



# When Relaxation Makes Anxiety Worse

## What is happening?

Sometimes people notice that when they try to relax — during breathing exercises, meditation, or hypnosis — their anxiety actually increases instead of decreasing. This experience is known as paradoxical anxiety or relaxation-induced anxiety. It can feel confusing or discouraging, but it is a recognised reaction and does not mean anything is wrong with you.

## Why can this happen?

When your body has been used to staying alert for a long time, suddenly slowing down can feel unfamiliar or even unsafe. Changes in breathing, muscle tension, or awareness of body sensations can sometimes be misinterpreted by the brain as a sign of danger.

*Some common reasons include:*

- Being very sensitive to body sensations
- Feeling uncomfortable with loss of control
- Being used to staying mentally 'on guard'
- Having strong emotional reactions when the mind finally becomes quiet



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## What can help?

If relaxation feels uncomfortable, it doesn't mean you can't benefit from therapy. Often it simply means we need to approach things more gradually.

Helpful adjustments can include:

- Keeping your eyes open instead of closing them
- Using gentle movement before relaxing
- Practising very short exercises (1–3 minutes)
- Focusing on the outside environment instead of internal sensations
- Reminding yourself that you are always in control of the process

## A helpful way to think about it

Your nervous system may simply be more used to being 'on alert' than being calm. With the right approach and a little patience, it can learn that slowing down is safe. Many people find that once this adjustment happens, relaxation becomes much easier.

## Remember

Experiencing anxiety during relaxation is more common than many people realise. It is not a failure, and it does not mean therapy won't work for you. It simply means your nervous system needs a slightly different route towards feeling calm.



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