



How to Help Your Patients Overcome Anxiety with Mindfulness:

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Leaves on a Stream

Begin by focusing on the sensations of the breath, feeling it either in the rising and falling sensations in your belly or perhaps as sensations at the tip of the nose, where the air enters cool and leaves a little warmer. There's no need to control your breathing in any way—simply open to the breath however it appears. Allow your eyes to close gently.

Once you've followed the breath for a few minutes, imagine that you're sitting next to a stream on a pleasant autumn day. As you look at the stream, you notice a number of large leaves of all colors, shapes, and sizes drifting along, each at its own pace, one by one, in the slowly moving current. Allow yourself to simply be there for a moment, watching.

When you're ready, gradually bring your awareness to what's going on inside you. As you do, gently notice and label each experience that shows up—thoughts, feelings, sensations, desires, and impulses. Pay attention to what's happening in your mind and body and then label what's going on. Use simple labels like “planning,” “remembering,” “feeling an itch,” etc.

As each thought, feeling, memory, or impulse comes along into your mind, imagine gently placing them one by one on each large leaf passing by. Observe as each leaf comes closer to you. Then watch as it slowly moves away, drifting along as it carries the contents of your mind and body out of sight downstream.

Bring your gaze back to the stream in front of you, waiting for the next leaf to float by. Continue placing each thought, feeling, memory, or impulse on its own large leaf. Watch each one as you let them just float away downstream.

If you have the time, continue doing this for 20 minutes or more. Then open your eyes with the intention to allow all of your experience to come and go freely for the rest of the day.

Adapted from:

[The Mindfulness and Acceptance Workbook for Anxiety](#)

By John P. Forsyth, Ph.D. and Goerg H. Eifert, Ph.D.

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