

Stress Management Exercises

Deep Breathing Instructions

Sit back or lie down in a comfortable position. Close your eyes, if you would like to do so. When you're learning, try placing a hand on your stomach. If you breathe deeply enough, you should notice it rising and falling with each inhalation and exhalation.

1. Inhale. Breathe in slowly through your nose for **4 seconds**.
2. Pause. Hold the air in your lungs for **4 seconds**.
3. Exhale. Breathe out slowly through your mouth for **6 seconds**.

Tip: Pucker your lips, as if you are blowing through a straw, to slow your exhalation.

4. Repeat. Practice for at least 2 minutes, but preferably 5 to 10 minutes.

TIPS:

- If it isn't working, slow down! The most common mistake is breathing too fast. Time each step in your head, counting slowly as you do so.
- Counting out your breaths serves a second purpose. It takes your mind off the source of your anxiety. Whenever you catch your mind wandering, simply return your focus to counting.
- The times we use for each step are suggestions, and can be lengthened or decreased. ***Lengthen the time if it feels natural to do so, or decrease the time if you feel discomfort.***

Mindfulness Meditation Guide

- Find a place where you can sit quietly and undisturbed for a few moments. To begin, you might want to set a timer for about 5-10 minutes, but after some experience you should not be too concerned about the length of time you spend meditating.
- Begin by bringing your attention to the present moment by noticing your breathing. Pay attention to your breath as it enters and then leaves your body. Before long, your mind will begin to wander, pulling you out of the present moment. That's ok. Notice your thoughts and feelings as if you are an outside observer watching what's happening in your brain. Take note, and allow yourself to return to your breathing.
- Sometimes you might feel frustrated or bored. That's fine--these are just a few more feelings to notice. Your mind might start to plan an upcoming weekend, or worry about a responsibility. Notice where your thoughts are going, and accept what's happening.
- Whenever you are able, return your concentration to your breathing. Continue this process until your timer rings, or until you are ready to be done.

Five Senses Exercise

Use this exercise to quickly ground yourself in the present when you only have a moment. The goal is to notice something that you are currently experiencing through each of your senses.

- What are **5** things you can see? Look around you and notice 5 things you hadn't noticed before. Maybe a pattern on a wall, light reflecting from a surface, or a knick-knack in the corner of a room.
- What are **4** things you can feel? Maybe you can feel the pressure of your feet on the floor, your shirt resting on your shoulders, or the temperature on your skin. Pick up an object and notice its texture.
- What are **3** things you can hear? Notice all the background sounds you had been filtering out, such as an air-conditioning, birds chirping, or cars on a distant.
- What are **2** things you can smell? Maybe you can smell flowers, coffee, or freshly cut grass. It doesn't have to be a nice smell either: maybe there's an overflowing trash can or sewer.
- What is **1** thing you can taste? Pop a piece of gum in your mouth, sip a drink, eat a snack if you have one, or simply notice how your mouth tastes. "Taste" the air to see how it feels on your tongue.

The numbers for each sense are only a guideline. Feel free to do more or less of each. Also, try this exercise while doing an activity like washing dishes, listening to music, or going for a walk.

Body Scan

Once again, find a place where you can sit quietly and undisturbed for a few moments and set your timer for 5-10 minutes.

During the body scan exercise you will pay close attention to physical sensations throughout your body. The goal isn't to change or relax your body, but instead to notice and become more aware of it. Don't worry too much about how long you practice, but do move slowly.

Begin by paying attention to the sensations in your feet. Notice any sensations such as warmth, coolness, pressure, pain, or a breeze moving over your skin. Slowly move up your body--to your calves, thighs, pelvis, stomach, chest, back, shoulders, arms, hands, fingers, neck, and finally your head. Spend some time on each of these body parts, just noticing the sensations.

After you travel up your body, begin to move back down, through each body part, until you reach your feet again.

Remember: move slowly, and just pay attention.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Find a private and quiet location. You should sit or lie down somewhere comfortable. The idea of this technique is to intentionally tense each muscle, and then to release the tension. Let's practice with your feet:

1. Tense the muscles in your toes by curling them into your foot. Notice how it feels when your foot is tense. Hold the tension for 5 seconds.
2. Release the tension from your toes. Let them relax. Notice how your feet feel differently after you release the tension.
3. Tense the muscles all throughout your calf. Hold it for 5 seconds. Notice how the feeling of tension in your leg feels.
4. Release the tension from your calf, and notice how the feeling of relaxation differs.

Follow this pattern of tensing and releasing tension all throughout your body. After you finish with your feet and legs, move up through your torso, arms, hands, neck, and head.

Guided Imagery

Guided imagery is a mindfulness exercise that focuses the imagination in proactive, positive ways. Ideally, it will involve all the senses, not merely the visual sense, and is experienced throughout the body.

1. Make sure you are somewhere quiet, where limited distractions are present. Allow yourself at least a few minutes to spend implementing this.
2. Think about one of your favorite calming places (for example: the beach, mountains, relaxing at home, or a being with a pet). If you think about it hard enough, you are likely to experience positive feelings associated with that place.
3. Think about every aspect of that place – the view, the touch (hands in the sand, petting your animal), the smell, the sound, and the taste in your mouth. Try to recreate the scenario in your mind in as much detail as possible.
4. Use tools to facilitate recreating the experience in your mind (e.g., a pine scented diffuser for the forest; an audio file of crickets for a summer evening; a heat lamp for the feel of lying on the beach; etc.).
5. If generating the scenario is distracting or challenging, you can listen to an audio file of someone reading a guided imagery script.
6. Doing this can be very calming.
7. Once practiced, you can take yourself to this “place” quite readily, even in the absence of the sensory cues.

Smart Phone Applications

1. Headspace
2. Insight Timer
3. Aura
4. Stop, Breath, & Think
5. Calm

Self-Help Books/Websites

Real Happiness: The Power of Meditation; By: Sharon Salzberg
Meditation For Fidgety Skeptics; By: Dan Harris

References

www.TherapistAid.com
Real Happiness: The Power of Meditation; By: Sharon Salzberg