



What is relaxation?

Building healthier lives

UHB is a no smoking Trust

What is relaxation?

Relaxation is a state of being free from feeling negative emotions such as anger, fear and anxiety. Relaxation can be a useful skill in reducing tension and making living with health conditions more manageable. These techniques reverse the fight or flight response by lowering heart and breathing rate and reducing stress hormone levels.



How do we know when we are relaxed:

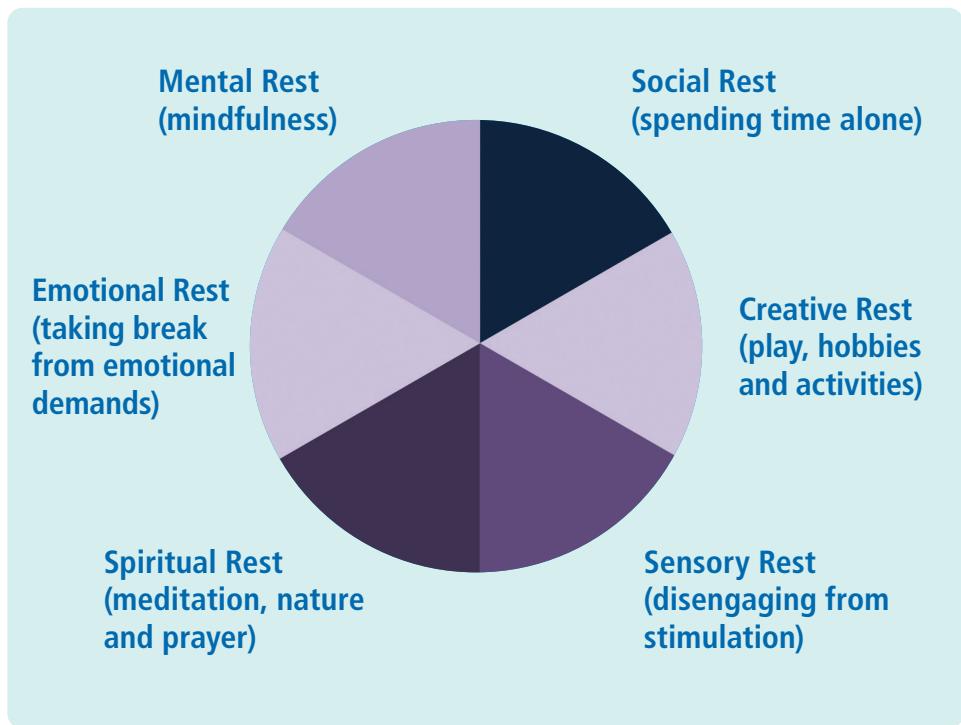
- Brain activity slows down aiding concentration and feeling calmer
- Muscles tend to hurt less
- Breathing slows down
- Heart rate slows
- Blood pressure goes down
- Immune system works better
- Improved sleep quality

Some forms of relaxation consist of:

- Rest
- Deep breathing
- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Visual relaxation
- Body scan
- Mindfulness meditation
- Yoga / Tai Chi
- Repetitive prayer
- Physical exercise

Rest

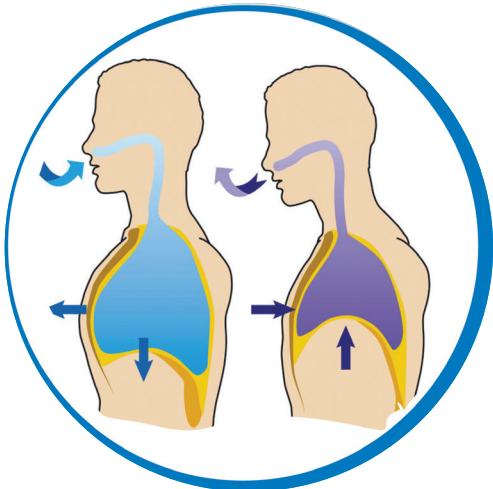
Rest is necessary for our health and well-being, but it is not all about sleep. There are different forms of rest which can help us maintain our physical and emotional balance.



Deep breathing exercises

To help check that you are breathing correctly:

- Place one hand on your stomach,
- Place the other hand on your chest,
- As you breathe in, your hand on your stomach should rise
- As you breathe out your stomach should fall, the hand on your chest should not move



Then:

Sit quietly with your eyes closed.

Breathe in to a count of four.

Hold your breath for a count of four.

Breathe out slowly for a count of four, sighing as you do so.

Sit for a few minutes concentrating on your pattern of breathing.

Repeat as required.

Remember to allow your breathing to return to its own natural rhythm between each exercise for a few moments.

Progressive muscle relaxation

Progressive muscle relaxation is an easy technique to do at home. You don't need any special equipment. All you need is focus, attention, and a quiet spot where you won't be distracted.

The key with this technique is to tense each muscle group and hold for 5 seconds. Then, you exhale as you let your muscles fully relax for 10 to 20 seconds before you move on to the next muscle group.

Benefits of progressive muscle relaxation



How to do it

1. Start by lying or sitting down. Relax your entire body. Take five deep, slow breaths
2. Lift your toes upward. Hold, then let go. Pull your toes downward. Hold, then let go
3. Next, tense your calf muscles, then let go
4. Move your knees toward each other. Hold, then let go
5. Squeeze your thigh muscles. Hold, then let go

6. Clench your hands. Pause, then let go
7. Tense your arms. Hold, then let go
8. Squeeze your buttocks. Pause, then let go
9. Contract your abdominal muscles. Pause, then let go
10. Inhale and tighten your chest. Hold, then exhale and let go
11. Raise your shoulders to your ears. Pause, then let go
12. Purse your lips together. Hold, then release
13. Open your mouth wide. Hold, then let go
14. Close your eyes tightly. Pause, then release
15. Lift your eyebrows. Hold, then release

Visual relaxation

When it comes to improving your physical and mental health, your thoughts can be powerful tools. We've all heard of mind over matter and studies confirm the link between what you think and how your body works.

Research shows positive thinking triggers chemical changes that, in turn, boost the immune system, giving your body added protection against infection.

Creative visualisation is a self-help technique which cashes in on the benefits of positive thinking. By using deep relaxation and mental screenplays, it invites you to dip into your imagination to create vivid scenes and then enter these moving images as though they are real.

You're also encouraged to break down the negative thoughts we all produce automatically and replace them with positive pictures to bring your body to better health, relaxation and strength.

These tips will help you have a go:

1. Be specific about what you want to achieve before each session
2. Tackle one problem at a time
3. Replace negative images with positive ones
4. Use your senses to the full – smell, touch, taste, hearing etc as you imagine scenes

Have a go!

To begin with concentrate on your breathing – breathe normally. After a few minutes try to think of an image (it is important to choose an image that makes you feel good). For example: a vase of flowers, a picture, lying on a tropical beach, being in a favourite place, a field of corn or trees blowing gently in the wind, or looking around a garden.

Imagine every little detail, the sights, sounds, scents and colours of your image. If thoughts come into your mind, concentrate on your image to block them out. Take time to enjoy exploring the image in your mind and the feeling of relaxation.

When you are ready, start to become aware of your surroundings, the sounds around you, and where you are sitting or lying. Then start to move your hands and feet, slowly followed by your arms and legs. Now slowly open your eyes and have a stretch or a yawn, if you want to.

You will need to practise this once a day. It takes time to be able to focus your mind on visualisation. Don't worry if at first your mind wanders. Just bring your thoughts back to the task, telling yourself to let go of other thoughts or concerns for now. The more you practise the easier this will become.

Visualisation exercise

1. Relax the body
2. Visualise a scene you know well. Your garden, perhaps, or the front of your house. Choose a pleasant scene that has happy associations. If you can't visualise clearly, don't worry. Just work with whatever you can get. Visualisation improves with practice
3. Once you've established your visualisation, imagine walking down some steps into the scene, counting backwards from the number ten. Imagine the tinnitus / sensation of dizziness at the top of the steps and as you count down, try to leave it behind so that when you get to the bottom of the steps you have left it at the top
4. Now look closely at the details. If it's your garden, pick out the exact position of the flowers, and look at the colours and shapes. Try to get them as accurately as you can but again don't worry if they don't become clear or tend to slip away. If stray thoughts come into your mind, just let them float away
5. Now let the visualisation go and replace it with an imaginary scene. Choose anything that appeals to you which is calm and full of peace
6. When the visualisation is as clear as you can get it, imagine yourself growing lighter and lighter until you're drifting into the scene itself so that it is all around you and you are part of it. Feel the physical sensations that go with it
7. As you become part of the scene, you become part of the peace within it. Stay for as long as you wish and when you are ready slowly come back to the here and now. Stay for a moment looking at the blank space left by the scene
8. When the exercise is over, don't jump up and immediately tense yourself but try to bring the peace of the scene into your daily life.

Body scan

This technique is used to focus on one particular body part or a group of muscles at a time. The idea is to mentally release any physical tension you may have in that area. This meditation can help strengthen your mind-body connection.

How to do a body scan meditation



Mindfulness meditation

The idea of mindfulness meditation is for you to focus your attention on the present time. This technique is designed to teach you to slow down racing thoughts, letting go of any negativity and allowing you to calm both your mind and body.

How to practice mindfulness

- 1. Take a seat.** Find a place to sit that feels calm and quiet to you
- 2. Set a time limit.** If you are just beginning, it can help to choose a short time, such as 5 or 10 minutes
- 3. Notice your body.** You can sit or kneel however is comfortable for you. Just make sure you are stable and in a position, you can stay in for a while
- 4. Feel your breath.** Follow the sensation of your breath as it goes out and as it goes in
- 5. Notice when your mind has wandered.** When you get around to noticing this – in a few seconds, a minute, five minutes – simply return your attention to the breath
- 6. Be kind to your wandering mind.** Don't judge yourself or obsess over the content of the thoughts you find yourself lost in. Just come back

Repetitive prayer

For this technique, you silently repeat a short prayer or phrase from a prayer while practicing breath focus. This method may be especially appealing if religion or spirituality is meaningful to you.

Experts suggest rather than choosing one type of relaxation, choosing several can be more beneficial. Ideally doing these for 20 minutes per day has a positive benefit, however if you can only do it for a couple of minutes that is also proven beneficial. The longer and more frequent these techniques are used the more effective it is to help reduce stress levels.

Please use the space below to write down any questions you may have and bring this with you to your next appointment.

If you require this information in another format, such as a different language, large print, braille or audio version please ask a member of staff or email **interpreting.service@uhb.nhs.uk**.

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