



STRESS MANAGEMENT: TECHNIQUES FOR RELAXING THE MIND AND BODY

This technique relaxes the body by first contracting, and then releasing, each of the main muscle groups of the body. This point-counterpoint procedure helps you relax more deeply and quickly than just releasing the muscles. To do progressive relaxation you can create your own audiotape to help you go through all the muscle groups, or you can just learn the procedure from the table below and work through them from memory.

- Choose a place where you can lie down on your back and stretch out comfortably, such as a carpeted floor or an exercise mat.
- Inhale and tense each muscle group (hard but not to the point of cramping) for 5 to 10 seconds, then exhale and suddenly relax the muscle group completely. Give yourself 10 to 20 seconds to relax, and then do the next group.
- When you are finished with all the muscle groups, return to alertness by counting backwards slowly from 5 to 1.

Following are the muscle groups and how to tense them:

Muscle group	What to do
Wrists and forearms	Extend them and bend your hands back at the wrist.
Biceps and upper arms	Clench your hands into fists, bend your arms at the Elbows, and flex your biceps.
Shoulders	Shrug them (raise them to your ears).
Forehead	Wrinkle it into a deep frown.
Around the eyes and bridge of the	Close your eyes as tightly as you can. (Remove contact lenses or glasses before you start the
Checks and jaws	Smile as widely as you can.
Around the mouth	Press your lips together tightly.
Back of the neck	Press the back of your head against the floor
Front of the neck	Touch your chin to your chest. (Try to create tension in your neck and head).
Chest	Take a deep breath and hold it for 5 to 10 seconds.
Back	Arch your back up and away from the floor.
Stomach	Suck it into a tight knot.
Hips and buttocks	Press your buttocks together tightly.
Thighs	Clench your thighs together tightly.
Lower legs	Point your toes toward your face. Then point your toes away, and curl them downward at the same



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Breathing Exercises

Breathing exercises are one of the simplest ways to relax. This is partly because breathing slowly and rhythmically makes your body feel like it does when you are already relaxed, and this sends a message to your brain to calm down and relax. It also relaxes you by clearing the mind of other thoughts, as you focus on your breathing. Here are several different breathing exercises:

Belly Breathing: Belly breathing is quick and easy. It's a good one to start with.

- Sit in a comfortable position.
- Put one hand on your belly just below your ribs and the other hand on your chest.
- Take a deep breath in through your nose, and let your belly push your hand out. Your chest shouldn't move.
- Then exhale through your mouth, letting your belly hand go back in.
- Do these 5 to 10 times. Take your time with each breath.

4-7-8 Breathing: This exercise also uses belly breathing to help you relax. You can do this either sitting or lying down.

- To start, put one hand on your belly and the other on your chest as in the belly breathing exercise.
- Take a deep, slow breath from your belly, and silently count to 4 as you breathe in.
- Hold your breath while you silently count from 1 to 7.
- Breathe out slowly as you silently count from 1 to 8. Try to get all the air out of your lungs by the time you count to 8.
- Repeat 3 to 7 times or until you feel calm.

Morning Breathing: Try this exercise when you first get up in the morning to relieve muscle stiffness and clear clogged breathing passages. Then use it throughout the day to relieve back tension.

- From a standing position, bend forward from the waist with your knees slightly bent, letting your arms dangle close to the floor.
- As you inhale slowly and deeply, return to a standing position by slowly rolling up, lifting your head last.
- Hold your breath for just a few seconds in this standing position.
- Exhale slowly as you return to the position of bending forward from the waist.
- Repeat several times.



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Rolling Breathing

The object of rolling breathing is to develop full use of your lungs and to focus on the rhythm of your breathing. You can do it in any position. However, while you are learning, it is best to lie on your back with your knees bent.

- Put your left hand on your belly and your right hand on your chest. Notice how your hands move as you breathe in and out.

Practice filling your lower lungs by breathing so that your “belly” (left) hand goes up when you inhale and your “chest” (right) hand remains still. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Do these 8 to 10 times.

- When you have filled and emptied your lower lungs 8 to 10 times, add the second step to your breathing: Inhale first into your lower lungs as before, and then continue inhaling into your upper chest. As you do so, your right hand will rise, and your left hand will fall a little as your belly falls.
- As you exhale slowly through your mouth, make a quiet, whooshing sound as first your left hand and then your right hand fall. As you exhale, feel the tension leaving your body as you become more and more relaxed.
- Practice breathing in and out this way for 3 to 5 minutes. Notice that the movement of your belly and chest rises and falls like the motion of rolling waves.

Practice rolling breathing daily for several weeks until you can do it almost anywhere. You can use it as an instant relaxation tool anytime you need one.



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Mindful Meditation

There are a variety of kinds of meditation. One is called mindful meditation. It can help you relax because you're not worrying about what happened before or what may occur in the future. You are just being in the pristine present. The idea is to note what you experience without judging or trying to change it. After you practice this meditation a few times, you may find it easier to be mindful and relaxed in everyday life, even when not meditating.

Here is how it works:

- Sit in a comfortable position, either in a chair or on the floor, or you can lie down. You can either close your eyes or look down, keeping your gaze a few inches in front of you on the floor.
- Pay attention to your breathing. This is a good way to focus your attention on what is happening right now. Don't try to change your breathing. Just notice how it feels in your lungs and chest.
- If your mind wanders, don't worry about it. Just notice your thoughts and then let them go and bring your focus back to the present moment and your breathing. You may do this repeatedly during a meditation session. That's okay.
- During your meditation, you may feel certain emotions, such as anger, impatience, sadness, or happiness. Don't try to hold on to or get rid of these feelings. They are part of your experience of the present moment.
- Keeping your attention on your breathing will help you stay focused in the here and now, and not get lost in thoughts of other places. For example, if you feel impatient to finish the meditation so you can start the laundry, see if you can focus on the feeling of the impatience rather than thoughts of the laundry. Where do you feel the impatience in your body? Does it feel tight? Does it affect your breathing?

Yoga

People have practiced yoga for thousands of years in India. It is based on the idea that the mind and body are "one." The goals of yoga include improved physical and mental health, as well as "oneness" with a higher being, or some form of higher awareness.

Yoga combines breathing, meditation, and exercises called postures or poses. There are lots of yoga poses you can learn to do to help you relax. Seek a reputable instructor if you would like to try it.



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Guided Imagery

Guided imagery is a method in which you use your imagination to direct your thoughts to a peaceful, relaxing place. Because of the way the mind and body are connected, when you use your senses to imagine a scene, you feel and react as if you were there. For example, if you are imagining a meadow in the morning, you might feel the crisp, cool morning air. As the sun rises, you feel the warmth on your face. You see the dew sparkling in the sunlight, hear birds chirping, and smell the wildflowers.

As you go through this imagery, your mind and body respond as if it was real—they relax.

To try guided imagery, follow these steps:

- Find a comfortable place to sit or lie down. Close your eyes.
- Start by taking a few deep breaths to help you relax.
- Picture a setting that is calm and peaceful. This could be a beach, a mountain setting, a meadow, or any other that is pleasing to you.
- Imagine your scene and try to add some detail. For example, is there a breeze? What does the sky look like? Is it clear, or are there clouds?
- It often helps to add a path to your scene. For example, as you enter the meadow, imagine a path leading you through the tall grass to the trees on the other side. As you follow the path farther into the meadow you feel more and more relaxed.
- When you are deep in your scene and are feeling relaxed, take a few minutes to breathe slowly and feel the calm.
- When you are ready, slowly take yourself out of the scene back to the present. Tell yourself that you will feel relaxed and refreshed and will bring that sense of calm with you.
- Count to 3 and open your eyes.

It may help to have an audio recording to follow. You can make one of your own voice, buy one, or find one on the Internet.



Wheeler

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE
PROGRAM (EAP)

RESOURCES

Stress and Coping-Self Test

http://livewellsiouxfalls.org/images/uploads/main/Stress_and_Coping_Self_Test.pdf

Keys to Handling Life Transitions – Psychology Today

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/fixing-families/201307/keys-handling-lifes-transitions>

Resilience: Build Skills to Endure Hardship – Mayo Clinic

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/resilience-training/in-depth/resilience/art-20046311>

Work-life Balance: Tips to Reclaim Control – Mayo Clinic

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/work-life-balance/art-20048134>

Workplace Stress – APA

<http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/workplace-stress.aspx>

Job Stress - APA

<http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/job-stress.aspx>

Top Five Stress Management Techniques

<https://www.silvercloudhealth.com/blog/article/top-5-stress-management-techniques>

Effective Stress Management

<http://www.workstress.net/sites/default/files/effective-stress-management-personal-guide-part1.pdf>

How to Do Progressive Muscle Relaxation

<https://www.anxietybc.com/sites/default/files/MuscleRelaxation.pdf>

Getting Started With Mindfulness

<https://www.mindful.org/meditation/mindfulness-getting-started/>