

Relaxation

Here at Wellbeing we understand that that some people experience more worry and anxiety than what is considered “normal”. This is completely understandable and a normal reaction to very stressful and unusual situations. Due to varying stressors you may be experiencing loss of hobbies, as well as time socialising with family and friends, which may ordinarily help you cope with stress and anxiety.



Our fight, flight or freeze response is a protective mechanism that we have needed to survive. When we were cavemen and women, we would need to react if we saw a lion. Our flight, fight or freeze response would kick in so we could run away, fight the lion, or play dead. Feeling anxious or stressed is our body's natural response to feeling threatened. It is an alarm system which helps us deal with danger.

Our breathing rate increases, as does our blood pressure, heart rate, muscle tension, sweating, state of mental arousal and adrenaline flow. A lot of the time, we do not need those survival responses, so relaxation helps to decrease that adrenaline response, to let it go.

How Relaxation Helps

- **Reduces tiredness** – if you can manage everyday life without excessive tension.
- **Improves performance** – your performance in work, sport or music can be raised through self-awareness and control of tension.
- **Reduces pain** – pain can occur as a result of tension e.g. headaches and backache. Relaxation can help you to cope by raising your pain threshold and reducing the amount of pain.
- **Coping with stress** – relaxation helps you to reduce the effects of stress and to breathe effectively.
- **Improves sleep** – by allowing you to be calm and peaceful.
- **Improves self-confidence** – by increasing your self-awareness and ability to cope with daily life.
- **Improves personal relationships** – it is easier to relate well to other people when you are relaxed and self-confident.



Breathing and Relaxation

Our out-breath releases tension in the chest muscles, allowing our muscles to release their tension. Breathing is far more effective when we use our diaphragms, rather than our chest muscles. Sit comfortably in a chair and place a hand on your belly. Take two or three large breaths and imagine that there is a balloon in your belly. It should inflate when you breathe in. Practise so that it is the lower hand on your abdomen that moves as you breathe in and out. People often think that their tummy goes in when they breathe in - but the reverse should be the case. As you breathe in, your belly should move out.



When you're feeling tense or trying to relax, try breathing out a little bit more slowly and more deeply, noticing a short pause before the in-breath takes over (don't exaggerate the in-breath, just let it happen). You might find it useful to count slowly or prolong a word such as "one" or "peace" to help elongate the out breath a little (to yourself or out loud).

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Our bodies respond automatically to stressful situations and thoughts by becoming tense. The opposite relationship also works: a good way of relaxing the mind is to deliberately relax the body. In a progressive muscle relaxation, each muscle group is tensed in turn, and the tension is then released. This relaxes the muscles and allows you to notice the contrast between tension and relaxation. Relaxation should be enjoyable so if any part of the exercise is too difficult skip it for the moment. If you have any injuries, you may wish to leave out that part of the exercise.

Preparation

Lie down flat on your back, on a firm bed, a couch, or on the floor. Support your head and neck with a pillow or cushion. **Alternatively sit in a comfortable chair** with your head well-supported. Close your eyes if you are comfortable doing so.

Instructions

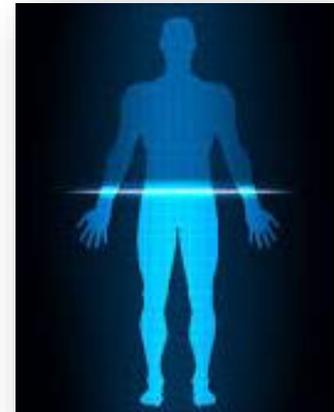
Focus your attention on different parts of your body in sequence. Go through the sequence three times:

- 1) Tense & release:** Tense that body part, hold it for a few moments, then relax.
- 2) Lightly tense & release:** Tense that body part with just enough tension to notice, then relax.
- 3) Release only:** Just pay attention to each muscle group and decide to relax it.



Recommended Sequence

- 1 Right hand & arm (clench the fist & tighten the muscles in the arm)
- 2 Left hand & arm
- 3 Right leg (tense the leg, lifting the knee slightly)
- 4 Left leg
- 5 Stomach & chest
- 6 Back muscles (pull the shoulders back slightly)
- 7 Neck & throat (push the head back slightly into the pillow/surface)
- 8 Face (scrunch up the muscles in your face)



Visualisation

Visualisation or imagery is a useful relaxation tool. Get yourself into a comfortable position and focus on your breathing. Close your eyes and pay attention to areas of tension in your body, releasing this tension on your out breath. Try to engage all your senses in this exercise.

Relaxing 'Safe Place' Imagery

- Imagine a place where you can feel calm, peaceful and safe. It may be a place you've been to before, somewhere you've dreamt about going to, or maybe somewhere you've seen in a picture.
- Focus on the colours in your safe place.
- Try to notice the sounds that are around you. Or maybe your safe place is silent.
- Pay attention to the smells you notice there.
- Focus on any sensations - the earth beneath you, the temperature, the breeze, and the air, anything else you can touch.
- While you're in your safe place, you might choose to give it a name, whether one word or a phrase that you can use to bring that image back, anytime you need to.
- You can choose to stay there a while, just enjoying the peacefulness. You can leave whenever you want to, just by opening your eyes and being aware of where you are now.



Try at least one of these exercises daily. Remember that just like learning to cycle or to swim, these things take time and practise before we get them right and feel the full benefit. So don't feel disheartened if the first few times you try these you're not sure if they're for you. Try to keep going.

Having suicidal thoughts? Discuss with a loved one, call Samaritans on **116 123** or access your **G.P.** or **Crisis Service** via **NHS** on **111**.

Our recommended resources (click for direct access):

NHS Inform	Offers the most up-to-date advice on dealing varying mental health difficulties, including the 5 Steps to Mental Wellbeing. Please visit: NHS Inform
Wellbeing	Our website offers a variety of self-help materials, groups, and courses for all sorts of problems that you may be facing. Anyone can download the self- help materials. Please visit: Wellbeing Website Glasgow
Mental Health Foundation	A range of content designed to give you more information about mental health and to help you to look after your mental health. Please visit: Your Mental Health - Mental Health Foundation
NHS Every Mind Matters	Interactive website providing you the opportunity to complete a short quiz which creates a Mind Plan of what you can do to improve your mental health. Please visit: Every Mind Matters
Psych Central	Mental health professionals offering reliable, trusted information to individuals. There is also an excellent quiz section allowing you to find out more about symptoms management. Please visit: PsychCentral for Mental Health
MIND	Information hub provides advice on how to support your mental wellbeing. Please visit: MIND Information Hub
SAMH	Hub of information and guidance about looking after mental health. Please visit: SAMH Guidance for Mental Health

Useful Apps:

	Mind Shift	Rather than trying to avoid anxious feelings, Mind Shift stresses the importance of changing how you think about anxiety. It can encourage you to take charge of your life, ride out intense emotions, and face challenging situations
	SAM	SAM might be perfect for you if you're interested in self-help, but meditation isn't your thing. Users are prompted to build their own 24-hour anxiety toolkit that allows you to track anxious thoughts and behaviour over time and learn 25 different self-help techniques.
	Happify	Need a happy fix? With its psychologist-approved mood-training program, the Happify app is your fast-track to a good mood. Try various engaging games, activity suggestions, gratitude prompts and more to train your brain as if it were a muscle, to overcome negative thoughts
	Headspace	The Headspace app makes meditation simple. Learn the skills of mindfulness and meditation by using this app for just a few minutes per day. You gain access to hundreds of meditations on everything from stress and anxiety to sleep and focus.
	Calm	Calm provides people experiencing stress and anxiety with guided meditations, sleep stories, breathing programs, and relaxing music.
	Smiling Mind	Smiling mind is a way to practice daily meditation and mindfulness exercises from any device. This is really helpful during times of stress and is a fun and unique way to help you put a smile on your mind.