Relaxation Techniques for Stress Relief

**Relaxation technique 1: Breathing meditation for stress relief**Provides a quick way to get your stress levels in check. The key is to breathe deeply from the abdomen, which makes you inhale more oxygen. More oxygen = less tense and anxious.

* Sit comfortably with your back straight. Put one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach.
* Breathe in through your nose. The hand on your stomach should rise. The hand on your chest should move very little.
* Exhale through your mouth. The hand on your stomach should move in as you exhale, but your other hand should move very little.
* Continue to breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Try to inhale enough so that your lower abdomen rises and falls. Count slowly as you exhale.

**Relaxation technique 2: Progressive muscle relaxation for stress relief** (tense and relax)Helps you spot stress in your body and counteract it. Check with your doctor if you have a history of muscle spasms, back problems, or other injuries that may be aggravated by tensing muscles.

* Loosen your clothing, take off your shoes, and get comfortable.
* Take a few minutes to relax, breathing in and out in slow, deep breaths.
* When you’re relaxed and ready to start, shift your attention to your right foot. Focus on the way it feels.
* Slowly tense the muscles in your right foot, squeezing as tightly as you can. Hold for a count of 10.
* Relax your right foot. Focus on the tension flowing away and the way your foot feels as it becomes limp and loose.
* Stay in this relaxed state for a moment, breathing deeply and slowly.
* When you’re ready, shift your attention to your left foot. Follow the same sequence of muscle tension and release.
* Move slowly up through your body, contracting and relaxing the muscle groups as you go.
* It may take some practice at first, but try not to tense muscles other than those intended.

**Relaxation technique 3: Body scan meditation for stress relief**Similar to progress muscle relaxation, except instead of tensing and relaxing muscles, you simply focus on the sensations in each part of your body.

• Lie on your back, legs uncrossed, arms relaxed at your sides, eyes open or closed. Focus on your breathing,   
 allowing your stomach to rise as you inhale and fall as you exhale. Breathe deeply for about two minutes, until  
 you start to feel comfortable and relaxed.   
• Turn your focus to the toes of your right foot. Notice any sensations you feel while continuing to also focus on  
 your breathing. Imagine each deep breath flowing to your toes. Remain focused on this area for 1-2 minutes.   
• Move your focus to the sole of your right foot. Tune in to any sensations you feel in that part of your body and   
 imagine each breath flowing from the sole of your foot. After one or two minutes, move your focus to your right  
 ankle and repeat. Move to your calf, knee, thigh, hip, and then repeat the sequence for your left leg. From there,   
 move up the torso, through the lower back and abdomen, the upper back and chest, and the shoulders. Pay close  
 attention to any area of the body that causes you pain or discomfort.   
• Move your focus to the fingers on your right hand and then move up to the wrist, forearm, elbow, upper arm,   
 and shoulder. Repeat for your left arm. Then move through the neck and throat, and finally all the regions of   
 your face, the back of the head, and the top of the head. Pay close attention to your jaw, chin, lips, tongue, nose,   
 cheeks, eyes, forehead, temples and scalp. When you reach the very top of your head, let your breath reach out   
 beyond your body and imagine yourself hovering above yourself.   
• After completing the body scan, relax for a while in silence and stillness, noting how your body feels. Then open   
 our eyes slowly. Take a moment to stretch, if necessary.

**Relaxation technique 4: Mindfulness for stress relief**Mindfulness is the ability to remain aware of how you’re feeling right now, your “moment-to-moment” experience—both internal and external. Thinking about the past—blaming and judging yourself—or worrying about the future can often lead to a degree of stress that is overwhelming. But by staying calm and focused in the present moment, you can bring your nervous system back into balance.

Meditations that cultivate mindfulness have long been used to reduce overwhelming stress. Some of these meditations bring you into the present by focusing your attention on a single repetitive action, such as your breathing, a few repeated words, or flickering light from a candle. Other forms of mindfulness meditation encourage you to follow and then release internal thoughts or sensations.  
 Key points in mindfulness mediation are:

* **A quiet environment.** Choose a secluded place in your home, office, garden, place of worship, or in the great outdoors where you can relax without distractions or interruptions.
* **A comfortable position.** Get comfortable, but avoid lying down as this may lead to you falling asleep. Sit up with your spine straight, either in a chair or on the floor. You can also try a cross-legged or lotus position.
* **A point of focus.** This point can be internal – a feeling or imaginary scene – or something external - a flame or meaningful word or phrase that you repeat it throughout your session. You may meditate with eyes open or closed. Also choose to focus on an object in your surroundings to enhance your concentration, or alternately, you can close your eyes.
* **An observant, noncritical attitude.** Don’t worry about distracting thoughts that go through your mind or about how well you’re doing. If thoughts intrude during your relaxation session, don’t fight them. Instead, gently turn your attention back to your point of focus.

**Relaxation technique 5: Visualization meditation for stress relief**When used as a relaxation technique, visualization involves imagining a scene in which you feel at peace, free to let go of all tension and anxiety. Choose whatever setting is most calming to you, whether it’s a tropical beach, a favorite childhood spot, or a quiet wooded area. Find a quiet, relaxed place. Beginners sometimes fall asleep during a visualization meditation, so you might try sitting up or standing.

Close your eyes and let your worries drift away. Imagine your restful place. Picture it as vividly as you can—everything you can see, hear, smell, and feel. Visualization works best if you incorporate as many sensory details as possible, using at least three of your senses. When visualizing, choose imagery that appeals to you; don’t select images because someone else suggests them, or because you think they should be appealing. Let your own images come up and work for you.  
If you are thinking about a dock on a quiet lake, for example:

* Walk slowly around the dock and notice the colors and textures around you.
* Spend some time exploring each of your senses.
* See the sun setting over the water.
* Hear the birds singing.
* Smell the pine trees.
* Feel the cool water on your bare feet.
* Taste the fresh, clean air.

Enjoy the feeling of deep relaxation that envelopes you as you slowly explore your restful place. When you are ready, gently open your eyes and come back to the present.

Don't worry if you sometimes zone out or lose track of where you are during a guided imagery session. This is normal. You may also experience feelings of stiffness or heaviness in your limbs, minor, involuntary muscle-movements, or even cough or yawn. Again, these are normal responses.

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