

## **Managing Stress/Staying Calm**

### **Breathing exercise for stress**

**This calming breathing technique for stress, anxiety and panic takes just a few minutes and can be done anywhere.**

You will get the most benefit if you do it regularly, as part of your daily routine.

You can do it standing up, sitting in a chair that supports your back, or lying on a bed or yoga mat on the floor.

Make yourself as comfortable as you can. If you can, loosen any clothes that restrict your breathing.

If you're lying down, place your arms a little bit away from your sides, with the palms up. Let your legs be straight, or bend your knees so your feet are flat on the floor.

If you're sitting, place your arms on the chair arms.

If you're sitting or standing, place both feet flat on the ground. Whatever position you're in, place your feet roughly hip-width apart.

- Let your breath flow as deep down into your belly as is comfortable, without forcing it.
- Try breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth.
- Breathe in gently and regularly. Some people find it helpful to count steadily from 1 to 5. You may not be able to reach 5 at first.
- Then, without pausing or holding your breath, let it flow out gently, counting from 1 to 5 again, if you find this helpful.
- Keep doing this for 3 to 5 minutes.

### **What can I do to relax?**

You can use these exercises when you're feeling stressed, busy or worried:

- [Relax your body](#)
- [Draw calming circles](#)
- [Take a mindful moment in nature](#)

Don't worry if one technique doesn't work for you – you could give it another chance, or just move on to a different exercise.

How to use relaxation exercises:

- **You can use relaxation techniques regularly, or every once in a while** – whatever feels right for you.
- **Try and make some time in your day to try these exercises.** Don't treat relaxing like a task that needs to be completed – try to think of it as giving yourself some time and space.
- **Find somewhere quiet and comfortable** where you won't be interrupted, if you can.
- **Try to make sure your surroundings are the right temperature** – it can be hard to relax if you're too hot or cold.

### Relax your body

When you're stressed your muscles can become tight and tense. This exercise helps you notice tension in your body and relax your muscles.

What do I need?

You will need:

- somewhere comfortable to sit or lie down
- space where you won't be interrupted

What do I do?

1. Lie down or sit with your back straight and your feet on the floor. Close your eyes or focus on a spot in the distance.
2. Start by clenching your toes as much as you can for a few seconds then releasing them. Notice the difference between the two feelings.
3. Match this to your breathing. Tense your muscle as you take a deep breath in, and relax as you breathe out.
4. Move up your body to your thighs, your stomach and all the way to your shoulders and hands, clenching and relaxing each muscle in turn. Take time to notice any parts of your body that feel tense, tight or tired. You can repeat if you still feel tense.
5. Take a moment to relax, then slowly and gently begin to move. When you feel ready, you can stand up slowly.

Variations

Instead of tensing your muscles, try placing something warm on each part of your body in turn.

### Draw calming circles

Colour, creativity and movement can help you feel relaxed by:

- distracting you from worrying thoughts
- giving you an outlet and focus for your emotions

- stimulating your senses.

What do I need?

You will need:

- a table or desk
- blank paper
- crayons, coloured pencils or pens
- sticky tape or masking tape to hold your paper down (optional)

What do I do?

1. Make sure you are sitting comfortably with your feet firmly on the floor, your back straight and your shoulders relaxed.
2. Take your paper and crayon, and draw a circle that fills most of the page – don't worry if it's a bit wonky!
3. Now keep drawing. You could keep going over the circle, or fill it with a pattern, but try not to let your crayon leave the page. Don't worry about creating a finished picture, just keep going.
4. Take time to focus on what you're drawing. Focusing on these sensations can help you quieten your mind.
5. Once you have done this for a few minutes, try using a different colour or pattern.

Variations

- If you're focusing too much on getting the pattern right, try using your other hand.
- If you find it hard to get started, try using a colouring book.

Take a mindful moment in nature

[Mindfulness](#) is a way of paying attention to the present moment. And spending time in green spaces ([ecotherapy](#)) has been found to reduce stress, anxiety and depression.

Follow these steps for a new way to experience your surroundings. If you're able to walk this can also be an opportunity get some gentle exercise, but you can do this exercise whatever your mobility.

What do I need?

Just yourself and a green space – try a local park, woodland, nature reserve or just your garden.

What do I do?

1. Find a green space. When you get there, stop for a moment and take a deep breath.

2. Start exploring slowly – try not to focus on getting somewhere in particular. Really focus on any movement you make. If you're walking, notice which part of your foot touches the ground first, and feel the transfer of weight through your foot.
3. Notice the ground underneath you. Is it grass or earth? Does the ground feel soft? What colours can you see?
4. Think about the rest of your body – how are you holding your arms? Does the air on your face feel cold or warm?
5. Listen to the sounds around you – can you hear birdsong, or wind rustling through the leaves?

#### Variations

- If you can't go to a green space, you can try opening your window and noticing what's around you. Notice any clouds in the sky, or trees and plants you can see. Can you feel rain, wind or sun on your skin?
- You could try looking after a plant. Spend time focusing on its scent, shape and texture. You could try touching some of the leaves or soil and focusing on how it feels.