



Relaxation Techniques

Mindfulness Exercise

Mindfulness is the process of bringing one's attention to the present moment. This is a simple mindfulness technique.

- Choose an object (it can be anything) from your immediate environment
- Focus on watching it for a minute or two
- Don't do anything except notice the thing you are looking at
- Simply relax into a harmony for as long as your concentration allows
- Look at it as if you are seeing it for the first time
- Visually explore every aspect of its shape
- Allow yourself to connect with its energy and its role and purpose

Muscular Relaxation

Tense and relax different muscle groups in your body. As your body relaxes, so will your mind. You can combine deep breathing with progressive muscle relaxation for an additional level of stress relief.

Tense-Hold-Relax

- Right foot, then left foot
- Right calf, then left calf
- Right thigh, then left thigh
- Hips and buttocks
- Stomach
- Chest
- Back
- Right arm and hand, then left arm and hand
- Neck and shoulders
- Face

Deep Breathing Exercises

Breathing exercises help reduce feelings of arousal and physical tension. The key to deep breathing is to breathe deeply from the abdomen, getting as much fresh air as possible into your lungs. When you take deep breaths from the abdomen, rather than shallow breaths from your upper chest, you inhale more oxygen. The more oxygen you get, the less tense, short of breath, and anxious you feel.

Example 1:

- Sit in a comfortable position with your arms and legs uncrossed
- Inhale slowly through your nose or mouth (one-thousand one, one thousand, two, one-thousand three), and fill your lungs
- Silently and gently say to yourself, *"I'm filling my body with calm"*
- Exhale slowly through your mouth (one-thousand one, one-thousand two, one-thousand three), and comfortably empty your lungs
- Silently and gently say to yourself, *"I'm letting the tension drain away"*
- Repeat five times slowly

Example 2:

- Sit comfortably with your back straight. Put one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach
- Breathe in through your nose. The hand on your stomach should rise. The hand on your chest should move very little
- Exhale through your mouth, pushing out as much air as you can while contracting your abdominal muscles.
- The hand on your stomach should move in as you exhale, but your other hand should move very little
- Continue to breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth.
- Try to inhale enough so that your lower abdomen rises and falls. Count slowly as you exhale

Visualisation

Close your eyes and use your imagination to imagine that you are walking down a soft wide path towards the ocean. As you walk you feel calm and safe – breathing in and out – calmly and deeply.

You can hear the waves rolling onto the beach. You can smell the ocean. You can feel a beautiful cooling breeze on your face. As you continue along the path - breathing in and out – slowly and deeply –you feel the sand beneath your feet – it's soft and warm. The sun is shining and the sea is blue and glistening. The sound of the waves rolling onto the beach feels comforting and relaxing. And as you look out at the sea you can match your breathing to the pattern of the waves – slowly in and deeply out– relaxed and happy.

You can feel the sun's warmth filling the whole of your body as you gaze towards the water which is bright and blue and green. The beach is golden, long and wide and there is no-one here but you. This is your beach – your place – your time.

Breathing in, filling your body with warmth and relaxation and breathing out – letting go of any stress. As you continue to breathe slowly and deeply, lower yourself onto the sand. Sitting here quietly you can watch the waves lapping onto the beach – the water is clear and bright and as you watch you continue to feel the warm relaxing feeling flowing over you – and you feel safe and happy and content.

There is no-one here but you – this is your beach – this is your place – this is your time.

Sitting here in the warm, soft sand, soaking up the sunshine you feel strong and calm and you feel ready to return. Breathing in and out slowly and deeply.

Body focus

Take a deep breath and close your eyes for a few moments. Sense where your body is in contact with the environment around you (chair, floor etc.). Sense where your weight is resting. Now take another deep breath and move your body in some way to get more comfortable and relaxed. Are there any parts of your body that feel very tense or sore? If you find one, take a deep breath and try to imagine that place loosening up. Then gently and slowly move that part of the body just a little bit to let it loosen and relax.

Apple picker stretch

Imagine you are under the branches of an apple tree. Standing with both arms up in the air and gently bouncing on tip toes, reach up as high as you can and grab at the imaginary apples with one hand then the other. Then gently drop your hands and bend over towards the floor as far as you can with knees slightly bent. Then sway gently from side to side for a few moments before slowly rising up, one vertebra at a time, with the neck and head coming up very last. (Remember to keep breathing).

Further
resources for
anxiety and stress



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