

Relaxation Techniques

Relaxation is needed for good health. It gives your body and mind a chance to rest and recover from high-stress situations. Your heart rate slows down, blood pressure decreases and muscles relax. Relaxation exercises can improve anxiety, pain, fatigue and sleep.

You can try different ways to relax. Everyone experiences stress differently, so what relaxes you may not relax someone else. Try some of the following to find what works best for you.

Quick and Easy Relaxation

Relaxation does not always require a practiced technique. Opportunities exist every day to relax. Try a few of these:

- Take a hot bath.
- Curl up and read a good book.
- Get a massage.
- Watch a favorite TV show.
- Go for a walk.
- Play with a pet.
- Listen to your favorite music.
- Do some arts or crafts.
- Lie outside and watch the clouds.
- Chat with a positive friend or family member.

The 6-Second Mini-Relaxation

When a stressful situation occurs, practice this mini-relaxation technique:

1. Become aware of what is annoying you. Is it the ringing telephone or an urge to smoke? Whatever it is, decide that you need to relax and start the technique.
2. Silently say the phrase “alert mind, calm body” to yourself. Continue to repeat this phrase.
3. Smile inwardly with your eyes and your mouth. An inward smile is more of a feeling than an expression someone may notice. This stops the muscles in your face from tightening up in an angry expression.
4. Inhale slowly while you count to 3. Imagine the breath comes from the bottom of your feet.
5. Exhale slowly. Imagine your breath moving back down your legs and out through your feet. Let your jaw and shoulder muscles go limp.

Be sure to practice this technique several times a day and when a stressful moment occurs. After a few months, it becomes an automatic response to stress.

Deep Breathing

One of the easiest relaxation techniques is deep breathing. This takes only a few moments and you can use it wherever you are.

In order to breathe deeply, breathe from your abdomen (stomach) and not from your chest. To find out if you are breathing from your abdomen or chest, place one hand on your chest and one hand on your belly button. Take a normal breath. If the hand on your chest rises the most, you are breathing from your chest. If the hand on your belly button rises the most, you are breathing from your abdomen.

Breathe in a slow, controlled manner to relax your body. Follow the steps below to practice deep breathing.

1. Get into a comfortable position and close your eyes. Lie down on your back with your knees bent or sit in a chair. Loosen your belt or any tight clothing.
2. Place your hands over your belly button.
3. Breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose, filling your abdomen with air. Your hands on your belly button should rise.
4. Let all the air out slowly through your nose or mouth. Your hands on your belly button should lower as you breathe out.
5. Continue to breathe in and out with long, slow, deep breaths. Focus on the sound and feel of your breathing. Notice you become more relaxed.

*If you feel lightheaded or dizzy, you may be breathing too quickly. Just focus on slowing down your breathing.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive muscle relaxation teaches the difference between how it feels when your muscles are tense and when they are relaxed. When your muscles are relaxed, your mind and body will be relaxed.

You should tense and relax muscle groups one at a time. When you tense your muscles, do not tense too tightly because this may cause cramping. Follow the instructions below. Tense and relax your muscles in this order:

Patient Education

1. Hands and arms
2. Head and face
3. Chest, back and shoulders
4. Abdomen and buttocks
5. Legs and feet

To begin, find a quiet place where you will not be interrupted. Loosen any tight clothing and untie your shoes. Sit in a comfortable chair that supports your head. Place both feet flat on the floor.

1. Tense all your muscles in the first muscle group – hands and arms. Concentrate on what the tension feels like. Keep your muscles tense for about 5 seconds.
2. Breathe in deeply from your abdomen.
3. As you breathe out, immediately let go of the tension in the muscles of your hands and arms. Let your muscles go completely limp and relaxed.
4. Repeat the steps above 2 times or until they feel relaxed. Then, move on to the next muscle group – head and face.
5. Once you have gone through the steps to tense and relax all of the muscle groups, continue your deep breathing. Enjoy the feeling of relaxation throughout your whole body.

Practice progressive muscle relaxation every day. Be patient. It may be hard at first, but with practice, you are able to quickly relax the muscles in your body.

Meditation

Meditation calms your mind and body. It helps focus your attention and concentration. It also clears your mind of unwanted thoughts and feelings. This can lead to a higher level of joy and awareness in life.

There are 2 main types of meditation:

- **Concentration:** Focus your mind by concentrating on a single object. This calms your mind when it is jumping from one thought to another.
- **Mindfulness:** Take a non-judgmental view of the thoughts that go through your mind. Allow them to come and go without concentrating on them.



Concentration

To practice concentration meditation, find a quiet place. Sit in a comfortable chair and close your eyes.

- Relax your muscles and breathe in and out, slowly and naturally.
- Mentally focus on an object, such as your breathing, a word, phrase, image or prayer. When starting out, choose a word or phrase, such as “peace” or “one.”
- Each time you breathe out, say the word or phrase.

Don’t be upset if you cannot focus on the object for more than a few seconds. This is normal. As thoughts run through your mind, simply observe them and then return your focus to the object. With practice, you will gain more control.

Practice meditation one time a day for about 10 to 20 minutes. As you learn meditation, try to focus on different objects to find the one that works best for you. Some people find it easier to focus their minds by looking at a picture, rather than saying a word.

Mindfulness

Often in life, people think about the past or the future. Their mind jumps from one thought to another. Mindfulness is about keeping your attention on the present moment, without judgement. The purpose of mindfulness is to take you off “autopilot” and become more fully aware of the present.

By simply observing what is going on around you, with no intention of changing or acting on it, you are training your mind to be calm and aware. Observe and accept life in this way, even with its frustrations and disappointments. Aim to become more calm, clear and compassionate in your thoughts and actions.

Try the following exercise to learn how to use mindfulness in your everyday life. Start by sitting in a comfortable place.

1. Concentrate on a single thing, such as your breathing. Focus on the feeling of the air as it passes in and out of your nose with each breath. Do not try to control your breathing by speeding it up or slowing it down. Just observe it as it is.
2. Your mind will quickly drift off to thinking about something else. When this happens, observe where your thoughts went. Was it a memory, a worry about the future or a feeling of impatience? Then return your attention to your breathing.

3. Pay attention to what your body experiences in the present moment. What do you hear, smell, taste? Feel your body against the chair. Use your senses to help bring you into your body in the present moment.
4. Each time a thought or feeling comes to mind, observe what it is, then return to your breathing. Don't judge or act on the thought or feeling. Practice mindfulness, breath by breath.

Start out practicing this exercise for 5 minutes. As you become better able to focus on the present, practice it for 10 or 20 minutes.

Once you learn the skill of mindfulness, it is easy to make this part of your daily life. Focus on other things rather than your breathing. When you go for a walk, focus on the way your legs and feet move and how they feel against the ground. Whenever your mind drifts off, observe the thoughts and then return your focus to walking. Apply mindfulness to many activities in life, such as eating, showering, running errands or playing with children. Over time, mindfulness becomes a way of life, as you learn to become more fully aware of the present.

Imagery

Pleasant Imagery

Pleasant imagery uses your mind to recreate and enjoy a situation or environment that you find relaxing. Imagine yourself in a pleasant or calming setting, such as a favorite vacation spot or with someone whose company you enjoy. It is like focused daydreaming and can be especially helpful for people with vivid imaginations. It is limited only by your creativity.

Use all of your senses. For example, imagine a day at the beach – the sound of the waves, the smell of the ocean, the taste of a cool glass of lemonade, the warmth of the sun and so on.

You can also use imagery along with deep breathing. As you practice deep breathing, use calming mental images to relax further. Imagine that each breath has a calming effect as it goes throughout your body. For example, on a hot sunny day, imagine cool refreshing breaths.

Behavioral Rehearsal Imagery

Behavioral rehearsal imagery is when you rehearse for a situation. For example, if you have questions about your treatment and are nervous about asking your doctor, write down the questions you have and practice asking them in your mind or with a friend. When you rehearse a situation, you mentally prepare what you will do and say, feeling more in control and more confident. It also reduces stress so that you stay relaxed in stressful situations.

Patient Education



Resources

Baptist Behavioral Health

Baptist MD Anderson Cancer Center, 904-202-7300. Contact your clinic for any referral needs to Baptist Behavioral Health.

Integrative Medicine Center:

The Integrative Medicine Center aims to enhance cancer care and quality of life. Programs are open to anyone touched by cancer, their family members and caregivers. You are welcome even if you are not an MD Anderson patient. Approaches focus on the mind, body and spirit. Get health advice about how to pursue an integrative approach to cancer care. Join a free group program, such as meditation, yoga, music therapy and more. Massage and acupuncture also are available for a small fee.

For more information about the Integrative Medicine Center, call 713-794-4700. Some of these services are also available in the Jacksonville, Florida area. Please reach out to your physician or clinic team at Baptist MD Anderson Cancer Center at 904-202-7300

The Learning Center:

The Learning Center is a patient education library. We provide current and reliable information on cancer prevention, treatment, coping and general health.

- Theodore N. Law Learning Center, Main Building, Floor 4, 713-745-8063
- Levit Family Learning Center, Mays Clinic, Floor 2, 713-563-8010
- Holden Foundation Learning Center, Jesse H. Jones Rotary House International, 713-745-0007