

7 COPING SKILLS FOR PRE-SURGERY ANXIETY

1. Ask for what you need

One thing you can do in addition to therapy and trying grounding exercises before and during appointments is expressing your needs to your medical providers. Inform them of your concerns. Identify what you need to hear from your providers to feel safe and heard in those moments and ask for that. If you can't describe it verbally or worry it would overwhelm you to say it out loud, bring a card with you and hand it to the provider explaining your needs.

2. Locus of Control Exercise

Take out a piece of paper and draw 3 columns. Label these columns "Things within my control", "Things kind of in my control", and "Things entirely out of my control". Then categorize each and every single fear or discomfort you have about the upcoming surgery. You might be surprised how much responsibility you're carrying for things out of your control or you might be surprised by how much is actually within your control.

3. Journaling Exercises

Journaling before a major test or major procedure can improve your mood and decrease anxiety. You can even keep a journal on your phone so you always have it with you. Try answering the following prompts:

- Where and when do you feel the most comfortable?
- Write about a time you felt safe or content
- Who do you look to for support and how do they support you?

4. Grounding Exercises

Grounding exercises help us stay "on the ground" even when we feel like we're disassociating or having an "out of body" experience. Try these 2 grounding tools when you're preparing for a procedure:

1. Think of your favorite color. Try finding everything in the room that is that color, taking deep breaths. Repeat with several colors until you feel your anxiety decrease
2. Notice your surroundings. Name 5 things you can see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell, and 1 thing you can taste.

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5. **Identify Emotionally Safe People**

When going through a major surgery, it's important to surround yourself with those who will support you, not those who take away your energy. What do you deem safe? Is it people who won't judge you or share pity? Keep a list on your phone of emotionally safe people to call or text when you need that level of support.

6. **Pack a anti-anxiety box**

It can be a craft box you carry in an overnight bag or even something as small as an empty candy box. You can pack sensory items like mints, pictures of your favorite places, puzzles for distraction, stress ball, journal, art supplies, plastic bubble wrap to pop, play dough or silly putty, essential oil spray, mini massager, and socks or gloves.

7. **Bring sensory items with you for before and after the procedure**

Having some sensory items for comfort while you're waiting for surgery can help soothe your nerves. It can include a weighted blanket, gel eye mask, noise canceling headphones, warm or cold neck wrap, bottle of water, or anything else you think you'll need at that moment.