

3 Mindset Hacks to Reduce Anxiety



Invisible illness comes with many ups and downs along the journey. When you're first diagnosed and suddenly find yourself living in a hospital, it can come as a bit of a shock. You may have to have tests you've only ever seen on *Grey's Anatomy*, or even start on a medication that involves something you're not used to. For me it was my first injectable treatment—I just couldn't get on with it. I remember having panic attack after panic attack.

When I was first diagnosed 6 years ago, I was petrified of needles. Blood tests, I found, were always really difficult for me. I'd be sitting in the waiting room, palms sweating, heart beating like crazy, I couldn't breathe. Constantly thinking to myself, "I can't do this."

Over the last few years, however, I've managed to develop some techniques I've learned to manage my anxiety.

- 1. Name the things around you:** As you're sitting in that hospital waiting room or about to do your first injection, distract yourself by naming everything you see around you (e.g. Chair. Table. Receptionist. Lights. Blinds). Think also about what you can smell, taste, touch and hear. Focus hard on these things. By focusing on things outside of you, it connects you back to the present.
- 2. Ask yourself this question and focus on the answer:** Next tip is to ask yourself whether this issue you're feeling anxious about will still feel like a big issue in 6 months or even in a year. Chances are, it probably won't be. It'll probably be long forgotten by then. This exercise helps to shrink the size of the problem in your mind and make it

seem smaller. How many times when you get anxious does that huge feeling of panic come over you and the trigger in hand is the only thing you can see? It doesn't need to be this way.

3. **The "I AM" exercise:** First, think about the kind of person you want to be. Maybe you want to be more confident? Maybe you want to feel like you can handle any situation that comes your way? Maybe you want to feel physically stronger? It is possible. Start by writing down or typing out your list of "I AMs." This could be, for example:

I am strong. I am confident. I am able to handle any situation that comes my way. As many as you feel you need—but no less than 3. If you can, print these out and have them on your wall where you'll see them every day. Read these out loud to yourself a couple of times a day. In a few days, you'll start to see the difference. Make sure you are writing out as positive statements as possible. Don't write things like, "I am not shy," because that won't work. Instead, reframe it by saying the opposite of the thing you want to avoid, so, "I am a confident person." You become the thing you tell yourself.

Our mind controls so much more than we realize.

Why is it that some people with MS can run marathons and climb mountains, but others can't get out of bed? What's their secret? Are they just less sick than other people?

If it's one thing I've learnt from interviewing inspirational MSers on the DISabled to ENabled podcast, it's that they think differently. It's **how** they think about their situation. They focus on the goal they want to achieve and how they will get there. They won't stop till they reach their goal and they won't let anything stop them. They don't focus on how tired they are, or how much pain they're in or that they have weak legs. They just focus on what they want.

I used to live in a state of permanent anxiety about absolutely everything. It was awful, and I was so unhappy. But it doesn't have to be this way. If you want to change your situation, you can — and guess what — you're the only person who can change your situation.

Editor's Note: Find resources for emotional wellness and MS on [the Society website](#).