



RELAXATION

There are as many ways to relax as there are ways to get stressed out. Techniques range from simple breathing exercises to more elaborate systems using visualization. Some are calming responses to sudden moments of panic, while others help you foster the habit of de-stressing throughout your day. Below, you will find recommended activities to help you manage stress. Don't worry about memorizing them (you don't need anything else to worry about!); simply use them as models of something nice to do for yourself.

Example 1: Useful as a daily/weekly routine (times vary)

Don't neglect the obvious. What are the things that you already know will relax you? Identify healthy, positive activities and make them a priority. These are not "fluff;" they're as important as eating and sleeping. Examples include taking a walk, drinking coffee with friends, reading, listening to music, playing tennis, keeping a journal, watching a comedy, meditating, praying, playing with children, working a puzzle, or spending some quiet moments alone in the morning.

Example 2: Useful during tests (30 - 60 seconds)

- Close your eyes.
- Inhale a single, deep breath through your nose.
- Exhale slowly through pursed lips. Picture all the tension flowing from your body with the air.
- Pay attention to which parts of your body feel the most tension. Focus on these parts first.
- Imagine that those tense parts of your body are pleasantly warm and heavy.
- Allow gravity to stretch these tense muscles toward the floor.
- Feel your jaw, shoulders, arms and hands relax.
- Let your pen or pencil slide easily from your fingers.
- With your eyes still closed, inhale and exhale three more slow, deliberate breaths.
- Open your eyes slowly.
- Smile and say an encouraging word to yourself.

Example 3: Useful anytime you feel tense (3 - 5 minutes)

- Close your eyes.
- Gently let your chin lower toward your chest.
- Throughout the following steps, take slow, full breaths through your nose. Exhale through your mouth.
- Raise and lower your shoulders in rhythm with your breathing. (Remember: slow and smooth.) Repeat three or four times.
- Slowly roll your shoulders forward and backward several times.
- Raise your chin up to a relaxed, forward-looking position.
- Slowly let your head lean comfortably toward your right shoulder. Feel the muscles stretch.
- Raise your head back up slowly.
- Slowly let your head lean comfortably toward your left shoulder. Feel the muscles stretch.
- Raise your head back up slowly.
- With your eyes still closed, inhale and exhale three slow, deliberate breaths.
- Open your eyes slowly.
- Smile and say an encouraging word to yourself.

Example 4: Useful as a daily routine (15 - 30 minutes)

- Find a quiet spot where you will not be interrupted or feel self-conscious.
- Turn on soft, soothing music or “ambient sounds,” such as recordings of ocean waves or birds chirping. (Many stores carry CD’s and tapes of “relaxation” sounds; some also include guided imagery such as you will find below.)
- Dim the lights or turn them off completely.
- Settle into a comfortable spot (chairs, sofas, beds, and even floors will do).
- Make sure you are comfortable. You may want to remove your shoes or loosen your belt.
- Close your eyes.
- Inhale slowly through your nose; hold breath while you count to three; exhale briskly through your mouth. Repeat several times, imagining all stress being cast far away from you.
- Ease into a pattern of moderately-paced, easy breathing. It is helpful to inhale through your nose and exhale through you mouth.
- Once your pattern of breathing is established and doesn’t require your conscious attention, you can begin a process of flexing muscles and releasing them. One suggested pattern:
 - ✧ Squint your eyes tightly; hold this squint and inhale while you count to eight; relax your eyes as you exhale. Repeat.
 - ✧ Clench you jaw tightly; hold this tension and inhale while you count to eight; relax your jaw as you exhale. Repeat.
 - ✧ Raise your shoulders toward your ears; hold this position and inhale while you count to eight; release your shoulders as you exhale. Repeat.
 - ✧ Flex the muscles in your chest; hold the tension and inhale while you count to eight; relax your chest muscles as you exhale. Repeat.
 - ✧ Clench your fists and tighten muscles throughout your arms; hold this and inhale while you count to eight; release the tension as you exhale. Repeat.
 - ✧ Continue down your body, flexing or clenching different muscle groups; pay special attention to places where you “store” stress (often in the shoulders and back.)
- Return your focus to your breathing and make sure you are maintaining a relaxed, even pace of inhaling through the nose and exhaling through the mouth.
- Imagine an ideal place.
 - ✧ Some people choose beautiful places (misty mountain waterfalls, green meadows, or Caribbean beaches); some people choose safe places (a childhood bedroom, a secluded cave, or a place of worship.)
 - ✧ Picture yourself beginning a trip to your selected place. You might imagine strolling along a shaded path to that misty mountain waterfall or walking up the drive of your childhood home and entering the front door.
 - ✧ In your mind’s eye, as you progress along the way to your ideal place, notice details that stir up pleasant feelings within you. What do you see? What do you smell? How does the air feel? What do you hear? Who might you meet?
 - ✧ Once your imagination has taken you to your ideal place, again, notice the details. Search out things that bring happiness, peace, contentment, security, comfort, and joy.
 - ✧ Before your ideal place loses its appeal, imagine the journey away from it (simply retrace the steps that led you there.)
 - ✧ When you reach the end of the trip away from your ideal place, reassure yourself that you can return at anytime. Remember the feelings you had while you lingered there.
- Spend time remaining still and breathing comfortably. When you feel ready, slowly get up and ease you way back into your daily routine.