



Fort Hays State University – Health and Wellness Services

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Relaxation Techniques

Relaxation skills are excellent tools for the treatment of stress and anxiety. In addition to being easy to use, relaxation techniques are some of the few tools that offer an immediate sense of relief from the symptoms of stress and anxiety.

Deep Breathing

It's natural to take long, deep breaths when relaxed. However, when we are stressed or anxious, our breathing becomes rapid and shallow. Deep breathing reverses that and sends messages to the brain to begin calming the body. Practice will make your body respond more efficiently to deep breathing in the future.

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| 1. Breathe in slowly. Count in your head and make sure the inward breath lasts at least 5 seconds. Pay attention to the feeling of air in your lungs. |
| 2. Hold your breath for 5 to 10 seconds (again, keep count). You don't want to feel uncomfortable, but it should last quite a bit longer than an ordinary breath. |
| 3. Breathe out very slowly for 5 to 10 seconds (count!). Pretend like you're breathing through a straw to slow yourself down. Try using a real straw to practice! |
| 4. Repeat the process until you feel calm. |

Imagery

Think about some of your favorite and least favorite places. If you think about the place hard enough—if you really try to think about what it's like—you may begin to have feelings you associate with that location. Our brain has the ability to create emotional reactions based entirely off your thoughts. The imagery technique uses this to your advantage.

Make sure you're somewhere quiet. You'll need a few minutes to just spend quietly, in your mind.
Think of a place that's calming for you. Some examples are the beach, hiking on a mountain, relaxing at home with a friend, or playing with a pet.
Paint a picture of the calming place in your mind. Don't just think of the place briefly, imagine every little detail. Go through each of your senses and imagine what you would experience in that relaxing place. Here's an example using a beach: a. <i>Sight</i> . The sun is high in the sky and you're surrounded by white sand. There's no one else around. The water is a blueish green and waves are calmly rolling in from the ocean. b. <i>Sound</i> . You hear the deep pounding and splashing of the waves. There are seagulls somewhere in the background. c. <i>Touch</i> . The sun is warm on your back, but a breeze cools you down just enough. You can feel sand moving between your toes. d. <i>Taste</i> . You have a lemonade that's sweet, tart, and refreshing. e. <i>Smell</i> . You can smell the fresh ocean air, full of salt and calming aromas.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

When we are stressed or anxious, the tension in our muscles increases. This can lead to a feeling of stiffness, or even back or neck pain. Progressive muscle relaxation teaches us to become more aware of this tension so we can identify and address stress.

Find a private and quiet location. You should sit or lie down somewhere comfortable.

The idea of this technique is to intentionally tense each muscle, and then to release the tension. Let's practice with your feet.

- a. Tense the muscles in your toes by curling them into your foot. Notice how it feels when your foot is tense. Hold the tension for 5 seconds.
- b. Release the tension from your toes. Let them relax. Notice how your toes feel differently after releasing the tension.
- c. Tense all the muscles throughout your calf. Hold it for 5 seconds. Notice how the feeling of tension in your leg feels.
- d. Release the tension from your calf, and notice how the feeling of relaxation differs.

Follow this pattern of tensing and releasing tension all throughout your body. After you finish with your legs and feet, move up through your torso, arms, neck, and head.

Mindfulness Meditation

Mindfulness meditation is one exercise of many based upon the idea of mindfulness. In mindfulness meditation, you will focus on the present moment by turning your attention toward the cycle of breathing, and all the sensations that come with it.

Find a comfortable place to sit, with few distractions. If you are sitting on the floor, cross your legs. If you're in a chair, place your feet on the ground. Sit in an upright but comfortable position.

Turn your attention toward your breathing. Try to notice everything about it, from the feeling as it travels through your nose or mouth, to the sensation of it filling your lungs. Notice how it feels when you exhale and the air slowly returns to the atmosphere.

If your thoughts start to wander—which they eventually will—simply acknowledge that this has happened, and turn your focus back to your breathing. It's natural that your thoughts will wander, and it might take a moment before you catch yourself.

Set a timer, and practice! Five minutes is a good starting point, but aim for longer practice sessions as you progress.