
How and When to Practice

1. It is important that you become familiar with the strategies you're learning before you start using them in real-life situations. Therefore, when a strategy or method is being learned and is new to you, it's always best to practice it when you're feeling relatively calm, and when you're alone by yourself, to prevent any kind of self-consciousness. We suggest at least thirty minutes a day of reading the relevant handouts over to yourself, to give them a chance to be learned by the brain.



*Don't feel overwhelmed by the therapy.
Relax and take your time.*

2. The therapy you're learning does not need to be beat into the ground the first week. Take a determined, yet gentle, approach to it. Thirty minutes a day (which can be split up if necessary) is necessary but adequate. You get better results by doing therapy in the morning when your brain is fresh, and by reinforcing the therapy throughout the day: at breaks, lunch, or when you get home. Later, we'll talk about how you can reinforce the therapy while you're at work or school – without anyone else even knowing what you're doing. I will give you guidelines about what to do during the week at the end of every session.

3. Reading over the handouts out loud to yourself every day is the best way to keep reminding your brain what you're doing. This, of course, allows the therapy to sink in to your brain a little more deeply each time. When your eyes read the message, and your ears hear the sound vibrations, the brain takes it all in, and sends it to different areas of the brain. Because of this, you are hitting tens of millions more brain cells. Reading the handouts out loud to yourself allows progress to happen faster, because you are using more neurons in your brain to process the information.

4. Cognitive-behavioral therapy works best for anxiety disorders. Research and clinical experience alike consistently indicate that comprehensive cognitive-behavioral therapy for social anxiety is life-changing. Repetition and persistence with the methods and strategies that make permanent changes in the brain helps us overcome social anxiety.

5. If we want a permanent change in our brain – and we do – we must *practice* and be *persistent*. The brain cannot be changed overnight. Overcoming social anxiety is a process that takes patience and time to occur. We must do therapy in the way the human brain processes our words and deeds. We can't force the brain to believe things it hasn't had the time to process adequately. Our actions must correlate with the way the brain works physiologically, so that therapy has a permanent effect on our lives.

6. Contrary to popular thought, medication does not permanently change "brain chemistry." It may temporarily help, if the medication calms you down and helps you do the cognitive-behavioral therapy. The drug, however, is not "curing" you. The only way to permanently change neural pathways in the brain is by doing active CBT so that your brain (i.e., you) think, believe, and feel differently.

7. Do the therapy when you are calm and relaxed. Your brain takes in the strategies better when you are relaxed and calm. If you're agitated and anxious, the brain is not going to focus on the therapy you might try to do. It is important to be relaxed first -- before you do the therapy.

So, if you're feeling anxious, depressed, agitated, or any other negative emotion, burn off that excessive adrenaline and cortisol by:

- a. Exercising for twenty to thirty minutes.
- b. Singing along to your favorite (positive) music.
- c. Talking to a friend who is positive and supports you.
- d. Relaxing, meditating, or listening to peaceful music or sounds.
- e. Anything at all that helps you to calm down and relax, so that you can be relatively calm and peaceful during your 30 minute therapy time.

It takes consistent repetition before your brain starts to automatically use these strategies.