

Guided Imagery



Guided Imagery is the use of relaxation, visualization, and imagination to improve well-being, health, and mood. It can be done alone or with a therapist, CD, or video.

Dr. Martin Rossman (an expert in healing stress and anxiety) says, in his article about Guided Imagery, "you can worry yourself sick or think yourself well". Below are instructions on how to do Guided Imagery.

1. Find a quiet place to sit or lie down and become relaxed. Be sure you are comfortable. You can use the Deep Breathing or Tense & Relax Methods to become more relaxed. You can use the instructions on the back of this page to learn how to breathe more deeply.

2. Clear all thoughts out of your mind and begin to imagine something.

You can imagine any one of the following, or come up with your own image:

- Imagine your favorite place (real or imaginary) or a place you would like to go to, like a peaceful lake, a sunny beach, or a beautiful mountain area.
- Imagine that your pain or discomfort is an electric current and you can turn it off by turning off the switch.
- Imagine any pain you have can dissolve into a cloud and it can float away.
- Imagine having a conversation with your pain or disease; pretend your pain or disease can talk and imagine what it would say and what you could say back.
- Imagine you can feel clean water flowing though you cleansing out all the pain and discomfort.
- Imagine you are a flower or the sun and you can feel your petals or rays flowing in the air.
- Imagine you find a key and then a door that enters a room where you can leave all your pain and discomfort.

Whatever you choose to imagine, try to imagine it with all your senses. How warm or cold is it? What do you smell? If you could imagine touching something, how would it feel? What sounds do you hear in your image? What colors do you see?

Don't worry, there is no right or wrong way to do this. Just relax and use your imagination for at least 10 to 20 minutes.

Tense & Relax Method

(Progressive Muscle Relaxation)

Tense & Relax is a method used to reduce stress and muscle tension and help reduce chronic pain. With regular practice, Tense & Relax helps you become familiar with what tension feels like and how to let it go.

You can combine Deep Breathing and Tense & Relax for deeper relaxation. First do Deep Breathing for 10 minutes and then do the Tense & Relax Method. You can use the instructions on the back of this page to learn how to breathe more deeply.

1. **Find a quiet place to sit or lie down.** Be sure you are as comfortable as possible.
2. **Slowly and gently tense the muscles in your right foot. Hold the tension for a few seconds and then as you breathe out relax the right foot completely.** You can say or think the word RELAX as you relax the foot. Let go of any tension. Pause before you go to the next body part.
Do the same with the left foot.
3. Next, **tense the muscles in your right lower leg (calf) muscles.** Hold the lower leg tightly or tensely for a few seconds then as you breathe out relax the muscles completely. Pause.
Do the same with the left lower leg.
4. **Do the same tensing and relaxing of all the following muscle groups.** Be sure to let go of the tensing as you exhale and let the muscles relax as much as possible. Say or think the word RELAX as you let go of the tension. Be sure to pause between each body part:
 - Your right thigh (upper leg) then left thigh
 - Your inner legs by squeezing your legs together
 - Your buttock muscles by squeezing your bottom
 - Your abdomen (belly) muscles by contracting and sucking in your belly
 - Your right shoulder by pulling your shoulder up towards your ear
 - Your left shoulder by pulling your shoulder up towards your ear
 - Your jaw by clenching your teeth together gently
 - Your lips by squeezing your lips together
 - Your eyes by squeezing your eyes tightly
 - Your forehead by squeezing your eyebrows together.
5. Take some time to feel your breath again when you finish tensing and relaxing.

Mindful Meditation

With Mindful Meditation, you learn how to get a calm, focused, and harmonious mind and state of being. In this calmness or harmony is a more natural way of being that can help to reduce pain and discomfort.

1. It is important to create the right environment for Mindful Meditation. If possible find a place in your home that is quiet, where you will not be disturbed; a place that can be your healing place.
2. Sit or lie down with your back straight but not stiff. Be sure you are comfortable. If you're lying down, put something under your head if you need it so your head is not tilted up or down.
3. You can start this process by first doing the Deep Breathing Method, or by becoming aware of your breathing. Feel the breath come in and out. Let your belly expand as you breathe in. You can use the instructions on the back of this page to learn how to breathe more deeply.
4. Become aware of your thoughts. Watch as they come and go. Observe your thoughts as if you were an outside observer. Notice the speed of your thoughts. Notice what the thoughts are about.
5. Now start to let each of your thoughts float away. Don't ignore them, judge them, or try to stop them, but each time a thought comes up just let it go as if it could just float away.
6. As you let each of your thoughts float away, let your mind become peaceful and empty of thoughts. Just feel your breathing.
7. Don't worry that thoughts keep coming into your mind, this will happen. Just gently, lovingly send them away.
8. Allow yourself to remain calm like this for at least 10 to 20 minutes. If this process is difficult for you, start with less minutes and build up.



Deep Breathing Method

Deep breathing can help with chronic pain, stress, muscle tension, anxiety, sleep disorders, and other conditions like high blood pressure. It can help to bring a Relaxation Response in your body.

1. Find a quiet place to sit or lie down.
2. If you are sitting, try not to slouch but make sure you are comfortable. You can use cushions or back rests to help you sit more easily. If you are lying down, place a pillow under your head if you need to. Your face should be parallel to the ceiling and not tilted up or down.
3. Close your eyes.
4. Feel your breath as it comes in through your nose and fills your lungs and then goes back out.
5. Put one hand on your lower belly. Be sure your arm is relaxed and your elbow is resting on the floor or a pillow.
6. As you breathe in (inhale) slowly:
 - let your belly expand like you have a balloon in your belly that expands forward, sideways, backward, upward and downward
 - as your belly expands, feel your lungs fill with air
 - breathe in slowly like this for 4 to 10 counts.
7. As you breathe out (exhale) let your belly relax. Gently let the air in your lungs come out. This should take at least 4 to 10 counts too.
9. As you breathe like this, don't think about other things. Just think about your breathing. If you have other thoughts come up, just gently send them away.
9. Continue to breathe in and out as described in steps 6 and 7 for at least 10 to 20 minutes.
10. You can do the Tense & Relax Method after this deep breathing for more relaxation. Ask your health care provider for a handout on Tense & Relax or other relaxation methods.





Relaxation

There is no exact definition of stress because it is different for everyone, but most people view stress as how they feel in reaction to life pressures or demands. Too much stress can cause a variety of physical, emotional, and behavioral health symptoms or problems.

Practicing relaxation methods can relieve stress and can lead to improved health and well-being.

The Relaxation Response

Too much stress can hurt your health, but what is the alternative? How can you meet all the demands in your life without being stressed? Your body's solution to excess stress is the Stress Response which puts us in the "fight or flight" mode. You can help to relieve the Stress Response by bringing on the Relaxation Response which puts the body into "rest and digest" mode.

Because the Stress Response can wear your body down, it is important to engage the Relaxation Response to keep your body working properly.

Benefits of Relaxation

- Slows your heart rate
- Increases blood flow to your muscles and tissues
- Lowers your blood pressure
- Slows down your breathing
- Reduces muscle tension which can reduce pain
- Improves your concentration and problem solving skills
- Reduces anger, anxiety and depression
- Boosts confidence and feelings of resilience

Relaxation can help to reduce the symptoms of many diseases and conditions such as heart conditions, diabetes, chronic pain, sleeping disorders, anxiety and depression. Using relaxation methods in addition to the other treatments your health care provider prescribes can help you manage your health even better.

Relaxation Methods

Relaxing is a skill, and it may take time to get good at it. Start with 5-15 minutes per day of any of these methods and work up to at least 20 minutes per day. As you practice, it will get easier and feel better.

Exercise*

Any form of exercise can help reduce stress when it is done in a way that is fun and enjoyable. Exercise releases endorphins which help improve your mood. Exercise can also be a healthy distraction.

Some types of exercise are walking, riding a bike, swimming, sports, gym classes, weight training, yoga, tai chi, yard work and even house cleaning.

***If you have any health problems talk to your health care provider before starting any exercise program.**

Doing Things you Enjoy

Relaxing can be as simple as doing something you enjoy doing such as:

Listening to music

Being outside in nature

Visiting with family or friends

Reading or listening to books

Laughing

Laugh therapy can be done with a professional or you can watch a funny movie, have an uplifting conversation, or read a funny book.

Relaxation Techniques

These techniques are designed specifically to help you learn how to relax.

Mindful Meditation

Learn to achieve a calm, focused, harmonious mind and state of being. In this calmness is a more natural way of being that can help to reduce pain and discomfort.

Tense & Relax Method

This method can help to relieve muscle tension and help reduce chronic pain. With regular practice, Tense & Relax helps you become familiar with what tension feels like and how to let it go.

Deep Breathing

This can help with chronic pain, stress, muscle tension, anxiety, sleep disorders, and other conditions like high blood pressure.

Guided Imagery

This method uses relaxation, mental visualization, and imagination to improve physical well-being, health, and mood. It can be self-directed or it can be done with a therapist, CD or video.

Ask your health care provider about handouts on Exercise, the Relaxation Response, Mindful Meditation, Deep Breathing, Guided Imagery and the Tense & Relax method.