

Relaxation

How to use relaxation exercises

You can use these exercises when you're feeling stressed, busy or worried. Don't worry if one technique doesn't work for you – try it a few times and, if it doesn't feel effective, move on to a different exercise.

- You can use relaxation techniques regularly, or every once in a while.
- Try and make some time in your day to try these exercises. Don't treat relaxing like a task that needs to be completed – try to think of it as giving yourself some time and space.
- Find somewhere quiet and comfortable where you won't be interrupted, if you can.
- Make sure your surroundings are the right temperature – it can be hard to relax if you're too hot or cold.

Relax your body

How will this help?

When you're stressed, your muscles might be tight and tense. This exercise helps you notice tension in your body and relax your muscles.

What do I need?

- somewhere comfortable to sit or lie down
- space where you won't be interrupted

What do I do?

Lie down or sit with your back straight and your feet on the floor.

Close your eyes or focus on a spot in the distance.

Start by clenching your toes as much as you can for a few seconds then releasing them. Notice the difference between the two feelings.

Match this to your breathing.

Tense your muscles as you take a deep breath in, and relax as you breathe out.

Move up your body, clenching and relaxing each muscle. Take time to notice any parts of your body that feel tense, tight or tired.

You can repeat if you still feel tense.

Take a moment to relax, then slowly and gently begin to move. When you feel ready, you can stand up slowly.

Alternatives

- Instead of tensing your muscles, try placing something warm on each part of your body in turn.



Get creative

How will this help?

Colour, creativity and movement can help you feel relaxed by distracting you from worrying thoughts, giving you an outlet and focus for your emotions and stimulating your senses.

What do I need?

- a table or desk
- some blank paper
- some crayons, coloured pencils or pens
- some sticky tape or masking tape to hold your paper down (optional)

What do I do?

Make sure you are sitting comfortably with your feet firmly on the floor, your back straight and your shoulders relaxed.

Take your paper and crayon, and draw a circle that fills most of the page – don't worry if it's a bit wonky!

Now keep drawing. You could keep going over the circle, or fill it with a pattern, but try not to let your crayon leave the page. Don't worry about creating a finished picture, just keep going.

Take time to focus on what you're drawing.

Focusing on these sensations can help you quieten your mind, like meditation.

Once you have done this for a few minutes, try using a different colour or pattern.

Alternatives

- If you're focusing too much on getting the pattern right, try using your other hand.
- If you find it hard to get started, try using a colouring book.

For more ideas about how to relax, go to Mind's website:
mind.org.uk/relaxation

Exploring relaxation can help you look after your wellbeing when you're feeling stressed or busy.

Relaxation

Don't worry if some ideas don't work for you – just enjoy the ones that do.



Take a break

Relaxation doesn't have to take up lots of your time – just stepping away from something stressful for a few minutes or taking time away from your normal routines and thoughts can give you enough space and distance to feel calmer.

- Read a book or a magazine, even if it's only for a few minutes.
- Run yourself a bath, watch a film, play with your pet or try out a new recipe.



Focus on your breathing

Learning to breathe more deeply can make you feel a lot calmer and increase your sense of wellbeing.

- Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Try to keep your shoulders down and relaxed, and place your hand on your stomach – it should rise as you breathe in and fall as you breathe out.
- Count as you breathe – start by counting to 4 as you breathe in, 4 as you breathe out, then work out what's comfortable for you.



Listen to music

Music can relax you, connect you to your emotions and distract you from worrying thoughts.

- Listen to your favourite songs. Turn up the volume and dance or sing along, or put your headphones on and close your eyes.
- Really listen to the music. Can you pick out different instruments? Can you hear a drum beat or a certain rhythm? Focus on the music, and let other thoughts fade away.



Picture yourself somewhere serene

Even if you can't physically get away, your imagination can transport you to somewhere you feel calm.

- Think of somewhere relaxing and peaceful. You might choose a memory of somewhere you've been, or a place you have imagined.
- Close your eyes, and think about the details of this place. What does it look like? What kind of colours and shapes can you see? Can you hear any sounds? Is it warm or cool? Let your mind drift and your body relax.



Try active relaxation

Relaxation doesn't have to mean sitting still – gentle exercise can help you relax too.

- Look for a class like yoga, Pilates or gentle stretching.
- Take a walk, going at your own pace. You might choose to go for a longer walk, but even a few minutes of walking can help you feel relaxed.



Get creative

Getting in touch with your artistic side can help you feel more calm and relaxed.

- Try painting, drawing, making crafts, playing a musical instrument, dancing, baking or sewing.
- Try not to worry too much about the finished product, and focus on enjoying yourself.



Spend time in nature

Spending time outside and in green spaces can be great for your physical and mental wellbeing.

- Take a walk in the countryside or through a local park, taking time to notice trees, flowers, plants and animals you see on the way.
- Spend some time taking part in conservation, whether that's digging in your own garden or taking part in a local green project. You can find projects and outdoor activities to suit whatever level of mobility you have.



Do a tech check

Technology can be great for helping you feel connected, but if you're using it a lot then it can contribute to making you feel busy and stressed. Taking a break, even a short one, can help you relax.

- Try turning your phone off for an hour (or a whole day if you're feeling brave).
- Step away from the TV, or have an evening where you don't check emails or social networks. Use the time to do something relaxing – try some of the ideas above!