

Relaxation Techniques to Relieve Stress

It is normal to feel anxious, sad, angry or overwhelmed, especially when you have stress in your life. Relaxation techniques can help you deal with these feelings and reduce the effects of stress on your mind and body. This handout will explain techniques to help you relax when you feel overwhelmed, anxious, or stressed.

Common relaxation techniques include:

- Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- Controlled Deep Breathing
- Guided Imagery
- Distraction

Relaxation is a skill that can be developed and should be practiced. Each technique is different. You may find one that works better for you than others. The best way to discover which one works the best for you is to try them all.

Important things to remember:

- Find a quiet place where you can focus.
- Set aside time to practice relaxation.
- Be patient. Remember, relaxation is a skill that must be practiced.
- Try each technique once or twice to see which one works best for you.
- Rate your level of anxiety or tension on a scale of 1-10 (1 means no anxiety and 10 means the worst possible anxiety). Try doing this before and after completing your relaxation.



Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive Muscle Relaxation involves tensing and relaxing the major muscle groups in your body. You can start doing this from your head to your feet or your feet to your head. Tense each muscle group for 5 seconds and then relax for 15 seconds. **For example:** Start at your feet, then move to your legs, buttocks, arms and hands, neck and shoulders, jaw, and forehead. Different people carry muscle tension in different parts of their bodies, so the areas that need extra attention are different for everyone.

Controlled Deep Breathing

Controlled Deep Breathing involves breathing deep into your lungs to flex (expand) your diaphragm (the muscle under your rib cage). During deep breathing you will be able to see your stomach expand and contract (go out and in).

Controlled Deep Breathing (continued)

Practice deep breathing for at least **4 minutes**. This is how long it takes to restore your balance of oxygen and carbon dioxide. This technique works best if you breathe deeply in and out an equal amount of time.

For example: try breathing in to a slow count of 4 and out to a slow count for 4, for 4 minutes total. Be sure to breathe gently and not take big gulps of air.

Guided Imagery

Guided imagery involves actively visualizing scenes that are tranquil and relaxing to you. Scenes may be actual places you know that feel safe and relaxing, such as a beach, a garden, or a room in your house. They may also be scenes that you imagine are tranquil, safe, and relaxing. The scene isn't that important- how it makes you feel is. The more senses you can include in your imagery, the more relaxing it will be. **For example:** you can ask yourself 'what would I see in this place?' 'What sounds would I hear?' 'What smells would I smell?' 'How would these things feel to touch?' 'How would these things taste?'

Distraction

Distraction shifts attention away from your thoughts or the physical sensations that add to your anxiety. The more fully you can absorb yourself in other thoughts or activities, the more your anxiety will lessen. Distraction activities can be anything you enjoy. **For example:** listening to music, watching a television show, going for a walk, reading a book, doing activities with family/friends, or anything that eases your mind. Like controlled breathing, it is important to practice distraction for at least **4 minutes** before expecting any change in your anxiety level.

Resources

If you would like to learn more about relaxation techniques, or you would like to talk with someone about your stress, a **social worker** can help. Make an appointment with a social worker at the Cancer Centre or hospital by asking a member of your cancer care team for a referral.

The **Patient and Family Resource Centre** located on Burr 0 at the Cancer Centre has books on mindfulness and meditation. There are also some useful Internet websites, including:

- www.mayoclinic.com–Search meditation
- **Relaxation video** – www.mayoclinic.com–**Search:** Video: Need to relax? Take a break for meditation
- www.cancer.org–Search mind, body and spirit
- www.nccam.nih.gov/health– Click on Topics A-Z– Click on M– Meditation