practice technique? Y / N	Outcome

Date	What happened?	Practice technique? Y / N	Outcome

### Reflections on This Exercise

Was this exercise easy? Challenging? Why?

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Did this exercise help you feel more grounded and present? Why or why not?

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How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_  
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What could you do differently to make progress in this area?

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