

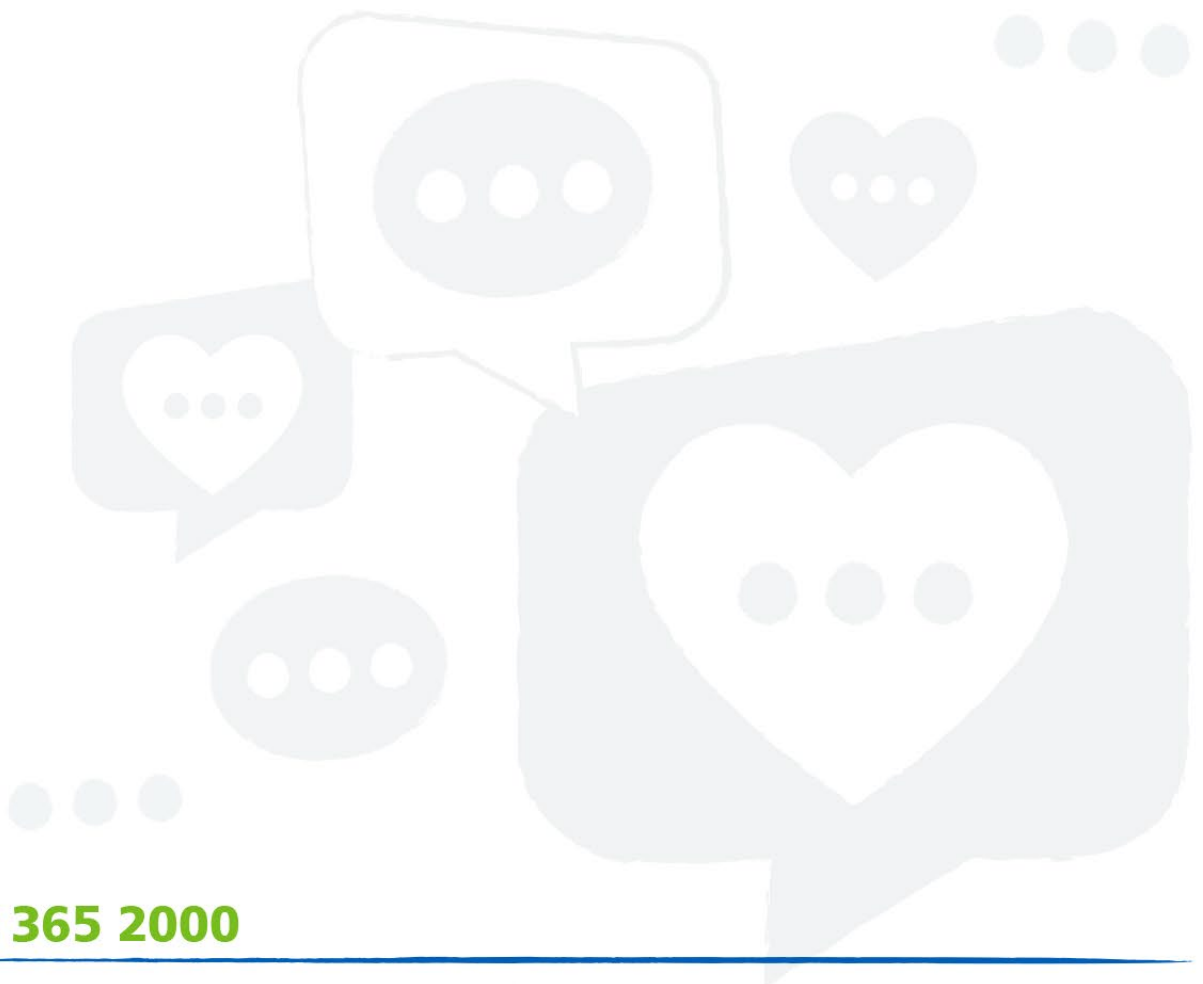


Talking Therapies
Workbook...

Workbook 14

Relaxation

A self-help guide



 **0300 365 2000**

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How can relaxation help?

When you're feeling stressed, anxious or low, finding a place of relaxation may seem out of reach, this may be part of the reason you came to NHS Talking Therapies in the first place.

It is common to experience physical tensions alongside emotional stresses too such as:

- Muscle tension
- Headaches
- Back pain
- Tightness in your chest
- A clenched jaw
- Or difficulty breathing

In this workbook we will show you how relaxation techniques that can help you to relax your body and mind.

Putting your body in relaxed state slows your breathing, lowers blood pressure, and heart rate and can take your mind off distressing thoughts.

Practiced regularly, the calming benefits can be felt throughout the day.

This puts you in a better frame of mind to use the CBT approaches you have already learned in your treatment to improve your mood and feel better overall.

Learning to relax can take time and practice to get better at however and different relaxation techniques work for different people so we will show a few options to try out so you can find out what works for you.



Allocating just 5 minutes a day for relaxation can make a big difference

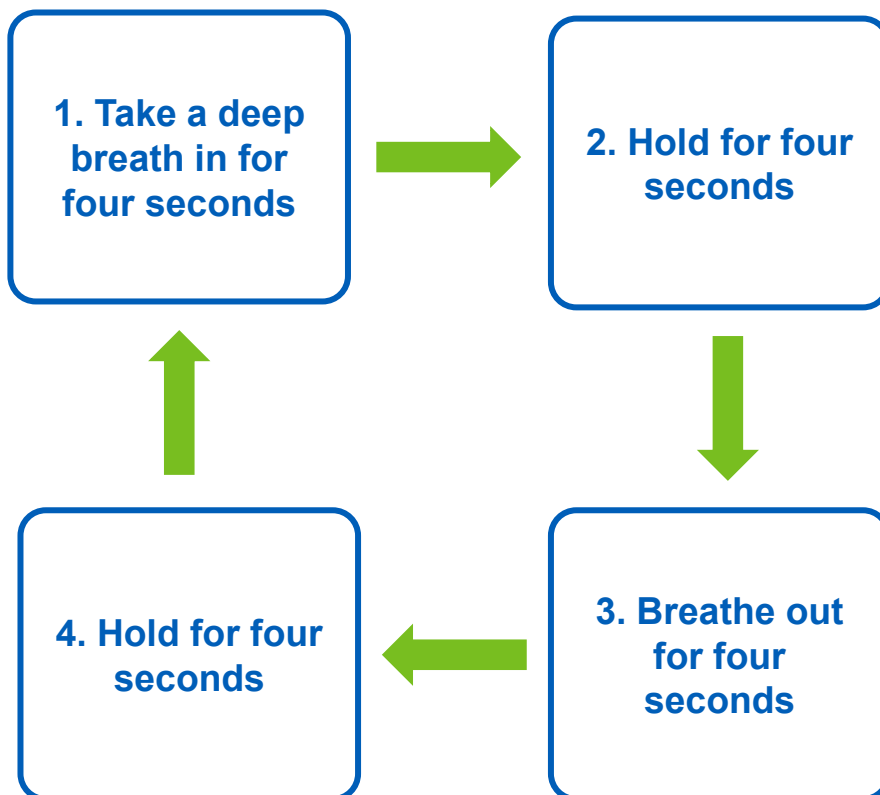
1. Square breathing

Introduction

To start off, this simple exercise can be useful in helping us pay attention to our breathing.

Before trying out the different relaxation techniques, you may wish to use this technique to help ensure that your breathing is even, smooth and at a comfortable pace for your body.

Close your eyes and try the exercise below:



2. Four-minute breathing space

Step by step

Find a comfortable position where you can sit or lie down.

Close your eyes or focus your eyes on a fixed point on the floor.

This technique is designed to fit into daily life as it is brief. The technique should take around four minutes and can help provide a moment of calm in a busy day.

- 1. Take a deep breath in and a deep breath out.** Repeat three times.
- Settle into your breathing, **let your breath come and go naturally** without trying to change it in anyway.
- 3. Notice if your attention moves away** from your breathing and you become distracted by any sounds in your environment. If this happens, acknowledge the sounds and then bring your attention back to your breathing
- 4. Notice if you become distracted by any thoughts or emotions.** Identify these, it may help to say them in your head, for example 'I feel sad' or 'I'm noticing self-critical thoughts'. Once you have acknowledged them, bring your attention back to your breathing.
- 5. Focus your attention on your nostrils, notice how they feel as you breathe in and out.** They may feel cooler as you breathe in and warmer when you breathe out
- 6. Bring your attention to your chest.** Notice that your chest rises as you breathe in and falls as you breathe out. Notice if your shoulders rise as you breathe in and fall as you breathe out.
- 7. Focus your attention on the stomach area, notice how it feels, if there is any tension there.** As you breathe in and then out pay attention to how your stomach expands as you breathe in and contracts as you breathe out.
- 8. Move your attention to whichever part of your body feels most natural.** Bring your attention to your breath and what you are noticing as you breathe in and out.
- 9. Now start to bring your awareness back to the room.** Listen for any sounds that you can hear, notice the sensation of sitting on the chair or lying on the ground. Once you are ready, you can get up and continue your day.

3. Body scan

Step by step

This is particularly useful for having an awareness of the physical symptoms of anxiety and depression and learning how to let tension go.

It is similar to the four-minute breathing space but designed to offer a longer relaxation exercise. If you are someone who struggles to be present in the moment, this may be a good one to try.

- 1. Bring your awareness to your chest and focus on your breathing.** Centre your attention to the rise and fall of the chest.
- 2. Focus on the feet and notice the sensation on the soles, upper part and toes.** Imagine that your breath is flowing in and out of the feet and notice any change in sensation or relaxation.
- 3. Notice the sensation in your ankles and lower calves.** Imagine you are breathing from your chest and abdomen all the way through to the feet, in and out, noticing any change.
- 4. Move up the body, bringing your attention to each group of muscles,** breathing in and out of each limb and body part, letting go of any sensations present.
- 5. Return to any body parts that you noticed were tense** and as you inhale, visualize your breath reaching the tension and expanding to create an open space.
- 6. As your attention moves to the top of your head, scan your body again and notice any tension present.** Now imagine that you have a breath hole in the top of your head where you will be able to inhale and exhale from, much like a whale or dolphin. Inhale deeply from the top of your head through the breath hole drawing the breath slowly all the way down through the body to the soles of the feet and then returning up along your body. As you breathe out from the breath hole, visualize the breath relieving any tension or discomfort remaining in the body.
- 7. When you're ready, slowly bring your awareness to your surroundings. Count down from three to one**
 - 3 -** Become aware of your surroundings (pay attention to any noises you can hear or smells you notice).
 - 2 -** Move your feet, legs and hands. Move your head in small, slow circles.
 - 1 -** Open your eyes feeling re-energised, refreshed and relaxed.

4. Progressive muscle relaxation

Step by step

One way of helping to calm your mind and relax your body is by learning to relax your muscles. Progressive muscle relaxation is a technique that helps you to relax both mentally and physically by systematically tensing and then relaxing each muscle group within the body. It can be particularly helpful in relieving muscle tension.

With each of the muscle groups below, breathe in and tense the muscle group and hold this tension for 3-5 seconds (depending on what is comfortable for you). Breathe out as you release tension. This exercise is not strenuous but if you are experiencing any pain or recent injuries you may wish to check with your healthcare professional before trying this.

1. **Feet** – As you breathe in, curl your toes so that your muscles in the soles of your feet become tense. Hold the tension and then release as you breathe out.
2. **Lower legs** – Curl your toes upwards towards your knees creating tension in your calves as you breathe in and relaxing the calf muscle as you breathe out.
3. **Knee and upper thigh muscles** – Straighten the knees and gently lift your legs from the chair or bed and tighten your thigh muscles as you breathe in. Tensing as you breathe in and then relaxing them as you breathe out.
4. **Hips and buttocks** – Tense the buttock muscles by squeezing them inwards and upwards. Hold the tension as you breathe in and relax your muscles as you breathe out.
5. **Abdomen** – Observe your abdomen rising and falling with each breath. As you breathe in, tighten your stomach muscles by pulling your belly button towards the spine and hold the tension for a count of 3-5 seconds. Relax your muscles as you breathe out.
6. **Upper back** – Arch your back away from your chair/bed as you breathe in by squeezing the shoulder blades together to the midline of the body. Hold the tension and then release on your outward breath.

4. Progressive muscle relaxation

Step by step continued...

7. **Arms and palms of the hands** – Turn your palms down and make a tight fist with each hand. Bend your elbow and tense your bicep and forearm. Notice the feeling of tension. As you breathe out, notice how it feels as your arm relaxes and becomes looser.
8. **Neck and shoulders** – Drop your chin and draw up your shoulders towards your ears. Hold this tension and then relax as you breathe out.
9. **Facial muscles** – Clench your teeth together which will prompt the muscle in your jaw to start to tighten. Turn the corners of your mouth into a tight smile and squeeze your eyes shut. Take a deep breath as you hold this tension and then exhale and relax your face on your outward breath.
10. **Forehead** – Raise your eyebrows up and tense the muscles across the forehead and scalp. Notice the tension build and hold it there. As you exhale let the tension go and notice how your forehead feels.
11. **Finishing the relaxation exercise** – Take a few moments to tune into your breathing from head to toe and notice how your body feels. When you are ready, count backwards from five to one:

5, 4, 3, 2, 1

- Become aware of your surroundings (pay attention to any noises you can hear or smells you notice).
- Move your feet, legs and hands.
- Move your head in small, slow circles.
- Bring your attention back to the room.
- Open your eyes feeling re-energised, refreshed and relaxed.



To get the best out of this exercise, it's best to do it daily, not just when you feel anxious or stressed.

5. Visualisation

Step by step

This exercise is designed to take you away from your mind and racing thoughts by helping you to visualize a relaxed and calm place.

For the purpose of this exercise, we have used the image of a meadow, but you can replace with an image you prefer.

- 1. Start off by taking three deep breaths in and out.**
Take a moment to tune in and connect with your breath, notice any changes that happen in your body as you breathe.
- 2. Imagine yourself standing in a meadow, notice the warmth of the sun shining down on you.** Visualise a path beneath your feet, look down and notice the path, it's dry from the sun and bumpy under your foot.
- 3. Breathe in the fresh air as you start to notice what you can see around you.** Imagine that the meadow is filled with wildflowers that are blue, purple and yellow. The flowers are blowing from a gentle breeze in the air. Look up at the dark sky and notice the marshmallow clouds floating up above you. Start to walk through the meadow and as you start to walk, imagine that your mind and body are relaxing with every step you take.
- 4. As you are walking, listen to the sounds around you.** You can hear the birds singing and tree branches and leaves rustling in the breeze. You come to a stream and hear the gentle trickle of the water babbling.
- 5. Feel your body relax as you continue to walk.** There are trees and bushes either side of the path covered in leaves of autumnal colours. You see that the leaves are green, orange, red and brown. Bring your attention to your breath as you breathe in sync with your footsteps. Feel your muscles relax and lengthen as you are walking along with your arms swinging to the same rhythm as your footsteps.

Visualisation

Step by step continued...

6. **Take a pause on your walk to admire the scenery.** Notice the rolling hills in the distance and neighbouring fields filled with crops. If you look into the distance, you can see a tractor in another field.
7. **You start to walk up a slight incline and feel a gentle pull in your calves as they start to stretch.** You take a moment to enjoy the gentle breeze against your skin. You take a breath in to fill your lungs with this fresh air. The smell of the meadow fills your nostrils, it smells of freshly cut grass, flowers and lavender.
8. **You see a clearing up ahead and walk towards it.** There is a bench made of wood and you take a seat. As you sit down you feel yourself relax as you take in the images around you. Lean back in the bench as you relax further and notice the contrast of the warm sun followed by a light breeze on your skin. Take a breath in and out and repeat as you continue to relax. Spend a few moments here relaxing.
9. **Once you are ready, open your eyes and acquaint yourself with the here and now.** Take the feelings of peace and relaxation that you felt in the meadow (or wherever your calm place was) with you as you continue your day.



Top tips for getting started

1. Decide on a **specific time** to try out an exercise (the length of time for each exercise can vary).
2. Find a **quiet and comfortable location**
3. Try to **avoid being interrupted** – it can be helpful to let the people you live with know what you're doing
4. **Avoid eating a big meal** before the exercise
5. Relaxation can be beneficial any time of the day, however it's **best to choose a time when you're not too tired** (it's important to stay awake, this can take practice).
6. **Check the temperature** of the room is right for you
7. It might be useful to **record the exercises** and play them back to yourself.



Notes

A series of 20 horizontal dotted lines for writing notes.



Further resources



Workbooks

Centre for Clinical Interventions (CCI) – <https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/>

A range of detailed resources and PDF workbooks available to download for free focusing on a range of depression and anxiety related difficulties.

Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS – <https://web.ntw.nhs.uk/selfhelp/>

Self-help guides free to download by PDF and print on a range of difficulties including anxiety and depression.

Smartphone apps (found on Apple and Google Play store)

WRAP – Wellness recovery action app

Mood Tools – Depression aid

Fear Tools – Anxiety kit

Insight Timer – Meditation app

Websites

Mind – <https://www.mind.org.uk/>

Mental Health Foundation – <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/>

NHS – <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/>

Useful contacts...



Talking Therapies:

0300 365 2000

(Open 8am to 8pm Monday to Thursday
8am to 5pm Friday)

Email:

talkingtherapies@berkshire.nhs.uk

Other contacts:

Berkshire Crisis Team:

0800 129 9999

(24 hours, specialist service for
immediate mental health crisis)

Samaritans:

116 123

(24 hours, confidential listening service)

NHS Direct / out of hours:

111

(24 hours, physical and mental
health concerns)

In an emergency always call 999

