



# Relaxation

This document has tips and exercises to help you relax.

If you require this information in Word document format, please email:  
[publications@mind.org.uk](mailto:publications@mind.org.uk)

## Contents

How could relaxation help me? .....	2
What can I do to relax? .....	4
Useful contacts .....	8

# How could relaxation help me?

Exploring relaxation can help you look after yourself when you're feeling [stressed](#) or worried. Relaxation might not make what you are stressed or worried about go away. But it can give you a mental break from these feelings and help you refocus.

There are lots of relaxation exercises out there. Many can be done in a short time with no equipment. Have a look at the tips and ideas below to see how relaxation can fit into your daily life.

Don't worry if some ideas don't work for you. Just try the ones that do.

## Take a break

Relaxation doesn't have to take up lots of your time. Just stepping away from something stressful for a few minutes or taking time away from your normal routines and thoughts can give you enough space and distance to feel calmer.

- Read a book or a magazine, even if it's only for a few minutes.
- Run yourself a bath, watch a film, play with a pet or try out a new recipe.

## Try active relaxation

Relaxation doesn't have to mean sitting still. Gentle exercise can help you relax too.

- Take a walk, going at your own pace. You might choose to go for a longer walk, but even a few minutes of walking can help you feel relaxed.
- Look for a class you'd like to try, such as yoga, Pilates or gentle stretching.
- Try some seated exercises, which you may be able to fit into your day more easily if you are busy. They may also help if you have mobility restrictions that make other exercise difficult. The NHS has a selection of [sitting exercises](#) you could try.

See our pages on [physical activity and mental health](#) for more tips.

## Focus on your breathing

Learning to breathe more deeply can help you feel a lot calmer. It takes just a few minutes and can be done anywhere.

- Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Try to keep your shoulders down and relaxed, and place your hand on your stomach – it should rise as you breathe in and fall as you breathe out.

- Count as you breathe. Start by counting 'one, two, three, four' as you breathe in and 'one, two, three, four' as you breathe out. Try to work out what's comfortable for you.

You can find more details about this exercise on the [NHS website](#).

## Get creative

Getting in touch with your artistic side can help you feel more calm and relaxed.

- Try painting, drawing, making crafts, playing a musical instrument, dancing, baking or sewing.
- Try not to worry too much about the finished product. Just focus on enjoying yourself.

See our page on [relaxation exercises](#) for more ideas on how to use creative activities to relax.

## Spend time in nature

Spending time outside and in green spaces can be great for your physical and mental health.

- Take a walk in a green space if you can, taking time to notice any trees, flowers, plants and animals you see on the way. See our page on [relaxation exercises](#) for a guided mindful moment in nature.
- Spend some time taking part in conservation, whether that's digging in your own garden or taking part in a local green project. You can find projects and outdoor activities to suit whatever level of mobility you have. See our pages on [nature and mental health](#) for more information about how to find projects in your area. If you live in an area where it is difficult to access nature and green spaces, our page on [overcoming barriers](#) may help.

## Picture yourself somewhere serene

Even if you can't physically get away, your imagination can transport you to somewhere you feel calm.

- Think of somewhere relaxing and peaceful. You might choose a memory of somewhere you've been, or a place you have imagined.
- Close your eyes, and think about the details of this place. What does it look like? What kind of colours and shapes can you see? Can you hear any sounds? Is it warm or cool? Let your mind drift and your body relax.

## Listen to music

Music can relax you, connect you to your emotions and distract you from worrying thoughts.

- Listen to your favourite songs. You could dance or sing along, or just close your eyes and enjoy.
- Really listen to the music. Can you pick out different instruments? Can you hear a drum beat or a certain rhythm? Focus on the music, and let other thoughts fade away.

## Do a tech check

Technology can be great for helping you feel connected, but if you're using it a lot then it can contribute to making you feel busy and stressed. Taking a break can help you relax, even if it is only short.

- Try turning your phone off for an hour, if you can.
- Step away from the TV, or have an evening where you don't check emails or social networks. Use the time to do something relaxing. You could try some of the ideas above.

## Further support

Making space in your life for relaxation is only one part of managing your mental health.

Our pages on coping with [stress](#) and [anxiety](#) have more suggestions for ways to help yourself. And our page of [useful contacts for relaxation](#) lists some other organisations who can help.

If you're finding things very hard right now and the tips on this page don't feel possible, it is ok to ask for help.

See our pages on [seeking help for a mental health problem](#) for guidance on talking to your doctor about options for support and treatment. Our pages on managing [panic attacks](#) and [dissociation](#) also have information to help you manage these experiences.

For more support and suggestions, if you're:

- a student, see our pages on coping with [student life](#)
- in work, see our pages on [workplace mental health](#)
- a parent, see our pages on [parenting with a mental health problem](#)
- a carer, see our pages on [how to cope when supporting someone else](#)

## 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](#)
- [Connect with your senses](#)

Some of these exercises might not work for everyone, so don't worry if one technique isn't right for you. You could try a different exercise instead.

How to use relaxation exercises:

- You can use relaxation techniques regularly, or every once in a while. Do 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.

The NHS's Every Mind Matters has an [audio guide to relaxing your body \(YouTube link\)](#) if you would like someone to guide you through this exercise.

## 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
- pencils, pens or crayons
- 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 pencil, and draw a circle that fills most of the page. It doesn't have to be neat.
3. Now keep drawing. You could keep going over the circle, or fill it with a pattern, but try not to let your pencil 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 has been found to reduce stress, anxiety and depression.

Follow these steps for a new way to experience your surroundings. This can also be a chance to get some gentle exercise, if you would like to and feel able to.

### What do I need?

Just yourself and a green space. Try a local park, woodland, nature reserve or garden, if you have access to these.

### 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.

## Connect with your senses

If are starting to feel stressed, overwhelmed or panicked, connecting with your five senses can help to ground yourself in the present moment.

You can do this exercise anywhere and it doesn't need any special equipment.

## What do I need?

Just yourself

## What do I do?

1. Look around you and notice five things you can see. It could be a pen, a mark on the wall, or someone's shoes. You can name these in your head or out loud, or write them down.
2. Name four things you can touch or feel around you. For example, your hair, your nose, the ground under your feet or the air on your skin.
3. Name three things you can hear around you. This could be something outside, or your own breathing.
4. Name two things you can smell around you. It doesn't have to be a strong smell, and you can take a short walk around to find something if you want to.
5. Name one thing you can taste at the moment.

## Variations

If you can't engage all your senses, just do the ones you can. You can also change the numbers if you want to.

# Useful contacts

## Mind's services

- [Mind's helplines](#) provide information and support by phone and email.
- [Local Minds](#) offer face-to-face services across England and Wales. These services include talking therapies, peer support and advocacy.
- [Side by Side](#) is Mind's support online community for anyone experiencing a mental health problem.

## Other organisations

International Stress Management Association



[isma.org.uk](https://isma.org.uk)

Information about stress, including details of practitioners who may be able to help you.

## Mental Health Foundation

[mentalhealth.org.uk](https://mentalhealth.org.uk)

Provides information about mental health problems, including personal stories, podcasts and videos.

## Mind Tools

[mindtools.com](https://mindtools.com)

Tips and articles on personal effectiveness, management and leadership.

## NHS UK

[nhs.uk](https://nhs.uk)

Information about health problems and treatments, including details of local NHS services in England.

## NHS Every Mind Matters

[nhs.uk/every-mind-matters](https://nhs.uk/every-mind-matters)

Advice and practical tips for looking after your mental health and wellbeing.

## No Panic

[0300 7729844](https://03007729844)

[nopic.org.uk](https://nopic.org.uk)

Provides a helpline, step-by-step programmes, and support for people with anxiety disorders.

## Stress Management Society

[stress.org.uk](https://stress.org.uk)

Information about stress and tips on how to cope.

## UEL Refugee Mental Health and Wellbeing Portal

[uel.ac.uk](https://uel.ac.uk)

University of East London free resource. Includes relaxation exercises in languages including English, French, Arabic, Urdu and Farsi.

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References are available on request.