
THE ANXIETY BUSTERS

Tense? NERVOUS? Stressed? We know how you feel. So we sent six women to test some DE-STRESSING solutions that could work for you

Ask a friend or a colleague how they're feeling right now and we'd bet our best Louboutins that the response will contain at least one of the following words: busy, stressed, tired. With day-to-day pressures both in and out of the office, we've all become familiar with that tight feeling in our chest that anxiety brings. Recent research by Bupa UK shows that women are significantly more stressed than men, the primary sources of our anxiety being work, finances and our health. Taking a deep breath and counting to 10 just won't cut it any more, so we sent six stressed-out writers on a quest for inner calm.

THE RELAXATION CLASS TESTER: NAOMI REILLY

I'm anxious, all right. I'm stressed that I'm not up to my job. That I can't sell my flat. That I have a dentist appointment coming up. Even my more irrational fears – like worrying that I'm going to run someone over while driving or that the mole on my right shoulder is malignant melanoma – have turned into full-on anxiety obsessions of late. Am I mad? Possibly. Am I alone? It would appear not. Sitting in a Relaxation for Living class in south London, there are six of us feeling under pressure. One is stressed with work, another can't stop fretting about her debts, while the only man in the class is anxious after breaking

up with his girlfriend two months ago.

Our instructor, Hazel, begins the session by getting us to discuss our symptoms: insomnia, headaches, restlessness, shortness of breath, poor concentration and loss of sex drive. We then do a series of techniques designed to help overcome them. The first requires us to clap loudly whenever we start to feel anxious, say sharply to ourselves 'Stop' and visualise something positive. Apparently, this pushes out NATs (Negative Automatic Thoughts) before they have a chance to take hold. Unless I want people to think I've lost the plot, this is one I'll be trying behind closed doors. Other techniques include flaring our nostrils while wrinkling our noses and jogging on the spot with our arms floppily following our legs. It's hard not to feel self-conscious, but at least I'm less anxious.

Finally, Hazel tells us to draw two pie charts – one detailing the amount of time we spend on certain daily activities, the other showing the amount of energy they take out of us. As homework, we're to study these charts and identify areas we can improve. I decide to establish clearer boundaries between my work and play, to allow me to switch off properly in the evenings, and to make time for exercise.

VERDICT: Some of the relaxation techniques are a little strange, but talking about my anxiety and its symptoms has

