

Physical Symptoms of Anxiety, Explained



Where anxiety shows up in your body, what each sensation actually is, and the fastest way to settle it.

1 FIND YOUR SYMPTOM ON THE MAP

2 READ WHY IT HAPPENS

3 TRY THE "WHAT HELPS" LINE

THE ONE THING TO REMEMBER

Everything on this map is your alarm system doing its job. Fight-or-flight is a feature, not damage: your body is preparing you to run from a danger that is not actually there. Uncomfortable, automatic - and safe.

● HEAD

Dizzy · light-headed · foggy · feeling unreal or far away

Your body reroutes oxygen toward the big muscles and switches your attention to threat-scanning. With the thinking brain running on less fuel and a hypervigilant filter over everything, the world can feel dreamlike.

WHAT HELPS Long slow exhales, then name five things you can see - orientation brings the thinking brain back online.

● CHEST

Racing or pounding heart · tightness · air hunger

Adrenaline speeds your heart and tenses the chest wall to pump fuel to your muscles fast. It feels cardiac, but it is chemical - a surge, not a malfunction, and it fades as the adrenaline burns off.

WHAT HELPS Make each exhale twice as long as the inhale for two minutes - your heart rate follows the out-breath down.

● STOMACH

Nausea · butterflies · churning · sudden bathroom urges

Digestion is useless in an emergency, so your body switches it off mid-meal to save energy for escape. Whatever your gut was doing gets paused or hurried out of the way - hence the strange plumbing.

WHAT HELPS A warm hand or mug on the belly, small sips of water, and slow breaths into the lower ribs.

● HANDS

Tingling · pins and needles · cold fingers · shaking

Blood gets pulled from the skin and fingertips to the big muscles, and quick breathing shifts your blood chemistry - together they leave hands buzzing, chilly, and unsteady.

WHAT HELPS Rub your palms together hard, wrap them around something warm, and let your breathing slow.

● LEGS

Restless · weak · wobbly · "jelly legs"

Your legs have been loaded with sprint fuel for a run that never happens. Unspent, all that mobilized energy reads as trembling, heaviness, or the urge to pace.

WHAT HELPS Spend the fuel: a brisk walk, a flight of stairs, ten slow squats - then shake your legs out.