

Relaxation & Coping Techniques

MINI'S: Breathing exercises

Deep breath to a 4-count

- As you inhale, count slowly up to four; as you exhale, counting slowly back down to one. Thus, as you inhale, you say to yourself “1,2,3,4” and as you exhale, “4,3,2,1.” Take a normal breath between each deep breath. Breathe slowly 4 times in a row, 3 times a day. *Harvard research shows these benefits: within 10 days – 2 weeks, increased sense of well-being, improved memory, focus and concentration. The brain needs 20% more oxygen than the rest of the body. When we're stressed or anxious, we shallow breathe and even hold our breath.*

10 Slow, deep breaths, counting back from 10 to 1. Take a normal breath or two between each deep breath.

- Can be done at traffic lights, standing in line, waiting on the phone on “hold”, waiting for class to start, before competition, before an exam, when angry or upset, before an important meeting, etc.
- Place blue $\frac{3}{4}$ ” round color coding labels in areas where you work and live to remind yourself to do deep breathing. i.e.: on computer monitor, phone, work area, rear view mirror, bedroom clock, etc.

Stop - Breathe - Reflect – Choose/Change

- When feeling tension build inside, or when having negative thoughts, take a moment to:
 - STOP!
 - Take a slow, deep breath.
 - Reflect on these 4 questions: **1.** Does this thought cause me stress? **2.** Where did I learn this thought? **3.** Is this thought logical? **4.** Is this thought true?
 - Negative thoughts are usually distorted, cause stress, are illogical, and untrue.
 - Choose how you will respond in a positive way.

PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

- Begin with the toes, tightening then releasing and softening
- Slowly moving to the ankles, lower legs, and on up the body, tightening, then softening each body part, becoming more comfortable, releasing tightness and tension
- Whenever your mind wanders, gently bring it back to the moment, focusing on just that area, and softening it.
- Along with softening, you can incorporate a slow deep breath.

MINDFULNESS

- Focus only on one thing - that which you are PRESENTLY doing! (example: walking, dancing, cooking, or any other focused activity.) This is an attitude of being aware and remaining present to what is happening without becoming involved with feelings.

IMAGERY

- This is using the imagination at its best; purposeful daydreaming.
- Take a few moments to get comfortable, letting muscles become soft, like a rag doll, while sitting or resting in a place that is quiet and without interruption.
- With eyes closed or open, imagine being in a special place, or performing a specific task or skill well, or reliving an experience or activity, or reframing an event in a positive way, etc. Letting yourself experience the event or activity as fully as you wish with your senses. Experience how it feels, recall and relive an experience when you performed your best and bring that moment to this moment, now. Performing to the best of your ability.
- Not everyone is visual or able to “see” with the imagination. You may hear, smell and most definitely feel the experience (kinesthetic) within your body.
- *Avoid the idea of perfection, since as human beings, this is unattainable.* For performance enhancement, imagine performing the activity with excellence.
- Imagery should be done where you will be uninterrupted.
- Imagery should never be done while operating machinery, as you are unable to put your full attention on the task at hand.

GUIDED IMAGERY

- This is the same as “imagery” except that the experience is guided in a one-on-one session with a practitioner or listening to an audiotape or CD.
- There are many of these resources available on the market.

AUTOGENIC TRAINING

- Imagine a comfortably warm and heavy “blanket” of energy, like a gentle ocean wave, coming over your body. With each wave in, feeling the comfortable heaviness and warmth. As the wave goes out and away, it takes with it tension, pain, cluttered thoughts, and anything that gets in the way of relaxation and sleep. Proceed as follows: Begin at the feet, then the lower legs, to mid-thigh, then waist, mid chest, to chin, then around head or over head, whichever is more comfortable.

You will find that the more you practice these techniques, the better you will feel, the easier they are to do, and the more effective they become.

OTHER RELAXATION/COPING TECHNIQUES

- Journaling
- Massage
- Yoga
- Soothing Music (especially instrumental)
- Sensory Awareness -e.g.: sitting in nature, taking it in with all your senses
- Exercise and Play
- Talking with a friend

COMMON QUESTIONS/PROBLEMS WITH ELICITING THE RELAXATION RESPONSE

1. **“Can’t find time to relax.”** That’s exactly the problem. Most of us won’t find the time. You need to Make time to do it! Everyone can open up at least 10-20 minutes a day for relaxation. Remember, anxiety and stress wastes a lot of time and energy.
2. **Restlessness:** exercise first or do yoga stretching, take a shower or bath.
3. **Falling asleep during imagery.** This is common, especially if you are sleep deprived. Practice imagery in the morning, when you are more alert, or sitting in a chair, where you are less likely to fall asleep.
4. **External noises:** notice them then let them fade into the background as unnecessary. What you give attention to grows. Focus away from the noise and toward something positive in your imagery.
5. **“Too many thoughts.”** Become aware of drifting thoughts, and gently bring yourself back to the moment at hand. This gets better with practice.
6. **Old emotions/memories resurfacing:** acknowledge them, make a mental note, and journal about it later. This may mean there are some old issues to resolve and emotions to release.
7. **Insomnia:** Practice relaxation before going to sleep as a way to quiet your mind. You have to let go of the day in order to fall asleep.
8. **Increased dream activity:** Doing relaxation may initially increase dream activity. Pay attention to them, note themes and even write about them in your journal.
9. **“Am I doing it right?”** Are you feeling more relaxed and quieting your mind? If so, you’re doing it right. Just taking some moments to be quiet and stop activity is a significant step. Enjoy the positive changes.
10. **Anxiety about “letting go”:** You can always open your eyes whenever you wish.
11. **Changes in bodily perceptions:** extremities may feel very heavy or light, tingling, larger, smaller or bodily sensations may change may change in unfamiliar ways. This is natural and a positive sign that the relaxation response is working. Just be aware without reacting and trust the process.
12. **New inner experiences** such as “floating”, “dropping”, “drifting”. This too is common and positive and an indication that you are achieving a deeper level of relaxation, accompanied by a quiet state of mind.
13. **Different images** during the relaxation response. Any and all kinds of images can appear, arising from prior experience, emotional content, or fantasy. An attitude of acceptance and gentle letting go is useful.

Enjoy the process of learning to relax. It’s fun and a natural way we process our thoughts, feelings and imagination.