



Relaxation workbook

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Learning techniques to help you relax







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Contents

Relaxation

Breathing techniques

Imagery techniques

Thought-replacement techniques

Counterstimulation techniques: Using sensory distraction

Progressive muscle relaxation

Relaxation

Relaxation skills are ways to handle physical and emotional stress. This book provides different exercises to help you relax when your body or mind is feeling tight or uncomfortable. They also help you get rid of the “butterflies-in-the-stomach” feelings.


To get the best results:

- Find a quiet place and even lie down or close your eyes.
- Follow the directions closely when doing the strategies, even if they seem kind of silly.
- Practice regularly so you get used to the exercises and become more relaxed.
- Pay attention to your body’s temperature, muscles, and mind, which feel different when they are tight instead of loose and relaxed.
- Check your body for muscle tension before and after each exercise, starting at the feet and working up to the legs, stomach, chest, arms, and face.
- Try these strategies at the hospital and at home, both alone or with someone else.



How do I know if I'm uncomfortable?

Before and after each exercise, use the distress thermometer to rate your discomfort on a scale from 0–10. Notice how your level of comfort changes over time and in different situations.



The image shows a vertical thermometer with a bulb at the bottom. The bulb is green and yellow. The liquid inside the tube has a color gradient: green at the bottom, transitioning through yellow, orange, and red to a dark red at the top. The thermometer has tick marks on both sides. To the right of the thermometer is a legend with ten colored bars, each with a cluster of dots to its left. The bars are numbered 0 to 10, with corresponding descriptions of discomfort levels.

| Number | Description |
|--------|--------------------------------------|
| 10 | Highest discomfort you've ever felt |
| 9 | Extremely uncomfortable |
| 8 | Very uncomfortable |
| 7 | Quite uncomfortable |
| 6 | Moderately to strongly uncomfortable |
| 5 | Moderately uncomfortable |
| 4 | Slightly uncomfortable |
| 3 | Mildly uncomfortable |
| 2 | Minimally uncomfortable |
| 1 | A bit uncomfortable |
| 0 | Comfortable |

Notes

Let's Talk About...

Breathing techniques

Learning breathing techniques can help you relax and feel more comfortable. It can also help you strengthen your lungs and make it easier to breathe. You'll learn about diaphragmatic (belly) breathing, focused breathing, paced breathing, and square breathing.

What is diaphragmatic breathing?

Diaphragmatic breathing is a technique that strengthens the diaphragm, a large muscle at the base of the lungs, through deep breathing. You will learn to use the diaphragm instead of the upper chest muscles. Diaphragmatic breathing can help you relax and breathe more easily.

Diaphragmatic 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 diaphragmatic breathing?

- Relax your neck and shoulder muscles.
- Get in a comfortable position by lying down or sitting.
- 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 with pursed lips, as if you were going to whistle. 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 your breaths 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.
- 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. Repeat the exercises for 5 to 10 minutes.

What is paced breathing?

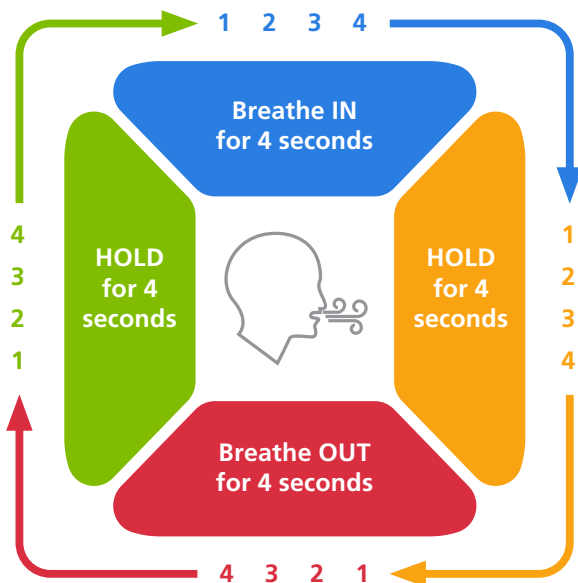
Paced breathing is a technique that helps you take slow, deep breaths using your diaphragm. It can help you relax and give you a sense of control. You can visualize paced breathing as slowly blowing bubbles, because it requires the same type of breathing.

How do I practice paced breathing?

- Sit or lie down in a comfortable, quiet space.
- Set a timer for 5 to 10 minutes.
- Close your eyes and listen to the sound of a clock, metronome, or other repetitive sound.
- Think about how you breathe in and breathe out.
- Notice the pattern your breathing has with the sound you are listening to.
- Let yourself focus on the pattern as you continue to breathe in and out.

What is square breathing?

Square breathing is a way to control your breathing through 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.
- Breathe in like you're smelling a flower while counting to 4.
- Hold your breath while counting to 4.
- Breathe out like you're blowing bubbles while counting to 4.
- Pause for 4 counts.
- As you breathe, draw a square in the air with your finger.
- Repeat for 5 to 10 minutes.

How can I make breathing techniques easier?

To make breathing techniques easier:

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

Notes

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Let's Talk About...

Imagery techniques

You can use imagery to imagine you're somewhere else. Just by imagining a relaxing place or thinking relaxing thoughts, you can feel more comfortable.

How do I pick the right imagery?

Everyone is different and finds different scenes calming. To create imagery 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 even 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.** Effective imagery helps you see, hear, feel, smell, and taste different things while you imagine a scene.
- **Write down your scene or use one of the examples.** 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?

You may find one of the following imagery examples helpful. You can also create your own relaxing scene on the next page.



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?

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

Describe all the things you see.

Describe all the things you hear.

Describe all the things you smell.

Let's Talk About...

Pain management techniques for special-needs children

Children with special needs feel pain just as other children do. However, they may not be able to tell you when they are in pain, and it can be hard to tell what is causing their pain. The following suggestions can help you identify your child's pain and help them manage it.

How can I tell if my child is in pain?

Since your child may not be able to tell you they are in pain or even make facial expressions or noises, it's important to watch for problems that may cause pain. To do this, you may:

- Take your child to the doctor regularly to make sure they don't have constipation, urinary infections, feeding issues, muscle spasticity, breathing problems, bone and joint pain, or seizures.
- Check shunts, pumps, trach tubes, G-tubes, or other implants daily to make sure they're working right and aren't infected.
- Look at their skin carefully for pressure sores, rashes, or infections.
- Make sure braces, wheelchairs, car seats, bath chairs, standing frames, and gait trainers fit and work as they should.
- Notice discoloration, swelling, or bruising around the leg and arm bones and ribs (special-needs children can be more prone to injuries).
- Check your child's body carefully right after they fall to make sure there are no injuries.
- Keep a journal of your child's symptoms, including fever, diarrhea, constipation, vomiting, trouble eating, and insomnia, and notice what they were doing when symptoms happened.
- Record all medicine and treatments your child has and notice any symptoms related to them.

Trust your intuition. If you feel something isn't right or you can't manage your child's pain, call their healthcare provider.



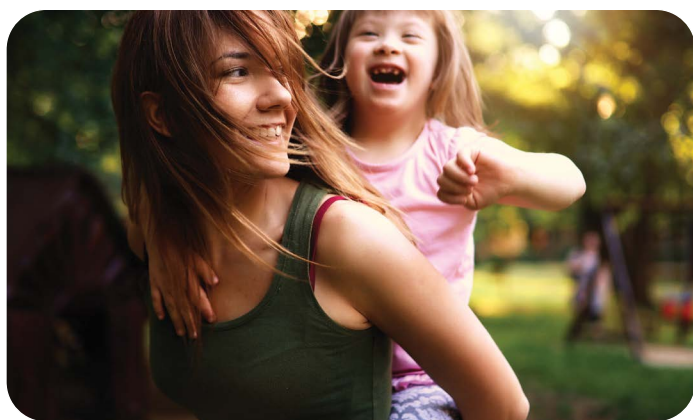
What are some ways to help my child manage pain without medicine?

Although your child's healthcare provider may prescribe medicine, the following suggestions can help your child manage their pain as well:

- Liquid timers (toys filled with water and colored liquid that drip down when you flip them over)
- Stress balls
- Textured sensory balls and toys
- Colored modeling clay
- Slime (purchased or homemade)
- Bubbles or bubble machines
- Pinwheels or party blowers (these also help with breathing techniques)

- Meditation and imagery audio exercises
- Finger painting
- Painting with watercolors
- Doodling or coloring
- Sensory bottles (homemade)
- Low lights in their hospital room or at home
- Relaxing music
- Aromatherapy

Talk to a child life specialist for more ideas, especially when you take your child home from the hospital.



How can I be more understanding with my child?

It can be frustrating when you don't know what's causing your child's pain or the best way to treat it. These suggestions can help you be more understanding:

- Be patient with your child and their healthcare providers.
- Remember that it may take longer to find out what's causing your child's pain and treat it, but it isn't impossible.
- Write down helpful and less-helpful treatments (including side effects) so you can help healthcare providers find the best option for your child.

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Let's Talk About...

Thought-replacement techniques

Thought-replacement is a series of techniques that help you replace negative or anxious 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 bad 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.”



Let's Talk About...

Counterstimulation techniques: Using sensory distraction

Counterstimulation is a way of distracting the brain when it is sending stress signals. 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).

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.

Let's Talk About...

Progressive muscle relaxation

Relaxing muscles can help you 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.

- **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 muscle relaxation 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.

Notes

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