

## **RELAXATION TECHNIQUES**

One of the most effective coping strategies you can use for anxiety symptoms (particularly the physical ones) is to use deep breathing and relaxation techniques.

Below you will find a variety of techniques that can be helpful at reducing the anxiety that you are currently experiencing. Select and practice a few of the techniques that you may find helpful.

### **Helpful Practice Tips:**

- Practice these techniques daily.
- Choose a consistent time each day that is free from distractions and calm. (Before bed is a great time because it can also help with difficulties falling asleep)
- Practice these strategies in a calm environment and consistently in order to increase your ability to access them when you are stressed/anxious.
- The more you practice these strategies the easier they will be to access when you are anxious.

## **BREATHING TECHNIQUES**

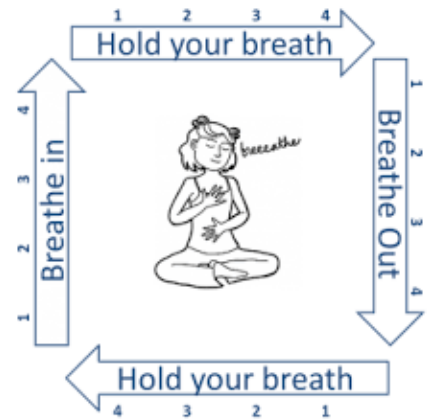
### **Belly (or Diaphragmatic) Breathing**

You can do this exercise in any position, but it is helpful to do this exercise while lying down when first learning belly breathing.

1. Lie comfortably on your back, with a pillow under your head, your knees bent and your back flat. You can stretch your legs out if that's more comfortable.
2. Place one hand on your belly and one hand on your upper chest.
3. Inhale slowly and expand your belly as you breathe so that your lower hand moves with your belly. The hand on your chest should remain as still as possible.
4. Slowly exhale, focusing on the movement of your belly and lower hand as it returns to its original position.
5. Repeat steps 3 & 4 for several minutes, always focusing on the movement of the belly as you breathe. If your mind wanders, gently bring your attention back to your breathing.

### **Square Breathing**

1. Place one hand on our stomach and one on our chest. You want to feel the hand on our stomach move in and out more than the hand on our chest.
2. Take a deep breath in through your nose. As you inhale you count in your mind 1...2...3...4 and you imagine using the air you breathe in to push against your hand on your stomach.
3. Hold for a count of 4. Then you exhale through your mouth like you are blowing out a candle.
4. Exhale for a count of 1...2...3...4
5. Pause for a count of 4 before starting again.



### **Breath-Counting Exercise**

This exercise focuses on the use of counting with the rhythm of the breath. Start with a short period of time and gradually increase the time. Set a timer so that you do not have to worry about when to stop.

1. Find a comfortable position. Take several deep breaths and settle into yourself. You may either close your eyes or keep them open, depending on your own comfort. If you keep them open, fix them on an object or a spot on the floor about four feet in front of you. Your eyes may be either focused or unfocused.
2. Take deep, comfortable breaths. Notice your inhalation. The pause between inhaling and exhaling, your exhalation, and the pause before starting again.
3. As you inhale, count, "one..." As you exhale, count, "two..." Inhale, "three..." Exhale, "four..." Continue until you reach 10 then start over.
4. If you lose count, simply begin with "one" on your next inhalation.
5. If you notice your mind has wandered, gently notice this, and return your focus back to counting your breath

## **GROUNDING TECHNIQUES**

When people become overwhelmed with distressing thoughts or feelings — including intense anxiety — doing activities that keep your mind and body connected (called “grounding”) can be helpful to regain a sense of stability and mental focus.

The following are a variety of grounding exercises that can help anchor you firmly within the present moment and provide you with space to choose where to focus your energy.

- Remind yourself of who you are now. State your name, age and where you are right now.
- Take ten slow deep breaths. Focus your attention on each breath on the way in and on the way out. Say the number of the breath to yourself as you exhale.
- Splash water on your face or place a cool wet cloth on your face.
- Pay purposeful attention as you hold a cold (non-alcoholic) beverage in your hands. Feel the coldness, and the wetness on the outside. Note the taste as you drink. You can also do this exercise with a warm beverage.
- Find a “grounding object” to hold, look at, listen to, and/or smell. This could be a soft object such as a pillow or stuffed animal, a smooth stone you found on the beach, a picture of a beautiful scene or loved one, and/or any other object that represents safety or comfort.
- Listen to music. Pay close attention and listen for something new or different.
- If you wake up suddenly during the night and feel disoriented or distressed, remind yourself who you are and where you are. Look around the room and notice familiar objects and name them. Feel your bed, softness of the sheets or blankets, the warmth or coldness of the air, and notice any sounds you hear. Remember you are safe.
- Feel the clothes on your body and the sensation of your clothes as you move in them.
- While sitting, feel the chair under you and the weight of your body and legs pressing down on it.
- If you are lying down, feel the contact between your head, your body and your legs, as they touch the surface. Starting from your head, notice how each part feels, all the way down to your feet, on the soft or hard surface.
- Stop, look, and listen. Notice and name what you can see and hear nearby and in the distance.
- Look around you, notice what is front of you and to each side, name first large objects and then smaller ones.
- Get up, walk around, take your time to notice each step as you take one then another.
- Step outside, notice the temperature, the sounds around you, the ground under your feet, the smell in the air.
- “54321” Grounding Exercise:
  - Name 5 things you can see in the room with you.
  - Name 4 things you can feel (tactile; e.g. “chair on my back” or “feet on floor”)
  - Name 3 things you can hear right now
  - Name 2 things you can smell right now
  - Name 1 good thing about yourself
- Write and/or say grounding statements:
  - This situation won’t last forever
  - This too shall pass.
  - I can ride this out and not let it get me down.
  - My anxiety/fear/sadness won’t kill me; it just doesn’t feel good right now.
  - These are just my feelings and eventually they’ll go away.

Adapted from: <http://www.livingwell.org.au/well-being/grounding-exercises/>

## SHORT RELAXATION TECHNIQUES: WHEN YOU ONLY HAVE A FEW MINUTES

Correct Breathing	Learn to always breathe using the diaphragm. Let the breath reach the bottom of the lungs, and let the chest and shoulders relax. High, shallow chest breathing is stressful and gives messages of stress to the brain.
Three-Part Breathing	Take a deep breath and imagine the lungs divided into three parts. Visualize the lowest part of the lungs filling with air; the chest should remain relatively still. Imagine the middle part of the lungs filling; visualize the rib cage expanding. Visualize the upper part filling with air as your shoulders rise slight and over backward. Exhale fully and completely; drop your shoulders, feel your rib cage contract, and force every bit of air from the bottom of the lungs. Repeat.
Stretching	Gently roll your head and shoulders many times a day. Also, gently stretch other areas of the body that may need it.
Tense-Relax Muscles	Tighten the muscles you want to relax and feel the tension. Let the muscles become loose and limp and feel the relaxation.
Body Scan	With your mind, briefly scan every muscle in your body from your toes to your head. Release any tension with a relaxing breath. Correct your posture and relax all the muscles you are not using.
Jaw Drop	Be aware of any tightness in your jaw. Allow your jaw to loosen by separating your teeth.
Heaviness and Warmth in Hands & Arms	Relax your body and feel heaviness in your arms and hands. Imagine a warmth flowing through them. Imagine and experience your shoulders, arms, hands becoming heavy, relaxed, and warm.
Mind-Quieting Meditation	Begin by focusing on your breathing. Use a special phrase that helps you focus on relaxation, and quiet your mind.
Attitudes & Perceptions	Pay attention to your perceptions and attitudes. Allow yourself to put a stress-reducing “frame” around the stressor. Remember, stress affects the body based on perceptions of the outside world.