



# Relaxation Workbook

Managing stress and pain  
through relaxation



Intermountain  
Children's Health

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## Introduction

Relaxation — in the simplest terms — is feeling calm. Learning how to relax takes practice, but provides both mental and physical comfort.

Using the lessons in this book, you can teach yourself or your child to let go of pain-related stress and find peace in your healing journey.

Our team is here to help. Don't be afraid to ask questions or to ask for help when you need it. Our greatest concern is your well-being.

Sincerely,

Your Care Team





# Relaxation

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Relaxation skills are ways to handle physical and emotional stress. You'll learn different exercises to help relax when your body or mind is feeling tight or uncomfortable. They also help with uncomfortable body sensations, including pain.

## To get the best results:

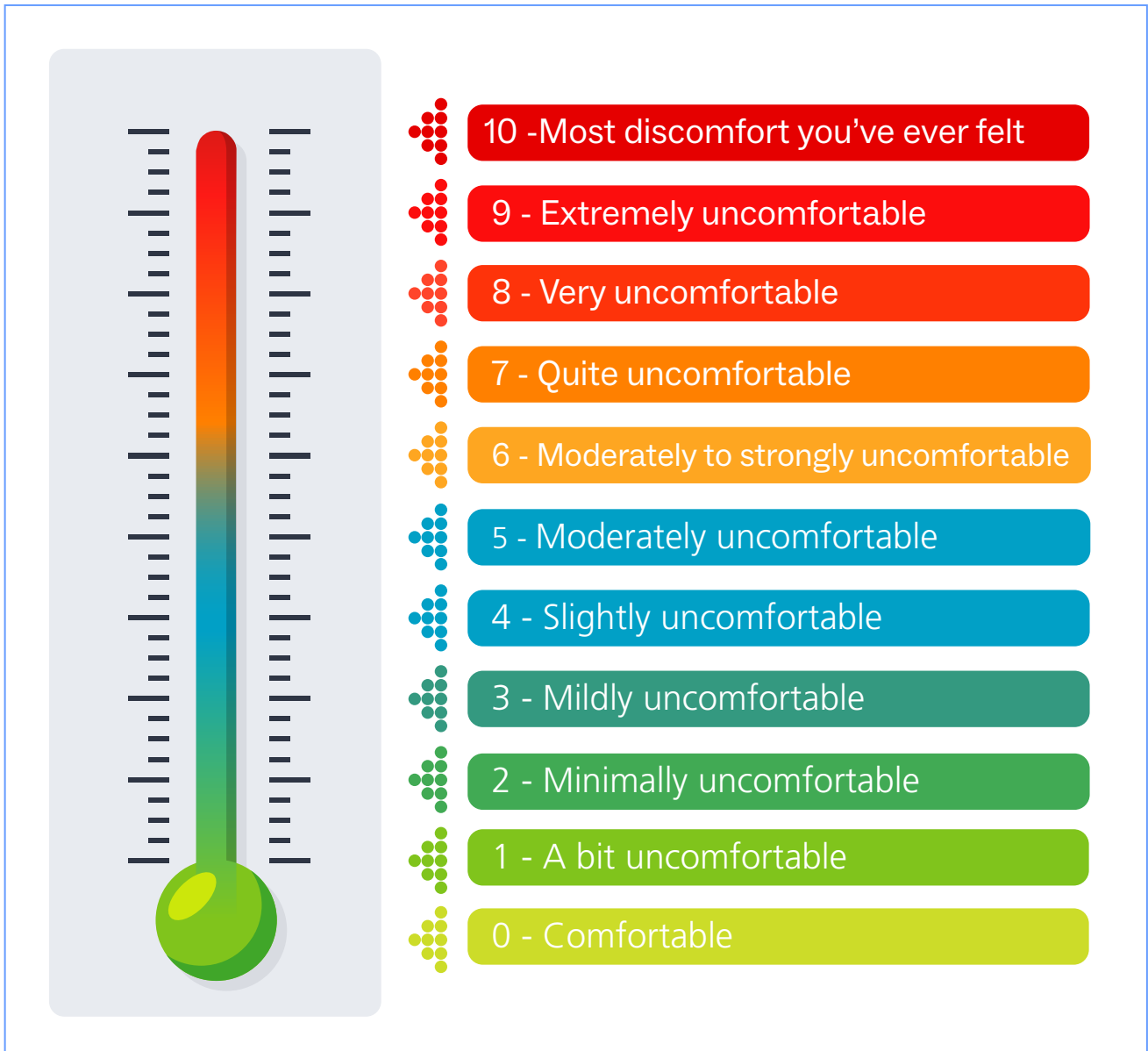
- Follow the directions closely when doing the exercises, even if they seem kind of silly.
- Practice regularly so you get used to the exercises and become more relaxed.
- Pay attention to your muscles, which feel different when they are tight instead of loose and relaxed.

Try these exercises at the hospital, at home, or at school, both alone or with someone else. If you feel unsure, don't be afraid to ask for help. We are here to support you and your family through this journey.



## How do I know if I'm uncomfortable?

Before and after each exercise, rate your distress or discomfort on a scale from 1 to 10 using the distress thermometer below. Notice how your level of distress and fear changes over time and in different situations.



# Breathing

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Everyone knows how to breathe, right? Well, yes and no. Thoughtful, targeted breathing is a proven way to help your body relax and feel more comfortable. Thoughtful, targeted breathing also helps your lungs get stronger and make it easier to breathe. The breathing practices described in this section are called belly breathing, focused breathing, paced breathing, and square breathing.

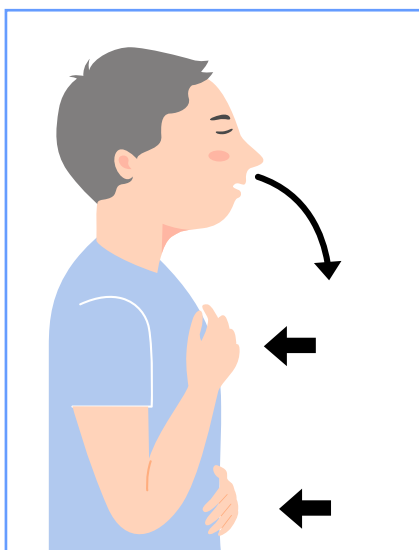
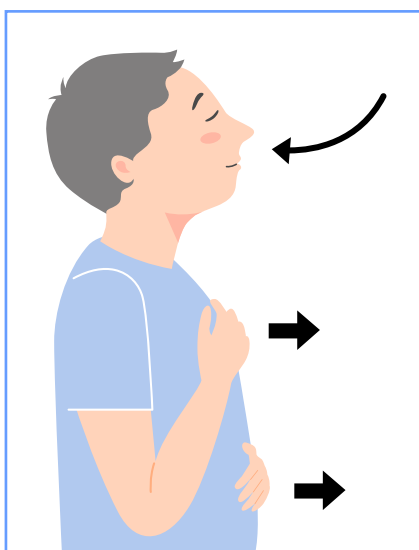
## Belly breathing

Belly breathing is also called **diaphragmatic** [die-uh-frah-MAT-tik] breathing. It can help strengthen your **diaphragm** [DIE-uh fram], the large muscle at the base of the lungs that moves them when you breathe. Belly breathing will help you learn to use your diaphragm instead of your upper chest muscles. This can help you relax and breathe more easily.

Belly breathing does not take the place of medicines or other treatments, but it can help you breathe more easily in certain situations.

### How do I practice belly breathing?

- Relax your neck and shoulder muscles.
- Sit or lie down in a comfortable position.
- Put one hand on your upper chest and the other hand just above your waistline to feel the diaphragm move.
- Take a normal breath in through your nose and feel the hand on your stomach move outward. The hand on your chest should not move.
- Breathe out slowly and gently through your mouth. Let the hand on your stomach move inward as you breathe out.
- Exhale at least twice as long as you inhale. For example, count to 2 as you take air in. Then, count to 4 as you breathe out.



## What is focused breathing?

Focused breathing is a technique that helps you focus only on breathing in and out. It can help when you're feeling stressed or uncomfortable. You can also practice focused breathing during meditation or while imagining a new scene (imagery).

## How do I practice focused breathing?

- Sit or lie down in a comfortable place.
- Set a timer for 5 to 10 minutes.
- Put your hands on your stomach or chest. Notice how your hands rise and fall as you breathe in and out. If you are lying down, you might notice that your hands rise more on your belly than on your chest.
- Breathe in through your nose like you are smelling a flower. Notice how your breath feels in your chest and belly.
- Breathe out like you are blowing out birthday candles. Each time you breathe out, notice that your body relaxes a little more.

## What is paced breathing?

Paced breathing is a way to help you take slow, deep breaths using your diaphragm. This can help you relax and give you a sense of control. You can “see” paced breathing as slowly blowing bubbles, because it uses the same type of breathing.

## How do I practice paced breathing?

- Sit or lie down in a comfortable, quiet space.
- Close your eyes and listen to the ticking sound of a clock, metronome, or another repetitive sound.
- Think about how you breathe in and breathe out.
- Notice how the rhythm of your breathing meshes with the sound you are listening to.
- Focus on this rhythm as you continue to breathe in and out.

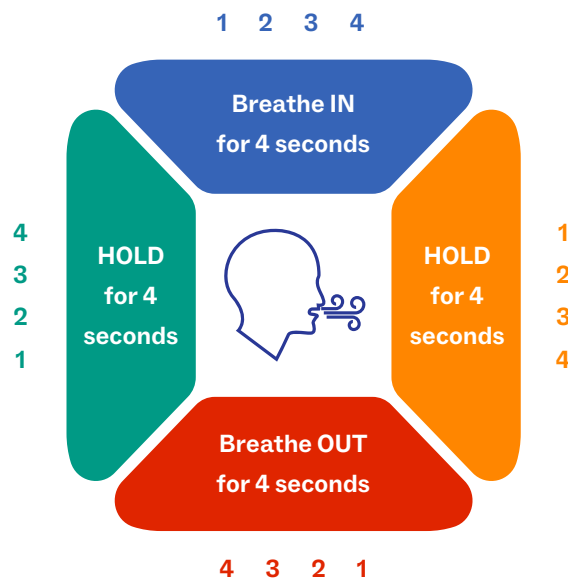


## What is square breathing?

Square breathing is a way to control your breathing with counts of 4. It can help you calm down and relieve stress. You can also use square breathing with meditation by visualizing a four-sided object, like a window or picture frame.

## How do I practice square breathing?

- Sit or lie down in a comfortable position.
- Set a timer for 5 to 10 minutes.
- While counting to 4, breathe in through your nose.
- Hold your breath while counting to 4.
- Breathe out through your mouth while counting to 4.
- Pause for 4 counts.
- As you breathe, imagine drawing a square in the air with your finger.



## Making it easier

To make these breathing techniques easier:

- Practice when you aren't stressed or in a lot of pain.
- Do the exercises daily for about 5 to 10 minutes at a time.
- Find a quiet place where you can sit or lie down comfortably with your eyes closed and you won't be interrupted.
- Practice at least one technique while lying on your bed before falling asleep.

### Notes

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# Imagery

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Imagery is when you use the power of your imagination to “be” somewhere else or be “doing” something you really enjoy. When imagining a relaxing place or thinking relaxing thoughts, your body can feel more comfortable.

## How do I pick the right imagery?

Everyone has a different idea of what is relaxing. To create an image that will help you relax:

- **Consider your interests.** Do you prefer to be outside or inside? Are you social and active? Do you like to be alone?
- **Think about your favorite place.** Visualizing a vacation spot or a cozy space in your home can help you relax. Make sure this is a safe, comfortable place.
- **Decide whether to include action.** You may find an active scene where you’re playing sports or running more calming. This scene may also make you excited instead of relaxed.
- **Include all five senses.** Think about what you see, hear, feel, smell, and taste while you are imagining your special place.
- **Write down your scene** or use one of the examples in this workbook. You may type it so it’s easier to read.
- **Read the scene or have someone help you memorize it.** It may be helpful to read the scene each time, or you can try to remember it after reading it a few times. You can also record yourself or a parent reading the scene and play it back when you need to relax.

## What are some imagery examples I can use?

Check out the next page to get some ideas. You can also create your own!



## Beach scene

You are in a reclining chair on a beautiful beach. You can hear the waves crashing against the sand, seagulls crying, and people splashing in the water. You feel the sand beneath your feet, the warmth of the sun, and a gentle breeze on your skin. When you look around, you see beautiful, white sand stretching for miles in either direction. You see an endless blue sky over the blue-green ocean. You take in a deep breath and smell the salt in the air. You can even taste the salt in the air. You close your eyes and take in the warmth of the sun and the sounds of the ocean. You feel relaxed and comfortable.



## Mountain scene

You are sitting on the porch of a log cabin near the mountains. When you look around, you can see snow on the tops of the peaks, tall green trees, and a few deer grazing in the meadow. A gentle cool breeze tickles your hair. You can feel the smooth boards beneath your feet. You smell meadow flowers, sage, and pine trees as you take a deep breath. You can hear a stream trickling nearby and the gentle creak of your chair on the porch. You taste warm homemade cookies and take a sip of rich hot chocolate. Everything around you is peaceful and quiet.



## Baseball scene

You are in the middle of a baseball game. You can hear your friends cheering your name as you take the bat and step up to home plate. When you look around, you see the bleachers packed with people and the glowing scoreboard that shows both teams are tied. You smell corndogs, popcorn, and freshly cut grass. You can feel the weight of the bat in your hands. The pitcher blows a bubble with their chewing gum and throws the ball. As if in slow motion, you feel your bat connect with the baseball and hear a loud TING as the ball flies over the field. You drop the bat and run to first base, then second, tasting a bit of dirt in your mouth as you dash to third base. You sprint to home base just as the pitcher throws the baseball to the catcher. You're safe — and your home run just won the game!



## Creating imagery

In the space below, create a relaxing scene with as much detail as possible.  
Where are you? Is it warm or cool? Sunny or cloudy? Calm or windy? Day or night?

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Describe what you're doing. Are you alone or with others?  
Are you moving quickly or slowly?

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Describe all the things you see.

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Describe all the things you hear.

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Describe all the things you smell.

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## Creating imagery *(continued)*

Describe all the things you taste.

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Describe all the things you feel.

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# Thought Replacement

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Thought-replacement is a series of techniques that help you replace negative or unhelpful thoughts with positive ones. By practicing thought-replacement techniques, you can change the way you think and begin to feel better.

## What thought-replacement techniques can I use?

One thought-replacement technique that may help is called **“changing the channel in your brain.”** It uses thought-stopping and replacement thoughts to help you feel better.

When a TV show you don’t like comes on, do you have to keep watching it? No, you can switch to a show you like better. The thoughts in your brain are like that too. When you get stuck on a negative thought — “This hurts so much. It’s never going to go away, and I can’t deal with this” — you have the power to switch to a helpful thought. It takes practice, but you can do it.

You can also create a positive statement to repeat to yourself when a bad thought comes to mind. You might say:

- “I can handle this.”
- “I can do hard things.”
- “I have coped with this before.”



## How do I practice thought replacement?

- Sit or lie down in a quiet place and close your eyes.
- Notice when you have a thought that worries or upsets you or makes you feel worse. When you catch one, tell yourself, “That’s a negative thought.”
- After you’ve caught your negative thought, imagine yourself using a remote to change to a positive thought.
- Think about the thought you want to hold in your mind. Picture a good memory that makes you laugh or feel proud or happy. Build all the details so it feels like you’re really there. Or think of something in the future you’re looking forward to. Picture what it will look or feel like when you’re doing that thing. Focus on all the details, like you’re making a movie in your mind.
- Let your body relax as you focus on the new thought.
- Practice changing to a new thought in your brain whenever you catch your mind thinking unhelpful thoughts. Have a few different “shows” or memories you enjoy so you always have something good to switch over to when you need it.



# Counterstimulation

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Counterstimulation is a way to send a sensory signal to the brain to compete with uncomfortable ones. To do this, you block these signals by sending another loud signal to the brain using one of the 5 senses (touch, sight, sound, smell, and taste). It is important to know that the **stronger** and **simpler** a signal is, the more it will help block another signal.

## What are some examples of counterstimulation techniques?

### Touch

- Focus on how your skin feels, using temperature or pressure.
- Apply ice or heat packs.
- Use heavy objects like a weighted blanket.
- Play with something sticky or messy, like clay or dough.
- Massage or push a pressure point with your fingers.
- Rub your hands together until you can feel heat.

### Sight

- Focus on a single object you can see, using color or texture.
- Look at a picture book or photo.
- Get a fish tank or lava lamp.
- Watch your pets play.
- Notice something outdoors (ocean, trees, sky, mountains).

### Sound

- Focus on a single sound or many sounds.
- Play music or listen to live instruments or playlists.
- Listen to the sounds around you.
- Use a fan, furnace, or vacuum for background noises.
- Turn on a clock, metronome, or other paced sound.

### Smell

- Focus on a smell and breathe it in.
- Smell citrus fruits, like lemons or oranges.
- Use essential oil concentrates (peppermint, spearmint, mandarin, and lavender).
- Apply scented muscle rubs or lotions.

### Taste

- Focus on a taste and feel it on your tongue.
- Suck on hard candies or mints (butterscotch, peppermint, or cinnamon).
- Let chocolate melt on your tongue.
- Try frozen or cold fruit, ice water, or ice cream.
- Eat tart or sour foods like lemons, limes, and apples.

## How can I use counterstimulation?

To create counterstimulation signals:

- Set a timer for 3 to 5 minutes.
- Practice the signals several times a day.
- Close your eyes.

# Progressive Muscle Relaxation

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Relaxing muscles can help relieve stress and tension, feel more comfortable, and even sleep better. To prepare for muscle relaxation exercises:

- Make sure you have at least 15 minutes to practice so you don't feel rushed.
- Sit or lie down comfortably.
- Find a quiet place where no one will disturb you.
- Choose a time when you're calm so it's easier to practice. You can do the exercises anytime, not just when you feel uncomfortable.
- Be ready to try each exercise for 10 seconds and then relax for 20 seconds.
- Think about tightening your muscles and relaxing them.

## Muscle relaxation exercises for kids 2 to 10 years old

- **Hands and arms:** Pretend you are squeezing a whole lemon in your left hand. Squeeze it hard. Try to squeeze all the juice out. Feel the tightness in your hand and arm as you squeeze. Now let go of the lemon and relax. Notice how much better your hand and arm feel when they are relaxed. Repeat with the other hand.
- **Arms and shoulders:** Pretend you are a lazy kitten who wants to stretch. Stretch your arms way out in front of you. Raise them up as high as you can over your head and lean way back. Feel the stretch in your arms and shoulders. Now really stretch, as far as you can. Let your arms fall down to your sides. Start the stretch again.
- **Shoulders and neck:** Pretend you are a turtle, sitting in the sun. It's nice and warm and quiet. Uh-oh. You hear something. You'd better pull your head into your shell just to be safe. Pull your shoulders way up to your ears, and push your head down to your chest. Stay in your shell, nice and snug. Now stretch back out into the relaxing sunlight. Pretend you hear another noise, and practice getting back into your shell again.



## Muscle relaxation exercises for kids 2 to 10 years old *(continued)*

- **Jaw:** You have a huge piece of bubble gum in your mouth, and it's really hard to chew. Bite down on it hard! Let your neck muscles help you. Now just relax and let your mouth hang loose. Notice how good it feels to just let your mouth drop. Take another bite. Repeat.
- **Face and nose:** Here comes a pesky fly, landing right on your nose. Try to get him off without using your hands. Wrinkle up your nose. Make as many wrinkles as you can. Scrunch your nose right up. Good, he is going away! You can relax your nose. Oops, he is coming back again. Repeat.
- **Stomach:** Here comes a cute baby elephant. He's not watching where he is going. He doesn't see you relaxing there, and he's going to step on your stomach. Don't move, just get ready for him. Make your stomach very hard. Tighten up your belly really, really tight. Hold it. Whew! Looks like he missed you, so you can let your belly relax now. Make it really soft. That feels so much better. Get ready, here he comes again! Repeat.
- **Legs and feet:** Pretend you are barefoot and your feet are in a big, fat pot of mud. Squish your toes down deep in the mud. Try to stretch your feet all the way to the bottom of the bucket. Spread out your toes and feel the mud squish between them. Really stretch! Now just let them relax, and let your toes go loose. Feel how nice that is. Repeat.



## Muscle relaxation exercises for kids 11 to 18 years old

Read and do the following muscle relaxation exercises. Tighten (or think about tightening) muscles for 10 seconds and then relax for 20 seconds before repeating or going to the next exercise.

- **Upper and lower arms:** Bring both arms to your shoulders, as if making a muscle. Make a fist with each hand.
- **Legs and thighs:** Straighten your legs and raise your feet off the ground. Flex your toes towards your knees, tensing the muscles in your calves and thighs.
- **Shoulders:** Push your shoulders up towards your ears, as if shrugging your shoulders.
- **Neck:** Press your head tightly backward against the chair, couch, or bed. You might also try rolling your head around on your neck slowly in one direction and then the next direction. Pay attention to any tension in either direction.
- **Lips:** Press your lips together tightly, as if you've just put lip balm on. You might also try puckering your lips, like a kiss.
- **Jaw:** Clench your teeth (not too tightly) or open your mouth wide.
- **Eyes:** Close your eyes somewhat tightly.
- **Forehead:** Raise your eyebrows upward so your forehead wrinkles.

Repeat the exercise for each muscle group at least once. You can repeat the exercises several times for muscles that are harder to relax.

## How can I make muscle relaxation exercises easier?

The following tips can make it easier to do these exercises:

- Practice several times a day or at night before falling asleep. The exercises will become easier with time.
- Try the exercises when you're feeling OK. You may begin doing the exercises automatically after a while when you're stressed or feeling pain.
- Let go of tension when you're relaxing your muscles. You can also visualize your muscles as warm or heavy.











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