

Breathing and relaxation strategies to use with your child

>>> Parent Information

Deep breathing and relaxation can reduce pain, anxiety and stress during procedures, or at any other time. Your child can learn relaxation techniques and use them when they are needed.

Here are three sets of relaxation instructions. The first is breathing exercise. The second has both a tension phase and a relaxation phase and the third uses imagery. These relaxation techniques are arranged from easiest to hardest and best for children 8 – 10 years old. Younger children may relax better by involvement in their favourite stories.

You and your child can use any one, or all three relaxation techniques at different times. Use them in any order. Change them to suit your child. Your child might have a favourite one. Whatever works is fine.

Relaxation techniques work best if you and your child practice them before they are needed.

The relaxation instructions should be spoken in a slow, quiet voice. It is best to learn the instructions so that they flow smoothly. It is OK to change the instructions to suit your child. The instructions can be audio recorded and then played back at a convenient time.

What to do

Find a comfortable place for you and your child to relax. Choose a chair that will support your child's body, or a bed or couch. Ensure that you will be free from interruption or distraction. Have your child settle and then begin. If your child fidgets or feels uncomfortable, stop and try again at some other time. Do not try to force your child to follow the instructions. You can't make someone relax.

Loosen any tight clothing or shoes and make sure you have a light blanket (in case your child gets cold during relaxation). Make sure your child does not cross his or her legs or arms (they might "fall asleep"). It is fine if your child's body twitches during the relaxation. If he or she feels uncomfortable, you should stop the relaxation exercise. If your child laughs or seems self-conscious, just continue and the feeling will probably pass.

What to say

Relaxation by deep breathing

- Just relax. Close your eyes if you wish. Now, take a deep breath. Try to breathe in as much air as possible so it fills up your belly like a balloon. Hold it for a few seconds. Now, let your breath out very, very slowly. As you let out your breath, relax all of your muscles.
- Now, breathe in again, slowly and deeply. Breathe in relaxation. Slowly, breathe out and blow away all your tension and worries. Relax your face, arms and shoulders. Enjoy the warmth of the relaxation.
- Take another deep slow breath. Fill your lungs. Relax and breathe out. Relax your chest and tummy. Allow calm and peacefulness to replace any tension.
- Now breathe in again as if you are breathing in through the bottom of your feet. Slowly. Slowly. Slowly. Relax your legs and feet. Pause for a few moments and then breathe out slowly. If you begin to get dizzy breathe more slowly.
- Breathe in again, deeply and slowly. Try and relax some part of your body that is a bit tense. Breathe out slowly. Release all tension. Relax and enjoy being peaceful.
- Keep breathing deeply and slowly and to increase your relaxation with every breath. Open your eyes and enjoy how you feel.



Tension and relaxation

- Move so that you are as comfortable as you can be. Take a deep breath and breathe out slowly. Now do it again, breathe in and slowly breathe out.
- Relax all of your muscles. Focus your attention on your right hand. Squeeze the hand into a fist. Tighten all the muscles and hold the tension for five seconds. Hold it: Tighter. Now relax. Relax your hand as much as you can. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation.
- Now make a fist with your left hand. Make it go tight. Tight, tight (hold for five seconds). Notice the tension; feel it. Now relax, release the tension in the hand. Let go and release the muscles in your hands. Let your hands become totally relaxed.
- Tense your right arm by pushing it down on the chair or bed. Hold it for five seconds and feel the tension, then relax. Loosen the muscles and enjoy the warm relaxing feeling.
- Now tense your left arm by pushing it down on the chair or bed. Hold it for five seconds and feel the contrast between tension and relaxation. Relax. Calm and loosen the muscle in your arms. Enjoy the peace and calm of relaxation.
- Tense your shoulders again by pushing them forward. Hold the shoulders in this position for five seconds and notice the muscles in your back and shoulders stretching and tensing. Release and relax. Loosen your muscles and allow your shoulders to drop. Allow the tension to leave your shoulders and allow the warm pleasant feeling to move into your arms and shoulders.
- Tense your shoulders by pushing your shoulders back and noticing the tension. Hold the tension and then release and relax. Finally tense your shoulders by moving and lifting them up and holding them up for five seconds. Release, relax, deepen the relaxation by breathing deeply and slowly. Your hands, arms, and shoulders now will feel relaxed.
- Concentrate now on your face. Create tension by scrunching up your face and hold it for five seconds. Notice the tension spreading throughout your face and scalp. Relax and let all the tension disappear.
- Clench your teeth and notice the tension in your jaw. Hold it and feel how the tension and tightness spreads. Loosen, relax, and let go. Let your jaw go slack. You can let your mouth open if that is comfortable. Breathe slowly and deeply. Relax.
- Now create tension in your neck. Be careful not to cause yourself any pain. Turn your head to the left as far as comfortable. Notice the tension in your neck and back. Hold it for five seconds and then return your head to the resting position. Next turn your head in the other direction. Hold the tension for a few moments and then relax. Finally, create tension by pushing your head onto your chest. Hold the tension and then relax.
- Focus attention on your breathing. Create tension by taking a deep breath and holding it. The tension will spread gradually. Allow the tension to build until it is mildly uncomfortable. Then breathe out. Breathe deeply and slowly for three breaths. Imagine that you are breathing in through the bottom of your feet. Breathe out through your mouth or nose. If you begin to feel dizzy, breathe more slowly.
- Now create tension by blowing out all your breath. Hold this for a few moments and then breathe in. Resume normal breathing and breathe deeply and slowly. Each time you exhale, try to breathe out any tension.
- Cause tension in your tummy by pulling in the muscles and holding them. This will stop your deep breathing and tension will increase. Relax, loosen the muscles, and enjoy slow and relaxing breathing. Create tension by pushing your stomach out and holding it for five seconds. Relax, loosen your stomach muscles, allow the muscles to become calm and peaceful. Enjoy the calm feeling.
- Tense your right leg by pushing it down on the bed or chair. Feel the tension in your upper and lower leg. Do not tense your foot. Hold the tension for five seconds and then let go. Relax, let go, enjoy the feeling of relaxation spreading through your leg.
- Now repeat the same procedure with your other leg. Tense your left leg by pushing it down on the bed or chair. Study the tension in your thigh and your calves. Do not tense your foot. Hold the tension for five seconds and then let go. Relax, let go, enjoy the feeling of relaxation spreading through your leg.
- Finally, make some tension in both of your feet by pointing your toes towards your head. Do not cause too much tension or you may cause cramping and pain in your feet. Relax your feet, legs and thighs. Let the relaxation move into your abdomen and back. Notice the warm pleasant feelings of relaxation. Breathe deeply and slowly. Allow the relaxation to move into your lungs and chest. Relax your shoulders and neck. Relax your arms and hands. Now deepen your relaxation by trying to loosen any remaining tense areas.

- Now, let's use your imagination to deepen the relaxation. Create in your mind a very pleasant and relaxing place. Perhaps it would be lying on a beach or walking through a forest. Imagine the calmness in your body as you enjoy the sounds and smells of your place. Feel the fresh air and enjoy the calm relaxed peaceful feeling that you have throughout your body. Feel the warmth of the sun on your head and allow the warmth to spread throughout your upper body. Feel the warm relaxing feeling spread throughout your entire body. Imagine that your body is floppy and let it totally relax and flop on the chair or bed.
- You are calm and relaxed and feel very confident and peaceful. Just enjoy these feelings for a few moments. Gradually come out of this relaxation as I count backwards from 5. Five, four, three, two, one. You will feel good as you open your eyes. Open your eyes, stretch if you wish.
- Good, now just enjoy the pleasant feelings. Relax. Enjoy every moment of it.

Relaxation with imagery

- Let's use your imagination to help you relax. Start by imagining being in a very pleasant and happy mood. Imagine that you are doing something you really like. Imagine what you can see, what you can feel, and what you are doing. You can close your eyes if you wish.
- Breathe in deeply and then breathe out slowly relaxing your lower arms and your hands. Your arms and hands may be kind of heavy and tingly. You feel peaceful and relaxed. Allow your arms and hands to loosen and relax more and more. Let your arms and hands relax from your elbows to your fingers. Just let go. Enjoy the calm, relaxed feeling.
- Think about your upper arms and shoulders. Notice where there is some tension. Let the muscles become loose and relaxed. Imagine they are smooth and calm. Be calm and peaceful. Notice how pleasant it is to relax your muscles. Just let go of any tension in your arms and shoulders.
- Think about the muscles in your neck and face. Relax these muscles. Let them become loose and heavy. If you can, you may want to rest your head on the pillow or couch. As you relax your face, your mouth may open. That is fine. Breathe slowly and calmly. Now your forehead. Relax and smooth the muscles of your forehead. Relax your forehead as much as you can. Relax your jaw. Let all the muscles in your head and face relax and loosen. Let these muscles become heavy and calm.
- Think again of the very pleasant thing you were thinking about at the start of this exercise. Imagine you are totally relaxed and happy. Enjoy this memory.
- Now, focus on the muscles of your chest. Loosen the muscles of your chest. Try and make your breathing smooth and slow, calm and peaceful. Breathe in relaxation, breathe out tension.
- Relax your stomach and abdomen. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. Imagine all of your tension escaping as you relax.
- Let the muscles in your upper legs become relaxed and peaceful. Feel that your legs are relaxed. Allow your legs to sink into the chair or bed. Your legs are becoming calm and relaxed. Relax your lower legs and feet. Let the muscles become calm and peaceful. Let them become very relaxed.
- Imagine the warm peaceful feelings of relaxation gradually moving through your body and loosening all your muscles. Allow all your tension to disappear. Breathe in relaxation, breathe out tension.
- Let the warmth move through your head. Relax all the muscles in your head and face. Allow the warm feeling of relaxation to move through your neck and shoulders. Relax your shoulders. Allow the warm feelings of relaxation to move throughout your back muscles. Let the warm feelings of relaxation move down your spine. Let the warm relaxing feeling fill your legs and move into your feet. Imagine that the tension is just gradually draining away. Let the tension disappear gradually as you relax. Breathe slowly and deeply. Allow yourself to be calm and peaceful, warm and relaxed. Let all your muscles become heavy and loose. Enjoy the calm gentle feelings of relaxation.
- You are calm and relaxed and feel very confident and peaceful. Just enjoy these feelings for a few moments. Gradually come out of this relaxation as I count backwards from 5. Five, four, three, two, one. You will feel good as you open your eyes. Open your eyes, stretch if you wish. Good, now just enjoy how good you feel. Relax. Enjoy every moment of it.

Acknowledgements:

Pediatric Pain Sourcebook

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