



# Relaxation workbook

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Learning techniques to help you relax







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Learning techniques  
to help you relax

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# 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.*

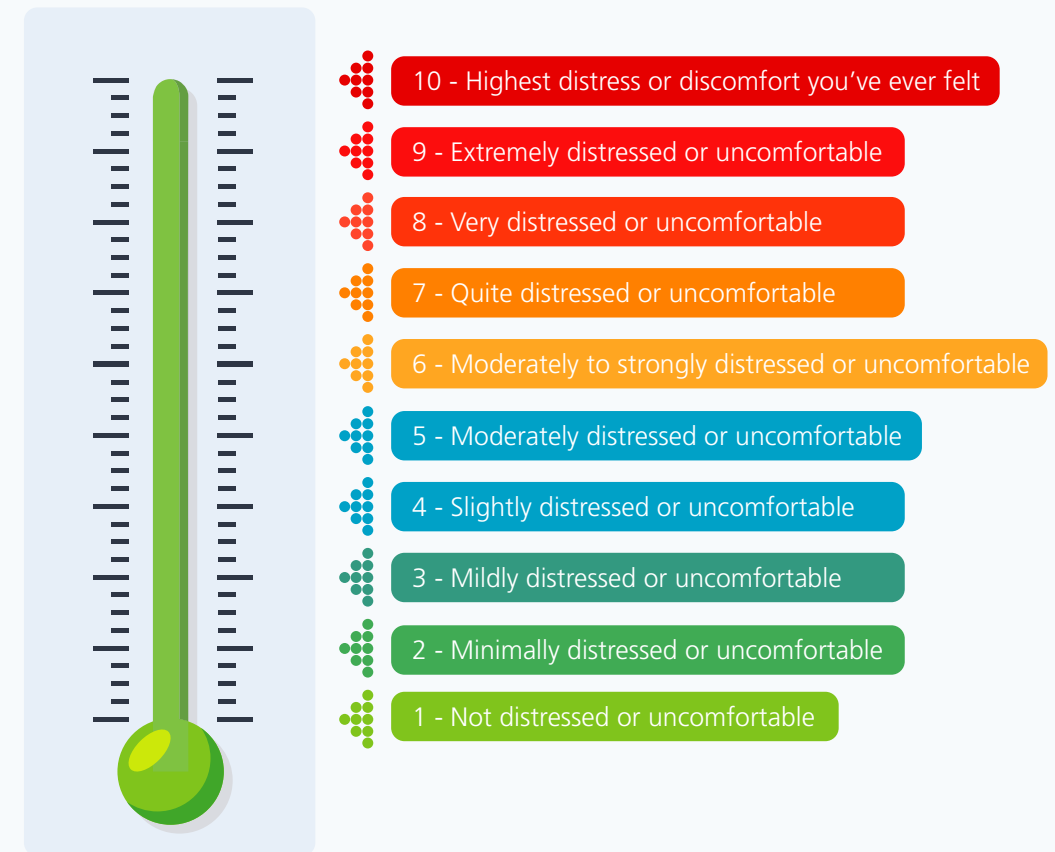
**To get the best results:**

- 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.
- 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 what level of distress I'm in?

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



## Notes

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# Let's Talk About...

## Breathing techniques

Learning breathing techniques can help you relax and relieve anxiety. It can also help you strengthen your lungs and make it easier to breathe. This is helpful if you have lung problems like asthma, cystic fibrosis, bronchitis, and pneumonia. These techniques include: 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, while deeply breathing. You will learn to use the diaphragm instead of the upper chest muscles. Diaphragmatic breathing can help you relax, breathe more easily, and strengthen your diaphragm.

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.
- Place 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 anxious. 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 5–10 minutes.

### What is paced breathing?

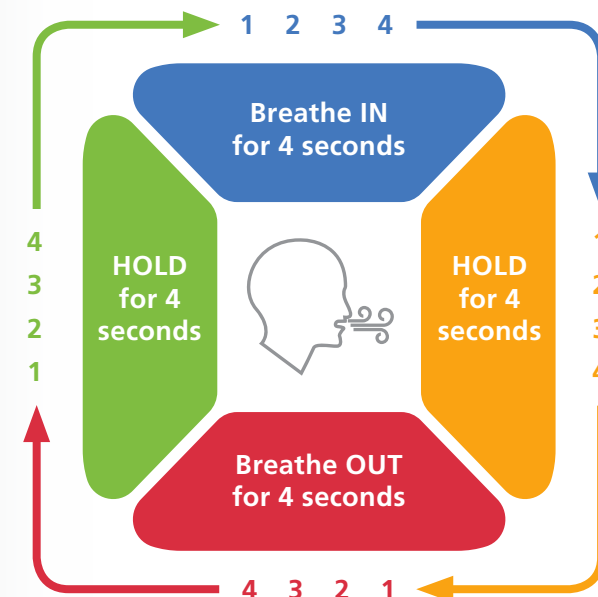
Paced breathing is a technique that helps you take slow, deep breaths using your diaphragm. It can help you relax when you're anxious and give them a sense of control. You can visualize paced breathing as slowly blowing bubbles, because it requires the same type of breathing.

### How do I practice paced breathing?

- Sit or lie down in a comfortable, quiet space.
- Set a timer for 5–10 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



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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, beginning in the lower left corner.
- Repeat for 5–10 minutes.

### How can I make breathing techniques easier?

The following tips can help you 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.

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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 reduce pain and feel less stress.

### 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.** If you have a sensory processing disorder, 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. Decide what works best for you.
- **Include all five senses.** Effective imagery helps you see, hear, feel, smell, and taste different things while you imagine a scene.
- **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 everything when you close your eyes 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.

#### Beach scene

You are lying back in a chair on the shore of a beautiful beach. You can hear the waves crashing against the shore, the sound of seagulls flying, and people splashing in the water. You feel the sand beneath your feet, the warmth of the sun, and a slight breeze brushing gently against your skin. When you look around, you see white, glistening 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 lie there with your eyes closed 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 cresting the peaks, tall green trees, and a few deer grazing in the meadow. You feel a cool breeze ruffling your hair and smooth boards beneath your feet. You smell lavender, 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 bread 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 and feel the weight of the bat in your hands. You see the pitcher blowing a bubble with their chewing gum and throwing 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?

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.



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# Let's Talk About...

## Progressive muscle relaxation

Relaxing muscles can help you relieve stress and tension, manage pain, 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 stressed.
- Be ready to try each exercise for 10 seconds and then relax for 20 seconds.
- Think about tightening your muscles and relaxing them if it's too uncomfortable to tighten them.

### Muscle relaxation exercises for kids 2–10 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 drop the lemon and relax. See 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. Now, let your arms fall down to your sides. Now 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. Now 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:** Hey! 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. Now let's try again. Repeat.

### Muscle relaxation exercises for kids 11–18 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. Point 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, but do not squeeze them shut.
- **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, relax, or unwind when you're relaxing muscles for 20 seconds. You can also visualize your muscles as warm or heavy.

### Notes

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