

This too shall pass



Sue Yen Wan is a yoga teacher and reader of Menopause Matters.

Anxiety is a feeling of unease, often presented as mild or severe worry and, or fear. It's an emotion experienced by everyone.

However, as many as a third of menopausal women may experience a heightened level of anxiety causing distress and discomfort due to the decline and fluctuation of hormone levels.

It can affect our daily lives, often blowing situations out of proportion and making us feel constantly overwhelmed. Long term, on-going anxiety affects our physiological state, which in turn impacts destructively on the physical body. Racing and shallow breathing patterns can affect our heart health and brain function, exhaust the adrenal glands, compromise our nervous system, cause mood swings, possible panic attacks, and be the cause of restless night's sleep- the list itself is exhaustive!

So, you may ask, can we manage our anxiety and stress levels ourselves? You'll be pleased to know that there are many ways we can take control of anxiety and that there is light at the end of the tunnel.

How does that work and what does that look like?

Let's be realistic... if your daily symptoms are severe there may be a

need for prescription medication or herbal remedies, which can be super effective to help shift the mind state.

In addition to any medication, a few mindful and spiritual tools could potentially lessen the intensity and, or frequency in the spike of anxiety symptoms.



• Sue Yen Wan.

A common reaction to anxiety can put our body into a compromised sympathetic mode – a fight or flight response. Over long periods, repeated negative response patterns can cause excessive stress on the adrenal glands. To re-nourish ourselves, a Yin or Restorative yoga practice can assist in smoothing out the angst and can bring the tempo of the mind and body into a parasympathetic response – a rest and digest mode of functioning.

It can be difficult to know what is causing any anxiety, especially during menopause, which can be upsetting and stressful in itself. A way of identifying possible triggers is to keep a regular journal. It could make you aware of any anxiety-inducing patterns. Keeping a daily log of your movements can contribute to recognising types of behaviour that set off the downward spiral.





• As with everything not one method works for everyone. You may need to explore what works for you.



Chanting and humming create positive vibrations, fully supporting the mind to connect with the breath and body. Resonating higher throat vibrations or a lower belly sound, can stimulate the vagus nerve, providing a signal to shut down over stimulated nervous systems and helping you to instantly calm down and relax.

Breathing exercises and meditations are invaluable tools to 'pull out' in difficult situations. These can directly distract and slow down the sometimes-hyperventilated breath that comes with anxiety.

Instantly calming and soothing the nervous systems will reduce your anxiety. Becoming proficient with a couple of breathing methods could make a difference to the intensity of your reaction and lessen the impact on your body and mind.

Meditations, guided meditation and yoga Nidra, all help take you on a journey to guide your mind into a more restful state of being. They help to shift the energy and mood into deeper levels of relaxation and restoring equilibrium.

Having taught yoga for over 20 years, I have practiced and experienced many breathing exercises and meditations from various schools of thought.

As with everything, not one method works for everyone and realistically, if starting a daily practice of meditation was easy, we would all be enlightened! I encourage you to explore the many styles of yoga breathing exercises to find the ones that work for you. I have various options on my website and I encourage you to experiment with them.

From my own experience, a life-changing event left me so psychologically traumatised that I knew I had to force myself out of the situation to avoid a debilitating downward spiral. I am sure mediation played a vital part in moving me into the positive direction towards healing myself. I had tried various meditation methods before, without great success and nothing anchored me. I wasn't drawn to any one particular method to incorporate it into a daily, regular practice.

However, when my sister passed away I was consumed with grief. I felt disconnected from myself and my daily reality, it took me over a year before I could even begin to address the depth of my loss.

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The Balloon Breath

A breathing exercise to instantly calm and relax the body and re-set the mind. An acute stressful situation often causes the breath and breathing patterns to become more rapid and shallow. Use this breathing exercise and visualisation of blowing up a balloon, to then float up and away carrying the anxiety and stress away from you and transmuting the energy back into light.

- If possible, sit, or even better, lie down.
- Close your eyes.
- Visualise holding a deflated elastic balloon up to your mouth.
- From the belly, take a deep breath in through the nose, followed by a long drawn-out breath releasing an exhalation through the mouth to inflate the balloon. Repeat this several times.
- This visualising can help extend the breath. It will distract away from the stressful thought or situation and instantly calm the mind and body down. Before you know it... the balloon is inflated and a level of balance is restored!
- By visualising yourself tying up the end of the balloon and then letting it go all the stress floats away from you and into the universe.

- Of course, there are no restrictions on how many balloons you can blow-up in any one session!

The balloon breath is a breathing technique that can be practiced anywhere, giving instant relief, soothing the nerves and restoring balance.



Being with other people made me incredibly anxious as the over sensitive subject contained visible and non-visible triggers and left me and everyone around me 'walking on egg-shells.'

Meditation and breathing exercises saved me. I was very fortunate to be able to retreat in a Kundalini Yoga ranch in Santa Fe. There I was immersed in a new discipline that required an uninterrupted daily commitment of 40 days meditation. And so began my journey of discovering an effective and impactful meditation practice which I have incorporated into my life.

Kundalini Yoga is a practice of 'transformation.' It involves chanting and breathing exercises with repetitive poses. The premise of this discipline is that after 40 days it becomes a new habit. A new and healthy habit, which in turn becomes a lifestyle. →





These practices served me well, enabling me to take the first steps on the path to healing and acceptance.

Eight years along and I find myself now in uncharted territory - the rollercoaster ride of peri menopause!

I feel these breathing exercise and meditation practices are more than ever essential for my daily self-care routine. The positive benefits are worth prioritizing the practice for me, and I make sure to find time in my busy daily schedule for them. A way of life, as essential as flossing my teeth!



• That misty fog can be lifted.

I am so thankful I found this healthy and nourishing habit. They help me navigate not only my symptoms, but also give me a better understanding of how menopause is affecting me wholly and spiritually, body and mind.

I have identified that today, this week, this past month, my overriding disruptive menopause symptom is

anxiety, often coupled with mood swings, brain fog or feelings of being overwhelmed.

I am practicing the Calm Heart Meditation daily and Balloon Breath with visualisation when needed and I am preferring Yin yoga over Yang practices.

I cherish moments in nature and taking on the understanding that not everything needs to be completed today!

The combination of these holistic self-care practices are nourishing and restorative, keeping me grounded and truly connected to my sense of belonging and honouring the present. They help lessen my anxiety levels and enable me to have a smoother day as I navigate the misty fog of my menopause.

Taking the wise words from my Vipasana training and the teachings of Buddha: *"This too shall pass."*

SueYen is a yoga teacher and founder of Triple Goddess Yoga, a yoga platform dedicated in helping women through the menopause.

www.triplegoddessyoga.com

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The Calm Heart Meditation

This meditation teaches stillness and creates internal calm. It is a meditation that promotes non-judgement or animosity, it exudes feelings of kindness, peace, love and light for ourselves and others.

- Prepare a space and sit comfortably.
- Set a timer, start with three minutes.
- Place the left hand on your spiritual heart centre, located at the centre of your chest.
- Bend your right arm at the elbow, with your palm facing outwards, bring your hand to shoulder level. Make your right hand mudra (a hand position) taking the tip of your index finger, touch the bend in your thumb and the remaining three fingers should point up towards the sky. The three fingers

pointing up, act as an 'antenna' tapping into the abundance of universal energy. This hand position is significant for dispelling fear.

- Close the eyes and bring the focus to your left hand touching your spiritual heart, breathe into this space with calm and rhythmic breaths.
- If you find yourself struggling to stay present and are distracted during the meditation, lightly press the left hand closer to your spiritual heart to bring back your awareness.
- Gradually build up to an 11-minute and then a 31-minute practice.

The Calm Heart Meditation has a calming and soothing effect on the mind and body. It is especially effective in times of distress and discomfort.