

WAYS TO CALM THE MIND



What is a Relaxation Strategy?

Relaxation Strategies involve breathing in large but slow and measured amounts of oxygen. Breathing helps us relax because we feel stress or anxiety when we kick our bodies into “fight or flight” mode.

To Reverse this process, breathing helps us use an amazing skill our bodies are wired for. When we breathe in more oxygen we reverse the “fight or flight process”. But, we have to do this slowly or our body will think we’re still in danger. Too much oxygen means hyperventilation!

Below we will explore a number of ways to calm the mind and compare uses and effectiveness.

Here’s a Legend to Help you!

When to Use?



As a Daily Practice



To Fall Asleep



When Feeling Healthy and Regulated



When There’s More Anxiety or Crisis

ABDOMINAL BREATHING

BELLY GOES
OUT



When to Use?



- Useful for anxiety, panic attack or elevated stress In particular thought-based overwhelm (ex. Can't get to sleep).
- Practice 2-3x daily for 5 to 10min.
- Important to practice.

How?

1. Find a comfortable position, sitting, standing or lying down.
2. Begin by taking a slow, easy, mindful breath in, through your nose, gently pulling the air deep down into your abdomen. You should feel your tummy rise with this inhalation and your chest should only move a little. Inhale for a count of 4 seconds.
3. Hold that breath deep in your lungs for a count of 4 seconds.
4. Exhale through the mouth for a count of 4 seconds, feeling your tummy fall.
5. Hold your breath for a count of 4 seconds before repeating the process.
6. You just completed what we also call box breathing!
 - Pro Tip: If counts of 4 seconds are too difficult, start with holds of 2 seconds (rectangle breathing).
 - So much breath research suggests a longer exhalation is good for our health, so try to work up to 7 second exhales.

PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

TENSE AND
RELAX
MUSCLES

When to Use?



- Stress/anxiety
- Before or in bed for better sleep
- In morning, when you first get up
- During exams, on a busy day or before a stressful meeting
- Great for those who need something visceral or enjoy physical activity
- Pair with Abdominal Breathing

How?

1. Similar to the deep breathing technique, but while tensing different muscle groups throughout your body, moving from your head down to your toes with each breath.
2. Follow the steps of the abdominal breathing technique.
3. On the inhale (count for 2-4 seconds), tense a muscle group (e.g. raise your eyebrows to tense your forehead).
4. Hold this muscle group with your breath for 2-5 seconds
5. Exhale and release the tension slowly (count of 4-7 seconds)
6. On the next inhale choose the next muscle group (e.g. perhaps make a huge smile to tense your cheeks)
7. Continue with muscle groups like jaw, neck, shoulders, biceps, triceps, fists, chest, stomach, lower back, gluts, thighs, calves and toes.
 - Pro Tip: Push into the chair or the bed to help you create tension
 - Look at videos online for guided examples.

GUIDED IMAGERY

THE MINI VACATION



When to Use?



- Needing an escape, or feeling emotionally unsafe.
- Wanting to calm the mind or emotions.
- If you don't like Progressive Muscle Relaxation

How?

- Choose a place that you can imagine and gives you good thoughts.
- Imagine, being in that place, pay attention to the details of that place. Alternatively, listen to a guided imagery recording to help generate these thoughts.
- Choose a "happy place" or "safe place", that provides positive memories or elicits a feeling of comfort, close your eyes and imagine being in that moment.
- Pair this exercise with Abdominal Breathing

Other Ways to Calm The Mind

These other ways are not the same as the first 3, they are a bit different and should only be used in specific situations.

GROUNDING

GET BACK INTO
YOUR BODY

When to Use?



- Use it when you are feeling scattered /in crisis/ overwhelmed
- If you feel like you are outside your body or in your head
- If you're having a very intense day and have not stopped all day
- Will help you get out of head and into the current space

How?

1. Stop what you are doing and connect yourself to the floor or the earth by either putting your feet flat on the floor or laying down on the floor.
2. In the space you are in, label the following:
 - 5 things you see
 - 4 things you feel (sensory, not emotion)
 - 3 things you hear
 - 2 things you smell (or 2 favourite smells)
 - 1 thing you taste (or 1 thing you like about yourself)

MINDFULNESS

A PRACTICE
NOT A
STRATEGY



When to Use?



- As a meditative practice, to allow for more flexibility with thoughts and emotions.
- A daily exercise to condition your brain the same way you condition your muscles.

Note: This approach takes practice, it not an approach for anxiety in the moment. Many experience a rush of thoughts for the first time, and it can be quite scary. Know that this reaction is normal as this is the nature of the brain. If you experience suicidal or self-harming thoughts, stop the exercise immediately.

How?

- Observing thoughts in a non-judgmental way.
 - Focusing/ describing one-mindfully (i.e. present/with intention).
 - Allowing thoughts to float in and out of your mind freely, rather than digging in and latching on to the thought.
1. Choose a relaxed position and set a timer (suggest 5mins for beginners).
 2. Some like eyes closed, if eyes open pick a spot to focus on.
 3. Breathe deeply and slowly.
 4. Pick a point of focus (many beginners choose following their breath)
 5. Bring your attention to the point focus
 6. Your mind will begin to wander, this is completely natural.

7. Bring your attention back to the point of focus without judgement. It is impossible to do this without thoughts being present, but the objective is to practice while noticing thoughts and allowing them to come and go.
8. You returning to your breath and redirecting yourself means you're doing it!
9. Remember this skill requires practice and it becomes easier to focus and redirect over time.



@sghorsford

*Stay Tuned for More
Upcoming Publications!*

@sarahghorsford



HORSFORD COUNSELLING
AND CONSULTING
Strong Minds. Open Hearts.

