

7 Podcasts to Soothe Your Back-to-Normal Anxiety

These shows will help you to navigate whatever complex feelings you're having about the world reopening, and ease you back into society at your own pace.

We have collectively lived through a global trauma that's going to take years, maybe even decades, to process. With vaccination rates in the United States rising and infection rates plummeting, most of the Covid-19 restrictions we've become used to are disappearing, while all the forbidden fruits we've learned to live without — from indoor dining to air travel to large gatherings — are once again within our grasps.



Credit...Irene Rinaldi
By Emma Dibdin
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As exciting as this all feels, it also means back-to-normal anxiety is at an all-time high. After months of isolation and disconnection from our usual routines, months during which we've learned to see the outside world as inherently dangerous, it's only natural that the prospect of [picking up where we left off feels overwhelming](#).

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‘Sleep With Me’

[Pandemic insomnia is a thing](#), and back-to-normal anxiety may be exacerbating it. And while listening to an audiobook or podcast is a common home remedy for insomnia, it can backfire if whatever you’re listening to is too engaging. Enter Drew Ackerman’s innovative audio solution, “Sleep With Me,” which offers up nightly bedtime stories that are deliberately “lulling, droning and boring” enough to calm your racing thoughts. But Ackerman’s stories aren’t *quite* boring — they’re streams of consciousness, drifting off into tangents and logical eddies that recreate the way your brain works in the hypnagogic moments right between waking and sleeping. Close to a sleeping pill in audio form.

Starter episode: [“Llama Cat Dog Roommates”](#)

‘Armchair Explorer’

Most people’s worlds have become much smaller over the past 15 months, and now that travel restrictions are loosening, it will take a while to readjust into wanderlust mode. This inspiring storytelling series offers first-person narratives about adventures on the road (or at sea) from outdoorsy types of all stripes, whether professional mountaineers or regular listeners. Hosted by Aaron Millar, a British travel writer, “Armchair Explorer” is an ideal slice of escapism if travel is still a ways off, and handy for inspiration if you’re already planning your first post-pandemic getaway.

Starter episode: [“Signs of Life: A 53,000-mile Bike Ride Around The World”](#)

‘Terrible, Thanks for Asking’

Nora McInerny, the podcast host and author, became a reluctant grief expert in 2014, when she lost her baby, her father and her husband in the space of a few months. McInerny, who now wryly describes herself as a “notable widow,” channeled her sorrow into this compassionate, darkly hilarious podcast, where people share the unvarnished truth about their darkest moments. Recent interviewees have included a daughter who lost her father to amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, a mother whose son’s mental illness culminated in tragedy, and a 93-year-old concentration camp survivor. As dark as the subject matter gets, the show always has an undercurrent of hope — it’s an ideal companion as we all try to move on from the manifold losses of the past year.

Starter episode: [“That’s So Chad”](#)

'Radio Headspace'

Hundreds of meditation apps promise to deliver peace in the palm of your hand, and [Headspace is arguably the best](#). The soothing British voice of Andy Puddicombe, the company's co-founder, has become familiar to millions of users as the app's default deliverer of Zen, and in each bite-size episode of this podcast he expands on how mindfulness can help to combat anxiety and simplify daily life. Headspace Studios released a spinoff mini-series last year, "[The Yes Theory Podcast](#)," which explored the value of saying yes to discomfort and stepping outside your comfort zone. More recently, "Radio Headspace" has released episodes specifically geared toward navigating post-pandemic life.

Starter episode: "[The New Normal](#)"

U.F.Y.B. (Not its Actual Name)

If you've ever reflexively rolled your eyes at the concept of "life coaching," allow Kara Loewentheil to change your mind. A Harvard-educated former lawyer turned feminist life coach, Loewentheil is not selling self-empowerment clichés or woo-woo truisms. Instead, "Unf*ck Your Brain" offers no-nonsense insights about the ways your anxious brain might be sabotaging you, and actionable advice on how to choose different thoughts. There's a lightness of touch to Loewentheil's straight-talking version of mindfulness that makes it easy to absorb, and the vast library of back episodes means you're bound to find something that hits just right.

Starter episode: "[Saying No](#)"

'The Happiness Lab'

With so many trappings of normal life suddenly stripped away, this past year has forced a lot of people to redefine what happiness means to them, and it's worth holding onto some of those new priorities in the post-Covid world. In "The Happiness Lab," Dr. Laurie Santos, a professor at Yale, examines the pursuit of happiness through a science-based lens, and often incorporates history, too. Many recent episodes have focused on happiness lessons from the ancients, hitting up Aristotle, the Buddha and Confucius and extrapolating lessons about how to live a fulfilled life in the modern age. A consistently surprising, energizing listen that will teach you something about the world as well as your own brain.

Starter episode: "[Move More ... but for the Right Reasons](#)"

‘This Is Actually Happening’

This potent first-person series delivers a weekly episode in which an ordinary person details a life-changing and often traumatic event. Listening to this might sound like a counterintuitive way to combat anxiety — and it’s definitely advisable to heed the content warnings included in each episode’s show notes. But what comes through even the most harrowing episodes is the hardiness of the human spirit. After hearing people describe how they have not only lived through horror, but thrived in the face of it, it’s hard not to feel a little more resilient.

Starter episode: [“What If You Couldn’t Remember That Night?”](#)