

Fear Hierarchy

This worksheet is designed to help you systematically confront and overcome your anxiety by gradually exposing yourself to the feared object or situation. Start by identifying your specific fear triggers, then break them down into smaller, manageable steps, and rank these steps from least to most anxiety-provoking. Then, systematically work through each step, starting with the least threatening and gradually progressing to more challenging ones.

STEP 1: What is your primary fear?

Example: Fear of flying

STEP 2: List smaller challenges that are related to your primary fear

Watching videos of airplanes taking off and landing

Reading articles about flying

Visiting an airport without boarding a plane

Searching for flight tickets online

Watching flights take off and land near the airport

Listening to audio of a flight in turbulence

Sitting in an airplane during a short flight

STEP 3: Rate these challenges with the Anxiety Scale

Challenges That Trigger Your Fear	Anxiety Level
Watching videos of airplanes taking off and landing	2
Reading articles about flying	3
Visiting an airport without boarding a plane	5
Searching for flight tickets online	6
Watching flights take off and land near the airport	7
Listening to audio of a flight in turbulence	8
Sitting in an airplane during a short flight	10

Anxiety Scale

10 panic

9 

8 fearful

7 

6 afraid

5 

4 worried

3 

2 okay

1 

*This worksheet provides information but is not a substitute for therapy. It works best with guidance from a professional.



Fear Hierarchy

STEP 4: Prepare for challenges

What makes this technique effective is **staying in the situation until your anxiety naturally comes down on its own**. This process is what helps your nervous system to learn that the feared situation is tolerable (and teaches your mind that situations are not as scary as you may think!).

As you can imagine, facing your fears and waiting for your anxiety to come down is difficult! So here are two ways to prepare for the challenge.

List effective coping skills in case they're needed

If a situation is far more challenging than you thought, you may need to use coping skills like taking a break, deep breathing, listening to music, or taking a walk. List coping skills that you know work for you on the right.

deep breaths, listen to my favorite song,
text a friend

Plan some appropriate rewards

Facing fears takes practice and motivation! Use the space to the right to consider small rewards you are willing to reward yourself with, like stickers, treats, money towards a purchase, etc.

stickers, chocolates, money towards a
new purchase

STEP 5: Plan your challenges and rewards, starting with the least scary

Challenges That Trigger Your Fear	Anxiety Level	Reward Per Try
<i>Watching videos of airplanes taking off and landing</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>sticker</i>
<i>Reading articles about flying</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>sticker</i>
<i>Visiting an airport without boarding a plane</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>chocolates</i>
<i>Searching for flight tickets online</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>chocolates</i>
<i>Watching flights take off and land near the airport</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>\$ to purchase</i>
<i>Listening to audio of a flight in turbulence</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>\$ to purchase</i>
<i>Sitting in an airplane during a short flight</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>\$ to purchase</i>






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STEP 6: Do challenges and record your progress

At the beginning of each challenge, use the Anxiety Scale to rate your anxiety. Your goal is to **stay in the scary situation until your anxiety naturally comes down on its own**. Every so often through the challenge, re-rate your anxiety. You can stop the challenge when your anxiety has come down significantly (at least halfway). Unless a challenge is much too difficult or you get really stuck, try not to use coping skills. When the same challenge causes less *starting* anxiety, you'll know you're ready to move on to the next challenge.

Date	Challenges That Trigger Your Fear	Anxiety At:		Anxiety Scale
		Start	End	
May 3	Watching videos of airplanes taking off and landing	2	1	10 panic
May 4	Watching videos of airplanes taking off and landing	1	1	9 
May 5	Reading articles about flying	1	1	8 fearful
May 6	Visiting an airport without boarding a plane	5	2	7 
May 7	Visiting an airport without boarding a plane	4	1	6 afraid
May 8	Visiting an airport without boarding a plane	2	1	5 
May 9	Searching for flight tickets online	7	6	4 worried
May 10	Searching for flight tickets online	5	2	3 
May 11	Searching for flight tickets online	3	1	2 okay
May 12	Searching for flight tickets online	2	1	1 
May 13	Watching flights take off and land near the airport	6	2	

As you work through the challenges, use these spaces to reflect and adjust if needed.

How does it feel to “wait out” anxiety?	Do any of the challenges need to be adjusted?	Are rewards and coping skills (if necessary) working?
<p><i>It was really hard at first and didn't feel natural. After a couple of challenges, I think I got the hang of it though.</i></p>	<p><i>May 9: I tried searching for flight tickets online before work and got way too overwhelmed.</i></p> <p><i>May 10: searching for flight tickets online after work went better.</i></p>	<p><i>May 9: needed to use coping skills before work. Deep breathing worked okay, but listening to music worked better.</i></p>

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STEP 3: Rate these challenges with the Anxiety Scale

Challenges That Trigger Your Fear	Anxiety Level

Anxiety Scale

10 panic



8 fearful



6 afraid



4 worried



2 okay



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STEP 4: Prepare for challenges

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STEP 5: Plan your challenges and rewards, starting with the least scary

Challenges That Trigger Your Fear	Anxiety Level	Reward Per Try
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May 6				7 
May 7				6 afraid
May 8				5 
May 9				4 worried
May 10				3 
May 11				2 okay
May 12				1 
May 13				

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How does it feel to “wait out” anxiety?	Do any of the challenges need to be adjusted?	Are rewards and coping skills (if necessary) working?

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Additional Resources to Support Your Mental Health Journey

It can be hard to know where to begin looking for support in your mental health journey. Getting a referral from a primary care physician is a reliable first step. Also, sometimes family and friends have experienced similar issues and have professionals they would recommend. The experts at ChoosingTherapy.com are here to help as well, with resources we have reviewed and recommend. Our [strict editorial standards](#) ensure our reviews are fair, honest, thorough, and based on firsthand experience.

You Can Trust ChoosingTherapy.com



325+
Companies Reviewed



3,625+
Hours of Firsthand Experience



1,545+
Data Points Analyzed



[Best Online Therapy for Anxiety](#)

Online therapy is a convenient way to connect with a licensed therapist to address mental health issues, reduce unhealthy behaviors, develop effective coping skills, and get more satisfaction out of life. Many companies accept insurance and most have next-day appointments available.

[Best Online Psychiatry](#)

Online psychiatry providers enable patients to consult with licensed psychiatrists and other mental health professionals. They can evaluate, diagnose, and prescribe medication to help manage mental health issues. Many companies accept insurance and most have next-day appointments available.



[Best Mental Health Apps](#)

Apps can be great way to monitor mood, track sleep, journal, and practice healthy coping skills like mindfulness and meditation. There are apps specifically designed to help people reduce the symptoms of depression, anxiety, ADHD, chronic stress, and burnout.

[Therapist Directory](#)

When you're looking for a mental health provider with a very particular skill set, level of experience, or personality type, a therapist directory can be very helpful. Using the filters, you can refine your search until you find a therapist who feels like a perfect fit.

