



Relaxation

This document provides tips and exercises to help you relax.

If you require this information in Word document format for compatibility with screen readers, please email: publications@mind.org.uk

Contents

How could relaxation help me?	2
What can I do to relax?	4
Useful contacts	7

How could relaxation help me?

Exploring relaxation can help you look after yourself when you're feeling [stressed](#) or worried. Have a look at these tips and ideas to see how relaxation can fit into your daily life. Don't worry if some ideas don't work for you – just enjoy 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.

Focus on your breathing

Learning to breathe more deeply can help you feel a lot calmer.

- 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.

Spend time in nature

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

- Take a walk in the countryside or through a local park, taking time to notice 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 [ecotherapy](#) for more information about how to find projects in your area.

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 (even a short one) can help you relax.

- Try turning your phone off for an hour (or a whole day if you're feeling brave).

- 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.

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.

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

If you're interested in getting more active to support your mental health, take a look at our [Get Set to Go](#) campaign to find out more about how you can get active in your local area.

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.

Listen to music

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

- Listen to your favourite songs. Turn up the volume and dance or sing along, or put your headphones on and close your eyes.
- 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.

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.

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.

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.

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** – [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:

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?

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

What do I do?	<ol style="list-style-type: none">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?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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?	<ol style="list-style-type: none">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.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.

Useful contacts

Mind's services

- **Helplines** – all our helplines provide information and support by phone and email. Our Blue Light Infoline is just for emergency service staff, volunteers and their families.
 - Mind's Infoline – 0300 123 3393, info@mind
 - Mind's Legal Line – 0300 466 6463, legal@mind
 - Blue Light Infoline – 0300 303 5999, bluelightinfo@mind
- **Local Minds** – there are over 140 local Minds across England and Wales which provide services such as [talking treatments](#), [peer support](#), and [advocacy](#). [Find your local Mind here](#), and contact them directly to see how they can help.
- **Elefriends** is a supportive online community for anyone experiencing a mental health problem. See our [Elefriends page](#) for details.

Who else could help?

Be Mindful

bemindful.co.uk

Information about mindfulness and mindfulness based stress reduction (MBSR). Guidance on how to learn mindfulness, including course listings.

International Stress Management Association

isma.org.uk

Lists stress practitioners by specialist area.

Mental Health Foundation

mentalhealth.org.uk

Includes [podcasts and videos](#) with breathing and relaxation exercises.

Mind Tools

mindtools.com

Information on topics including [stress management](#) and [assertiveness](#).

NHS Choices

nhs.uk

Information on different health problems, treatments and self-care tips, including [breathing exercises](#).

No Panic

helpline: 0844 967 4848 (10am–10pm)

nopanic.org.uk

Provides a helpline, step-by-step programmes, support and self-care tips, including [relaxation techniques](#).

Stress Management Society

stress.org.uk

Information about stress and tips on how to cope.

Stressbusting

stressbusting.co.uk

Information about stress and techniques for coping. Lists several talking treatments and alternative therapies that can be used to treat stress.

UEL Refugee Mental Health and Wellbeing Portal

uel.ac.uk

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

© Mind 2017

To be revised in 2020
References are available on request.