

# OVERCOMING BOATING ANXIETY

## *14 Tips for Nervous Boaters*

Boating should be about relaxation, adventure, and enjoyment. But for some, the thought of being on a boat, whether as a captain or a passenger, brings a wave of anxiety. If you're a nervous boater, you're not alone. The good news? There are plenty of ways to overcome your fears, regain control, and start enjoying your time on the water. Let's look at what causes boating anxiety and, more importantly, how to conquer it.



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# Why Do Some People Feel Nervous on Boats?

Boating anxiety can stem from various sources. Understanding **the root cause of your fears** can help you address them directly. Here are some common reasons people feel uneasy on the water:

- **Lack of Experience** – fear of the unknown plays a significant role. If you haven't spent much time on a boat, everything—from the motion of the water to the sounds of the engine—can feel foreign and unsettling.
- **Fear of Losing Control** – some boaters worry about their ability to handle unexpected situations, such as rough weather, engine failure, or docking mishaps.
- **Motion Sickness** – if you've ever felt queasy, nauseous or dizzy on a boat, you might associate boating with discomfort, which can trigger anxiety before you even step aboard.
- **Bad Past Experiences** – a previous rough ride, seasickness, or witnessing a boating mishap can create a lasting fear.
- **Deep-Water Phobia** – some people feel uneasy about being in deep water, worrying about what's below the surface or possibly falling in.



Let's talk about how to overcome it.

## 14 Practical Steps to Tackle Boating Anxiety

### 1. **Start Small and Build Confidence**

If boating makes you nervous, don't jump into an all-day offshore adventure. Instead, start with short trips in calm waters. Stick to familiar areas where you can see land and gradually increase the duration and distance of your outings as you grow more comfortable.

### 2. **Learn the Basics**

Knowledge is power. Taking a boating safety course can boost your confidence and help you feel more in control. Learn how to operate a boat, understand navigation rules, and practice handling different situations, so you're prepared for whatever comes your way.



### 3. **Breathe Through It: Calming Techniques**

When you feel anxiety creeping in, breathing exercises can help calm your nerves:

- 4-7-8 Breathing– inhale through your nose for four seconds, hold your breath for seven seconds, and exhale slowly through your mouth for eight seconds. Repeat this cycle several times until you feel calmer.
- 4-4-4-4 Breathing or Box Breathing – inhale for four seconds, hold for four seconds, exhale for four seconds, and pause for four seconds before inhaling again. This method helps regulate your breathing and reduce stress.

### 4. **Sip Some Herbal Tea**

Certain herbal teas are known for their calming properties and can help ease boating anxiety. Try one of the following:

- Holy Basil (Tulsi) Tea helps lower cortisol (the stress hormone) and promotes relaxation. It also helps decrease fatigue.
- Chamomile Tea is well-known for its calming effects; it relaxes muscles and reduces stress. It can also relieve headaches.
- Ginger Tea soothes nausea and settles the stomach, making it great for motion sickness. Ginger chews also work well.
- Lavender Tea reduces stress and anxiety while promoting relaxation.
- Lemon Balm Tea is a natural mood booster that helps calm the nervous system.
- Peppermint Tea soothes digestion and reduces nervous tension.
- Ashwagandha Tea is an adaptogen that helps balance stress and anxiety.



### 5. **Use Distraction Techniques**

Focusing on anxiety makes it worse. Instead of fixating on your fears, distract yourself with engaging activities:

- Create a relaxing playlist of your favourite tunes to set a positive mood.
- Practice mindfulness and focus on the beauty around you—the sound of the waves, the fresh sea air, the warmth of the sun.
- Keep busy by giving yourself a task onboard, like helping with navigation, tying knots, or preparing snacks. Being involved helps shift your focus away from fear.





## 6. **Visualize a Successful Trip**

Before stepping onto the boat, close your eyes and picture yourself having a smooth, enjoyable trip. Visualization can help reframe your thoughts and reduce anxiety by creating a mental picture of success rather than fear.

## 7. **Use Anchoring (no pun intended) Techniques**

Anchoring is a mental trick that helps you associate a calming action with relaxation. For example, you might press your thumb and forefinger together while taking deep breaths. Over time, your brain will connect this physical action with a feeling of calm, helping you manage anxiety in stressful situations. You can start this at home and practice any time.

## 8. **Gradual Exposure Therapy**

If deep-water phobia is your issue, take it slowly:

- Simply stand on a dock and look at the water.
- Move onto a stationary boat tied to the dock.
- Take a short boat ride in calm conditions.
- Increase exposure as you gain confidence.
- On a sunny day, jump into the water with a life jacket to prove to yourself that you float!

## 9. **Choose the Right Boat and Conditions**

The type of boat and water conditions make a huge difference in comfort levels. If you're anxious, start on a stable boat in calm, protected waters. Avoid rough seas until you build confidence.

## 10. **Have a Plan**

Knowing you have a plan in case of emergencies can be incredibly reassuring. Before you set off, review safety procedures:

- Know where life jackets are stored or wear one!
- Learn how to use emergency communication devices, VHF, EPIRB and cellular.
- Have a plan for what to do in case of engine problems or bad weather.

## 11. **Boat With a Confident Boating Friend**

Having a calm, experienced boater with you can help ease nerves. Let them know how you're feeling so they can offer encouragement and support.

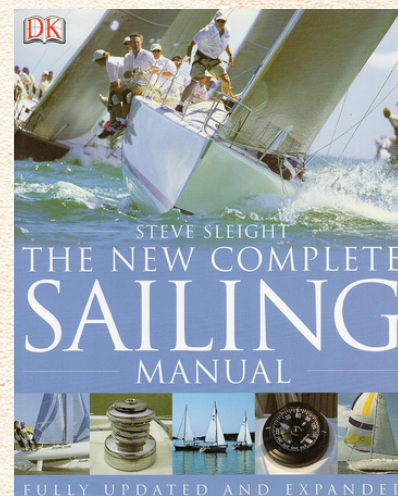
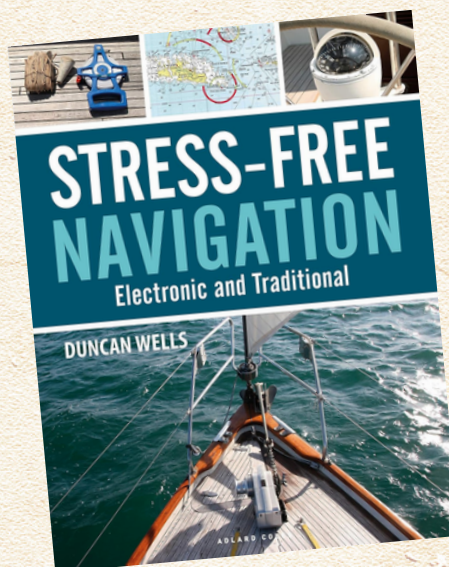
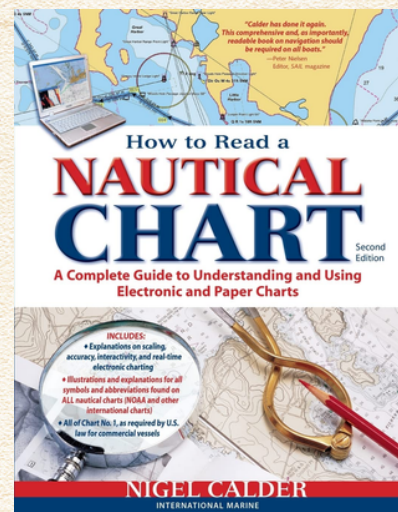
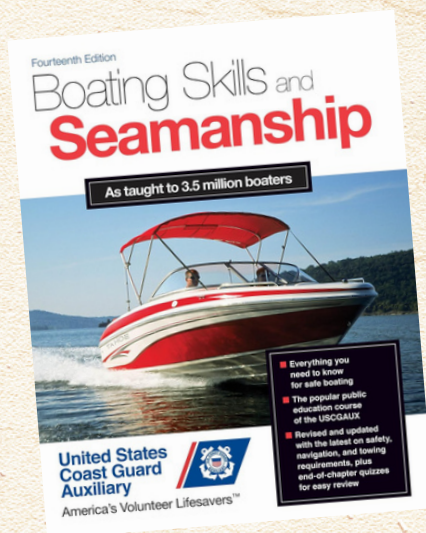




## 12. Read for Confidence

Books can be an excellent resource for learning and easing anxiety. Here are five great reads:

- *Chapman Piloting & Seamanship* by Charles B. Husick is a comprehensive guide covering all boating safety and navigation aspects.
- *Boating Skills and Seamanship* by the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary is an excellent book for beginners looking to build confidence.
- *The Complete Sailing Manual* by Steve Sleight, while sailing-focused, this book provides helpful knowledge applicable to all boaters.
- *How to Read a Nautical Chart* by Nigel Calder is perfect for those nervous about chart reading.
- *Stress-Free Motorboating* by Duncan Wells is packed with practical tips to make boating effortless and enjoyable.







**13.** If you're a nervous boater, the best way to swap fear for confidence is by having the right tools at your fingertips. Before you even untie from the dock, ensure your phone is charged and stocked with must-have safety apps to help you navigate, communicate, and stay informed on the water. Download and practice with them before you go.

**Weather to Boat** provides real-time weather forecasts, wave conditions, wind speeds, and safety recommendations so you can plan before you head out.

**MarineTraffic** uses AIS tracking to show nearby vessels, their speed, and course to maximize situational awareness.

**BoatUS App** is a boating emergency toolkit. It offers on-water towing assistance, real-time weather updates, and a GPS-based float plan so a friend can always find you.

**Navionics Boating App** is a favourite for navigational confidence, with detailed marine charts, tide data, sonar maps, and GPS route tracking to ensure you stay on course in real time. And you can share on Social Media!

**SafeSkipper** is for new and seasoned boaters; this app is packed with safety checklists, emergency procedures, and quick-reference guides for everything from engine failures and aids to navigation to distress signals.



Another great resource is **Live Online Webcams** so you can see what the water is **actually** doing before you go! Numerous website and YouTube channels offer a number of free options.



*There's An App  
For That!!*





## 14. Take a Power Squadron Course

If you are a new or nervous boater in Canada, the Canadian Power Squadron, now called CanBoat, offers a highly recommended course and one of the best ways to boost your confidence and knowledge on the water. This nationally recognized program covers everything from navigation and collision regulations to safety equipment, weather interpretation, and emergency procedures. Plus, completing the course earns you the Pleasure Craft Operator Card (PCOC), which is required to operate a boat in Canada.

It's like driver's ed—but for the water! 🚤🚦  
Find a course near you and get ready to boat with confidence.



## EMBRACE THE ADVENTURE

Fear shouldn't keep you from enjoying the water. You can transform boating anxiety into confidence with some preparation, relaxation techniques, and gradual exposure. Whether it's breathing exercises, a warm cup of herbal tea, or simply getting more experience, there's always a way to turn nervousness into excitement.

Boating is about freedom, relaxation, and adventure. The more time you spend on the water, the more comfortable you'll become. So, take a deep breath, embrace the journey, and enjoy the ride!

Do you have any go-to methods for calming boating nerves? Share your experiences in the comments!

