

Relaxation Techniques

Leaves on a stream

Start by sitting or lying comfortably, with your arms gently resting by your sides. Let your eyes gently close or fix them on a point in front of you.

Take a couple of gentle breaths in..... and out.

Notice the sound and feel of your own breath as you breathe in....and out.

Imagine you are standing by the bank of a gently flowing stream watching the water flow.

Feel the ground beneath you, the sounds of the water flowing past, and the way the stream looks as you watch it.

Imagine that there are leaves from trees, of all different shapes, sizes, and colours, floating past on the stream and you are just watching these float on the stream. This is all you need to do for the time being.

Start to become aware of your thoughts, feelings, or sensations.

Each time you notice a thought, feeling, or sensation, imagine placing it on a leaf and letting it float down the stream.

Do this regardless of whether the thoughts, feelings, or sensations are positive or negative, pleasurable, or painful.

Even if they are the most wonderful thoughts, place them on a leaf and let them float by.

If you notice your mind wandering off, gently notice where your mind was, what you were thinking about, describe this distraction, put it on a leaf and watch it float away downstream.

If your thoughts stop, just watch the stream. Sooner or later your thoughts should start up again.

If you have thoughts, feelings, or sensations about doing this exercise, place these on leaves as well.

If you find yourself getting caught up with a thought or feeling, such as boredom or impatience, simply acknowledge it. Say to yourself, "Here's a feeling of boredom," or "Here's a feeling of impatience." Then place those words on a leaf and let them float on by.

You are just observing each experience and placing it on a leaf on the stream. It is normal and natural to lose track of this exercise, and it will keep happening. When you notice yourself losing track, just bring yourself back to watching the leaves on the stream.

Finally, allow the image of the stream to dissolve, and slowly bring your attention back to where you are, in this room. Gently bring your attention back and open your eyes, noticing what you can see and what you can hear. Have a stretch. Welcome back.



Progressive muscle relaxation

If you are feeling tense or you are having trouble sleeping at night, the following relaxation technique may help you.

Relaxation should be practised at least once daily, preferably at the same time and in the same place. It doesn't matter which relaxation technique you use, as long as it works for you and you enjoy doing it.

Start by sitting or lying comfortably, letting your arms rest gently by your side with palms facing upwards. Begin by taking a deep breath and noticing the feeling of air filling your lungs.

Do this a couple more times, and after you draw in a long slow deep breath pause momentarily before slowly realising your breath. Each time feeling the tension leaving your body.

Now, move your attention to your feet, and begin to tense your feet by curling your toes and the arch of your foot. Hold onto the tension and notice what it feels like.

After a few moments, release the tension from your feet. Notice the new feeling of relaxation.

You will now repeat this process of tensing and relaxing areas of your body, each time taking a moment to notice the sensation in your body.

Move to your lower leg and calf muscles next, holding them tightly and paying attention to the tension.

Release the tension from your calves. Again, notice the feeling of relaxation. Remember to continue taking deep breaths.

Work your way through your body:

- Thighs
- Buttocks
- Abdomen
- Shoulders and back
- Arms
- Hands
- Neck and face

Once you have tensed and relaxed all these major muscle groups, lie quietly for a moment and take some breaths in to your abdomen, with a long and slow exhale.

When you are ready, bring the relaxation to a close. Wriggle your toes.

Stretch your hands and arms.

Open your eyes.

Breathing techniques

Breathing techniques are a powerful tool that is easily accessible at anytime and anyplace. They can quickly affect your central nervous system to calm you down, acting like a natural tranquiliser.

Belly breathing

Find a comfortable, quiet place to sit or lie down. Start by placing one hand on your upper chest and the other hand on your belly. Allow your belly to relax, without forcing it inward by squeezing or clenching your muscles. Breathe in slowly through your nose. The air should move into your nose and downward so that you feel your stomach rise with your other hand and fall inward (toward your spine). Exhale slowly through slightly pursed lips. Take note of the hand on your chest, which should remain relatively still. Continue this in long slow deep breathes for up to ten minutes to benefit.

Alternate-nostril breathing

Alternate nostril breathing involves blocking one nostril at a time as you breathe through the other, and then alternating between nostrils in a regular pattern. It's best to practice this type of breathing in a seated position in order to maintain your posture.

- Position your right hand by bending your pointer and middle fingers into your palm, leaving your thumb, ring finger, and pinkie extended.
- Close your eyes or softly gaze downward. Inhale and exhale to begin.
- Close off your right nostril with your thumb, and inhale through your left nostril.
- Close off your left nostril with your ring finger, and then open and exhale through your right nostril.
- Inhale through your right nostril.
- Close off your right nostril with your thumb, and then open and exhale through your left nostril.
- Inhale through your left nostril.

Do your best to work up to 10 rounds of this breathing pattern. If you begin to feel lightheaded, take a break. Release both nostrils and breathe normally.

4-7-8 breathing

The 4-7-8 breathing exercise is also called the relaxing breath. At first, it's best to perform the exercise seated with your back straight. Once you become more familiar with the breathing exercise, however, you can perform it while lying in bed:

Start by placing the tip of your tongue against the ridge of tissue behind your upper front teeth, where you will keep it for the duration of the exercise. Completely exhale through your mouth, making a whoosh sound. Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a mental count of four. Hold your breath for a count of seven. Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound to a count of eight.

Box breathing

Box breathing can be practised anywhere, and in any position (i.e., sitting, lying down, or standing). This technique combines imagery and breath, and each step is done to the mental count of four. Inhale through your nose to the count of four, sending the air all the way down to your belly. As you inhale, mentally visualise a straight line travelling up. Then, hold your breath to the count of four while visualising a horizontal line connected to the edge of first line, going across. Then, exhale to the count of four while visualising a vertical line travelling down from the edge of the horizontal line. Finally, hold your breath to the count of four while visualising a horizontal line going from one vertical line to the other. At the end of the 16 counts, you will have the mental image of a square (or a box). Once the cycle is over, start again.

Tip 1: if holding the breath to the count of four feels like too much of a challenge at first, you can start by holding the breath to the count of two and slowly increase it, as you become more familiar and skilled in this exercise.

Tip 2: if the visualisation does not work for you, you may choose to focus on just the breathing part of the exercise without the visualisation.

Visualising or imagining a peaceful scene

Use the technique above or one of the deep breathing exercises to help you breathe deeply and easily.

Once your breathing has become slow and regular, visualise a peaceful scene which makes you feel relaxed. You may visualise you are lying on a warm sandy beach, walking through a rainforest, sitting on a warm rock by the river or lying on a grassy hill looking at the sky.

Focus on each of your senses in great detail once you are in your peaceful scene.

Feel the warmth of the sun on your skin, the texture of the sand or grass under you.

Listen to the soft sound of the waves or the wind.

See the refreshing colours of the sky, the water or the trees.

Smell the ocean, the trees or the flowers.

Stay at your scene until you feel ready to leave and then imagine yourself getting up, stretching and walking away.

Wriggle your toes.

Stretch your hands and arms.

Open your eyes

