

Steadying yourself early

Quiet things you can do anywhere, without anyone noticing.

The idea

When anxiety builds, the thinking mind goes offline first, so anything with lots of steps can make it worse. So, three rules:

- **One channel.** Touch, or pressure, or movement. Not several at once.
- **No counting, searching or naming.** Just a small physical action, repeated.
- **Early is easier.** A small thing at the first flicker does more than a big thing at the peak.

Things to try Choose two or three, and practise them until your body knows them.

Feet

Inside shoes, nobody sees a thing. Curl your toes, then spread them wide. Or press your heels into the floor, then let go.

Hands

Walk your thumb slowly across each fingertip and back. Or run it over something in your pocket, the same way each time.

Jaw and throat

Let your tongue drop from the roof of your mouth, and your teeth part slightly. One slow swallow. Or a strong mint.

Press and let go

Press your back into the chair, or your palms onto your thighs, then let go completely. The letting go is what your nervous system reads.

Moving

If you need to leave, use the walk: steady pace, attention in your feet. Have an exit line ready: "Back in a minute." Knowing you can leave often means you don't need to.

Words, if words help

One word for the sensation: *tight, hot, fast*. Or an honest line: "This is a wave. It peaks and it comes down." "My body is being loud, and I'm still here."

Knowing it early

Most people have two or three early signals: in the feet or legs, the jaw, throat, stomach or hands, a change in temperature, or in how the room looks. When the first one shows up, that's the moment.

Practising

Sixty seconds a day when you're calm lays down a track your body can find later. A minute before something you know will be hard helps too.

Two things to skip

Sharp or painful tricks, like ice or snapping a band. They teach your system that relief comes from pain. Firm pressure does the job without the cost.

Breathing, if it backfires. If it helps, just let the out-breath be longer than the in-breath.

If it keeps rising

Sometimes it will, and that isn't failure. Once it's underway, stay with it until it turns, which it always does.

My card

Three things I've chosen: 1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

If I need to leave, I'll say _____

In my pocket _____