

# Relaxation Techniques

Relaxation techniques can help you quickly manage stress and anxiety. Use them during moments of high anxiety for immediate relief, or regularly for the most powerful long-term benefits.

## Deep Breathing

When anxiety rises, breathing becomes rapid and shallow. By purposefully slowing your breathing, you can reverse this response and create a calming effect.



1. **Inhale slowly through your nose for a count of 4.** Pay attention to the feeling of air filling your lungs.
2. **Hold the air in your lungs for a count of 6.** Don't hold to the point of discomfort, but it should feel quite a bit longer than an ordinary breath.
3. **Exhale slowly for a count of 7.** To slow yourself down, try puckering your lips as if you are blowing through a straw.
4. **Continue breathing this way for 3-5 minutes.** When you become distracted, gently return your attention to your breathing.

## Imagery

Our brains can create emotional responses based entirely on our thoughts. For example, if you think of a sad story, you'll probably feel sad. Similarly, if you imagine a relaxing scene, you'll likely feel calm.

**Setup:** Sit or lie down in a comfortable location without distractions. Think of a place or activity you find relaxing. Examples include the beach, hiking, relaxing at home, or playing with a pet.

**Practice:** For the next 5-10 minutes, imagine your chosen scene in vivid detail. Explore each of your senses: What do you see, hear, feel, smell, and taste?



**Sight:** Describe as many details as you can. What do you see all around you? What colors do you see? What textures?



**Sound:** What do you hear? Are the sounds quiet or loud? Pleasant or unpleasant? What do you hear more distantly, including sounds you might usually tune out?



**Touch:** Is the air warm or cool? Windy or still? Are you sitting, walking, or doing something else? What does that feel like? Touch something in your scene and imagine the sensation.



**Smell & taste:** Are any tastes or smells immediately noticeable? If not, go out of your way to smell a flower, sip a lemonade, or whatever fits your imagery. Savor the sensation.

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## Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Anxiety causes tension in our muscles that can lead to stiffness and pain. Oftentimes, we're completely unaware of the tension we're carrying. Progressive muscle relaxation teaches you to recognize this tension so you can then release it.

**Setup:** Sit or lie down in a comfortable location without distractions. Beginning with your feet and ending at the top of your head, you will tense and relax each body part one-by-one.

### Practice:

- **Tense each body part tightly, one by one, for 10 seconds.** It might feel a little uncomfortable, but should not be painful. If you are having trouble with a body part, refer to the cues below.
- **Release the tension and relax for 10 seconds.** Notice the feeling of relief and how relaxation feels different than tension.

**Feet**      Tightly curl your toes and arch your feet.

**Calves**      Point your feet as if you are standing on your toes and squeeze your calf muscles.

**Thighs**      Squeeze your thighs together as if you are trying to hold a ball between your knees.

**Stomach**      Imagine you are doing a sit-up, squeezing your core.

**Chest**      Bring your elbows together in front of your chest and squeeze.

**Back**      Squeeze your shoulder blades together behind you.

**Arms**      Imagine wringing out a rag, gripping it tightly and tensing your arms.

**Hands**      Ball your hands into tight fists.

**Neck**      Tilt your head slightly up or down and gently squeeze.

**Face**      Make a face by scrunching your mouth, forehead, cheeks, and nose.

**Body**      Curl forward into a ball, tensing all the muscles you can.