

Relaxation



The information given here is designed to help you manage your anxiety or breathlessness, if your symptoms are getting worse or new it is important that you seek medical advice from your GP.

Relaxation is defined as 'the state of being free from tension and anxiety' (Oxford English Dictionary) Feeling short of breath can be frightening and cause feelings of anxiety and panic. Being anxious can make the feeling of being breathless worse, which in turn leads to more anxiety. It is possible to manage the feeling of anxiety with some relaxation techniques.

Relaxation is not always easy, the more you practise the easier and more effective you will find it. Everyone is different and will have different ways of relaxing, find what works for you and try to establish a regular routine for practising.

Preparing for relaxation

Find a quiet place where you can be undisturbed for at least 10 minutes. Make sure you will be warm and comfortable.

Check your posture

Sit or lie with your legs uncrossed

Try to support your arms on cushions or the arms of the chair.

Let your shoulders and arms sink into cushions or support

If you want you can close your eyes or find a spot that doesn't involve moving your head and keep your eyes focussed on it.

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Relaxation exercises

These might be something you can try with a friend or family member, it can be helpful to have someone to read the instructions or find a CD or App that suits you.

These are some examples of what a relaxation exercise might look like.

Muscle Relaxation – With your eyes closed, notice your breathing, don't try and change it just sit quietly and breathe.

Then starting with your feet and working up through lower legs, thighs, buttocks, tummy, shoulder, arms, hands, neck and face gently tense the muscles, one area at a time and hold for 3 -5 seconds before letting go and relaxing them.

Noticed how loose your muscles feel after you have let go. Let your mind travel down your body and feel every part is relaxed as you sit quietly in your chair. Breathe quietly for a few breathes and then open your eyes. Wriggle your fingers and toes, become aware of your surroundings and bring your attention back to the room.

Visualisation – visualising a relaxing scene can help us feel more relaxed. It could be a favourite place – a garden, a beach, a wood or a walk that you know. It could be somewhere from your imagination, somewhere that makes you feel happy and secure, not places that make you sad or bring back bad memories. Sometimes visualising your favourite colour and the images associated with it can be relaxing.

Your colour

Make yourself comfortable

Think about the chosen colour, let's say blue

Think about the blue around you

The blue sky of a crisp autumn morning

The blue of your favourite jumper

The blue of a calm lake

The blue of the sea against a sandy beach

Close your eyes and try to feel the warmth of the blue, change the colours and images to the one that you find most relaxing.

Your scene

Make yourself comfortable and sit or lie down.

Close your eyes and picture your favourite place

Imagine how it smells, sounds and feels

Feel the joy you have when you are there.

When you are ready bring your attention back to the room, feel the relaxation you are bringing back with you and open your eyes when you are ready.

To finish your relaxation exercise – become aware of your surroundings by listening to the sounds around you, feel how relaxed you are, start to move by gently stretching your arms and legs and wriggling your finger and toes.

Mindfulness is another technique that can be used to relieve anxious thoughts. Mindfulness is when we are able to adopt a 'mindful awareness of the present'. Most people are aware that if they see (or think about) something they enjoy, such as chocolate, even the very anticipation of eating it can bring pleasure. The explanation for why this occurs lies in the internal chemistry of the brain; the experience of pleasure results from chemical changes in the brain.

Relaxation can be a useful skill to learn but it can take practise to feel comfortable, this leaflet will give you some ideas to try. However relaxation is not necessarily about sitting still, gentle exercise – a walk, yoga, pilates, tai chi or chi gong, getting outside can all be ways of helping you relax. Listening to music, singing or getting creative can help take you away from your normal routines and thoughts to give you time, space and distance to feel calmer.

What is important is that you find what works for you and try to make it part of your daily routine so that you get the most benefit from it.

Useful Websites/App's, Mind – www.mind.org.uk, Calm (Relaxation), PZIZZ (Sleep), Headspace, 10% Happier, (Mindfulness).