

Abdominal Breathing

Your breathing directly reflects the level of tension you carry in your body. Under tension, your breathing usually becomes shallow and rapid, and occurs high in the chest. When relaxed, you breathe more fully, more deeply, and from your abdomen. Breathing deeply and slowly can help to calm your nervous system and help you cope with stressful situations. The following exercises can help you change your breathing:

1. Diaphragmatic Breathing

- Start by sitting comfortably and place one hand on your chest and the other on your abdomen.
- Inhale slowly through your nose and breathe deeply into your abdomen. The hand on your abdomen should rise as you breathe in. The hand on your chest should remain as still as possible.
- When you have taken a full breath, pause for a moment, then exhale slowly through your mouth. The hand on your abdomen should move up and down with your abdomen as you breathe.
- Do 10 slow, full abdominal breaths. Try to keep your breathing smooth and regular.

2. Box breathing

- Breathing from your abdomen, inhale through your nose slowly to a count of four.
- Pause and hold your breath to a count of four.
- Exhale slowly, through your mouth to a count of four.
- Pause and hold your breath to a count of four.
- Tips: If 4 seconds is too much, start with 3 or 2.

5-4-3-2-1 Sensory Grounding Exercise

When you feel intense stress and overwhelming emotions, it is easy to get caught up in negative thoughts such as replaying the past or worrying about the future. Grounding techniques help you to stay in the present moment and allows you to feel safe and in-control by focusing on the physical world around you. 5-4-3-2-1 sensory grounding technique is a quick and simple ways to bring your focus to the present moment:

- Name 5 things you see in the room
- Name 4 things you can feel (such as the floor beneath your feet, chair underneath you)
- Name 3 things you can hear
- Name 2 things you can smell or like the smell of
- Name 1 thing you can taste or like the taste of

Repeat the exercise as many times as necessary.

Dropping Anchor

Dropping anchor is a helpful technique to cope with difficult thoughts, emotions, memories, sensations, and urges. It can also be a helpful tool to step out of “automatic pilot” to focus on the here and now. Dropping anchor involves the following:

A: Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings

Silently and kindly acknowledge whatever is ‘showing up’ inside you: thoughts, feelings, emotions, memories, sensation, urges. Take the stance of a curious scientist, observing what’s going on in your inner world.

C: Come back into your body

Come back into and connect with your physical body. Find your own way of doing this. You could try some or all of the following, or find your own methods:

- Slowly pushing your feet hard into the floor
- Slowly straightening up your back and spine; sit upright and forward in your chair
- Slowly pressing your fingertips together
- Slowly stretching your arms or neck, shrugging your shoulders
- Slowly breathing

E: Engage in what you’re doing

Get a sense of where you are and refocus your attention on the activity you are doing. Find your own way of doing this. You can try practicing the 54321 Grounding exercise. End the exercise by giving your full attention to the task or activity at hand. Ideally, run through the ACE cycle slowly 3 or 4 times, to turn it into a 2- 3 minute exercise.

Free audio recording: <https://www.actmindfully.com.au/free%20stuff/free-audio/>

The 3-Minute Breathing Space

The breathing space provides a way to step out of automatic pilot mode and reconnect with the present moment. The key skill in using Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy is to maintain awareness in the moment. Nothing else.

1. Awareness

Bring yourself into the present moment by deliberately adopting an erect and dignified posture. If possible, close your eyes. Then ask: “*What is my experience right now ... in thoughts ... in feelings ... and in bodily sensations?*”.

Acknowledge and register your experience, even if it is unwanted.

2. Gathering

Then, gently redirect full attention to breathing, to each inbreath and to each outbreath as they follow, one after the other. Your breath can function as an anchor to bring you into the present and help you tune into a state of awareness and stillness.

3. Expanding

Expand the field of your awareness around your breathing, so that it includes a sense of the body as a whole, your posture, and facial expression.

Free audio recording: <https://soundcloud.com/user-801302473/meditation-8-the-three-minute>

Peaceful Place Visualization

The purpose of this technique is to relax your mind and guide you to imagine your own peaceful, safe place. This place can be a place you have been before or an imaginary place.

Begin by sitting comfortably and taking a few deep breaths. Close your eyes and focus on your breathing. Continue to breathe slowly and peacefully as you allow the tension to start to leave your body. Let the rate of your breathing become gradually slower as your body relaxes. Now begin to create a picture in your mind of a place where you can completely relax, a place that feels safe. Focus on the following questions to help guide you in your visualization:

- Start by describing the details of what you see as you focus on this peaceful place: Where is this peaceful place? Are you alone or with someone? What colours are present? Is it day or night? Is it sunny or cloudy? What catches your attention in this place?
- Focus next on the physical sensations you experience: What is the temperature there? Are you sitting, standing, walking, or laying down? What does the ground or surface feel like below you? Is the air still or moving? If you are touching or holding something. What does it feel like?
- Focus next on the sounds you experience: What can you hear? Is it loud or quiet? Are there animals or other people? Can you hear wind, or water, or other natural sounds?
- Focus next on the smells you experience: Take a deep breath- what do you smell? Is the air fresh? Are there comforting smells? Does the air feel warm or cold as you inhale?
- Finally, focus on any tastes you experience: Are you eating or drinking anything? Is there anything you can taste?

Enjoy your peaceful place for a few moments more. In these last few moments of relaxation, create a picture in your mind that includes the sights, sounds, physical sensations, smells, and tastes around you. Know that you can return to this place in your mind whenever you need to. When you are ready to return to your day, turn your attention back to the present.

Free audio recordings: <https://insighttimer.com/havencoaching/guided-meditations/meditation-for-peace-calming-and-removing-stress>

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Muscle tension is commonly associated with stress, anxiety, and fear as part of a process that helps our bodies prepare for potentially dangerous situations. This can result in feeling “tense”, muscle aches and pains, tension headaches, and feeling exhausted. One method of reducing muscle tension that can be helpful is through a technique called Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR).

When you are ready to begin, tense the muscle group described:

- Right hand and forearm. Make a fist with your right hand.
- Right upper arm. Bring your right forearm up to your shoulder to “make a muscle”.
- Left hand and forearm.
- Left upper arm.
- Forehead. Raise your eyebrows as high as they will go, as though you were surprised by something.
- Eyes and cheeks. Squeeze your eyes tight shut.
- Mouth and jaw. Open your mouth as wide as you can, as if you are yawning.
- Neck. Face forward and then pull your head back slowly, as though you are looking up to the ceiling.
- Shoulders. Tense the muscles in your shoulders as you bring your shoulders up towards your ears.
- Shoulder blades/Back. Push your shoulder blades back, trying to almost touch them together.
- Chest and stomach. Breathe in deeply, filling up your lungs and chest with air.
- Hips and buttocks. Squeeze your buttock muscles
- Right upper leg. Tighten your right thigh.
- Right lower leg. Slowly flex your foot towards you to stretch the calf muscle.
- Right foot. Point your toes downwards.
- Left upper leg. Repeat as for right upper leg.
- Left lower leg. Repeat as for right lower leg.
- Left foot. Repeat as for right foot.

Make sure you can feel the tension, but not so much that you feel a great deal of pain. Keep the muscle tensed for 5 seconds then relax for 10 seconds.

Free audio recordings: <https://insighttimer.com/danguerra/guided-meditations/progressive-muscle-relaxation-8>