

Using relaxed breathing

The aim of this information sheet is to remind you about how you can manage your stress using relaxed breathing. You should have already practised this technique with your occupational therapist or as part of the cardiovascular rehab programme. You may want to ask a family member or friend to read it out to help you relax. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to your occupational therapist or a member of the cardiovascular rehabilitation team.

What is the purpose of the technique?

Relaxation can help to relieve the symptoms of stress. Although the cause of the anxiety will not disappear, you will probably feel more able to deal with it once you have released the tension in your body and cleared your thoughts.

This technique encourages you to concentrate on your breathing to feel calmer.

Don't worry if you find it difficult to relax at first. It is a skill that needs to be learned and it will come with practice.

How do I prepare to relax?

Allow yourself 15-20 minutes for this relaxation technique. Find a place that is warm, quiet and free from disturbances. If possible dim the lights and tell people that you should not be disturbed – you may want to switch off any phones.

Make yourself comfortable on the floor, on the bed or in a chair. Snuggle down and settle your body so that it feels limp.

If you can, ask a friend or family member to read the next sections to you.

What do I need to do?

Put your right hand on your stomach just above your waistline. Now take a few deep breaths – in – and – out – in – and – out. Check that your stomach comes out when you breathe in and goes in when you breathe out. Breathe calmly and regularly, and push your stomach out a little bit when you breathe in, and pull your stomach in a little bit when you breathe out. Your diaphragm expands when you breathe in to fill your lungs, and it contracts when you exhale. Check that you do not hold your breath between breathing in and breathing out. Breathe in and breathe out continuously and smoothly without holding your breath. Keep your breathing regular and shallow – in – and – out through your nose. Your stomach expands when you breathe in, and it contracts when you breathe out. At the same time, your chest keeps as still and relaxed as possible.

You are now breathing calmly and regularly, and I would like you to concentrate your mind on the word RELAX. Say 're' to yourself when you breathe in and 'lax' to yourself when you breathe out, still making sure that your stomach area does most of the breathing work. R-E----L-A-X. Your stomach expands when you breathe in, and contracts when you breathe out. You may also find it helpful to imagine the word RELAX written in huge letters in front of your eyes. Imagine you are exploring the letters of the word RELAX. Explore the letter -'r' - explore the letter - 'e' - explore the letter -'l' - explore the letter-'a' - explore the letter -'x'-. R-E----L-A-X.

With your mind, you are now telling your body to relax, allowing tension to flow out with each breath out. As your body is becoming more relaxed, your mind will also be able to relax more and more. You are using your mind and your breathing to relax your body and this in turn will also relax your mind.

I would now like you to concentrate on different parts of your body, breathing in to them and letting tension flow out from them when you breathe out, saying 're' to yourself when you breathe in and 'lax' when you breathe out. Concentrate first on your HANDS and on your ARMS. Breathe in to your hands and arms, saying 're' to yourself when you breathe in and 'lax' when you breathe out. Let tension flow out from your hands and your arms with each breath out. Your hands and arms are becoming heavy and relaxed. Now concentrate on your NECK and on your SHOULDERS. Tell your neck and your shoulders to relax and let all the tension flow out.

Concentrate now on your FACE and let all the tension flow out from your face to allow your face to become smooth and relaxed. Now focus your attention on your STOMACH. Let go of all the tension from your stomach area. Now I would like you to concentrate on your BACK. Tell your back to relax more and more – you are still saying 're' when you breathe in, and 'lax' when you breathe out. Let all the tension flow out from your back. Now concentrate on your LEGS. Let go of all the tension from your buttocks down to your toes.

By concentrating on your breathing and on the word RELAX, you have allowed tension to flow out of your body. I would now like you to choose one particular part of your body for more relaxation. A part that may feel particularly tense and in need of more relaxation. Continue breathing in to that part of your body and let tension flow out from it for a short while.

How do I end the relaxation session?

You have now tried to relax your body using your breathing and your imagination. Don't worry about how well you have been doing – all that counts is that you have been practising. In a few moments, I am going to count from 5 to 1. When I reach 1, I would like you to open your eyes and be wide – awake. 5...4...3...2 – your eyes are now opening – 1 – your eyes are open and you are wide awake.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about this relaxation technique, contact **occupational therapy** on 020 7188 4180, Monday to Friday 8.30am to 4.30pm or the **cardiovascular rehabilitation team** on 020 7188 0946, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

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