

Dealing with Chronic Fatigue (CFS/ME) in Young People

Relaxation



Having an illness which may last a long time makes lots of young people worried and upset.

It can also cause other problems in families. Any of these can affect how quickly you get better.

Feeling calm and relaxed is important.

It reduces anxious feelings to help you recover more quickly.

Relaxation is a skill which anyone can learn and the way you *breathe* is the important first step to achieving it.

This leaflet will give you useful information and tips on how to help tackle worries and tension.

This is one of a series of information leaflets on managing CFS/ME in children and young people. These are also available on our website at www.rnhrd.nhs.uk.

For more information on our service, please contact Heather Hill on **01225 473425** at the Specialist Paediatric Chronic Fatigue/ME Service, Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases (NHS Foundation Trust), Upper Borough Walls, Bath BA1 1RL.

**CFS/NHS/
PAEDIATRICS/BATH**

Specialist help for ME



**CFS/NHS/
PAEDIATRICS/BATH**

Specialist help for ME



Relaxation

Like all skills it may not be easy for you to learn to relax, but with practice, you will get better at it.

That is why you need to practise it every day.

How to relax

When practising at home, make sure you feel **warm** and **comfortable**. Try and stick to a time and place when it is **quiet**, when you won't be disturbed. Sit in a comfy chair which supports your head or lie on the floor or bed (don't go to sleep!).

Stretch out your legs (don't cross them over). Place your arms on the arms of the chair or flat on the floor or bed, a little bit away from your body. Loosen or take off any tight clothes, such as shoes or jumpers. Try to make yourself comfortable.

Breathing in the right way

Breathing in

As your lungs fill up they need more room, so they push your breast bone slightly forward. Your ribs move slightly out and up. As you breathe in, your diaphragm, which is a large muscle under your ribs and on top of your stomach, pulls in getting tighter, so that your lungs can fill up with air.

Breathing out

As your diaphragm relaxes it moves up and out helping you to push the used air out of your lungs.

If you are a bit tense or anxious, you breathe using just the top part of your lungs. When your breathing is relaxed, you breathe filling up the whole of your lungs, from your tummy.



You can check this by:

- Placing your hands on your tummy, just above your tummy button, with middle fingertips very lightly touching. The palms of both hands should be flat against your ribs (so that the finger tips of both hands are now touching).
- Now as you take a deep breath in, your stomach will push out slightly. You will feel your fingers move very slightly apart. As the lower parts of your lungs fill with air, your lower ribs, chest and upper ribs will have moved out just a little.
- As you breathe out, your stomach is pulled in, and your ribs and diaphragm return to their original position and you will feel your fingertips move back together again.

If you can (and don't feel too tired), practise in the morning and try again in the afternoon and/or in the evening.

Before you start the breathing exercises (see below), sigh deeply 2 or 3 times with your hands in the position above; check that your finger tips move apart slightly and come back together again as you breathe in and out. When you start practising relaxed breathing place your arms at your sides and breathe from your diaphragm.

Relaxed breathing

You will learn to breathe **deeply**, **slowly** and **regularly** - this is relaxing and opposite to shallow, fast, and irregular breathing that happens when we are tense (when your muscles feel tight and hard) and anxious.

1. **Get into a comfortable position and close your eyes.**
2. **Take a deep breath in through your nose, counting from 1-5** (about 5 seconds) – don't worry if you can't reach 5 at first.
3. **Breathe out through your mouth, counting from 1-5.**
4. **Repeat steps 2-3.** Make sure you breathe in a slow, steady rhythm without pausing or holding your breath.

You will notice after a while when doing relaxed breathing that you take about 5 breaths in one minute, instead of 15-20 when breathing normally. Don't worry if you can't count up to 5 without breathing in or have slightly more breaths than 5, everyone is different.

What is important is breathing in and out slowly as this will help you to relax.

Practice is very important

Try to practise the relaxed breathing for 3-5 minutes, 2-3 times a day (late in the morning, in the afternoon and evening).

Once you have learnt this skill, you can do relaxed breathing wherever you are. Relaxed breathing can be very helpful just before you do something that makes you tense or nervous, or when you are worried. It will make you a bit more relaxed and help you to cope better.

