

Exercises for Relaxation or Slowing the Mind Down

General Notes:

- Trying something new is stressful. Practice relaxation exercises proactively so that they do not add more stress when you try to do them when already stressed
- These are outlines and not complete experiences. Add any imagery that suits you.
- You should deliberately try to move at a slightly slower pace than what seems natural to your mind or breathing

Square Breathing

- Find a square or rectangle in your environment. With your eyes, focus on its outline
- Count to 4 (4 seconds) while breathing in and moving your eyes up along the side from a bottom corner to the top corner on that side.
- Count to 4 while holding your breath and moving your eyes along the top to the other top corner
- Count to 4 while breathing out and moving your eyes from the top to the bottom corner
- Count to 4 while holding your breath and moving your eyes along the bottom to the start again
- Repeat for a total of 4 or more rounds

4-7-8 Breathing

- Reduce the length of the below numbers if having breathing difficulties (e.g., asthma, cold, or smoking)
- When first getting used to it this exercise may cause dizziness/lightheadedness, so until you know that it does not have this effect on you anymore, do not do it while driving, operating heavy machinery, while on a ladder or otherwise anything where dizziness may pose a danger.
 - Slowly breathe in for 4 seconds
 - Hold your breath for 7 seconds
 - Slowly breathe out for 8 seconds
 - Repeat at least 3 times, or as many times as desired

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- Skip any individual parts if they cause pain
- Make sure to breathe throughout
 - Scrunch in toes 2 times 5 seconds
 - Push heels into the ground 2 times 5 seconds
 - Push legs into the chair 2 times 5 seconds
 - (remember to breathe)
 - Push belly-button in toward your back 2 times 5 seconds
 - Elbows at your side, push the elbows in toward your body 2 times 5 seconds
 - Stretch out your arms and fingers as much as you can for 2 times 5 seconds
 - Push shoulders up toward the ears for 2 times 5 seconds

Deep Breathing with Relaxation Word

- Sit up straight with your feet comfortably planted on the floor.
- If you want to, close your eyes (to begin with it may be easier to relax if closing your eyes).
- Take deep breaths far down into the stomach, feeling the stomach muscles expand.
- After a while, when breathing out, add a word that can symbolize relaxation (for example stream, field, summer, waves).
- Stick with that feeling for a moment before moving out of the exercise.
- If this exercise is done often, then eventually the chosen relaxation word may once in a while be used to bring calm without doing the whole exercise

Self-hug/Corpus Callosum Activation

- Do not do this if having wrist/elbow problems
 - Stretch arms and fingers out in front of you
 - Turn hands so the thumbs are down
 - Cross the arms
 - Fold the hands together
 - Bend your elbows and move the folded hands downwards, inwards, and up between your arms
 - Rest your arms and folded hands up against your body
 - Squeeze your arms and/or hands against your body if this is comfortable
 - Close your eyes
 - Take deep breaths

Down the River

- Sit up straight with your feet comfortably planted on the floor.
- Take a couple deep breaths and close your eyes (once getting better at this exercise, you can keep your eyes open).
- In your mind, picture being at a river-bank, sitting under a tree or otherwise comfortably seated and lying.
- Start picturing a river with leaves sailing down-river past you
- Start noticing the thoughts popping into your mind
- For each thought, grab it, and put it on a leaf. Watch it sail downstream.
- For each new thought, continue to put it on a leaf.
- Take your time.
- You don't have to catch every thought.
- If you have thoughts about this exercise, or about your thoughts, put those thoughts on leaves as well.
- Continue this exercise until you notice that the thoughts popping up seem more distant
- When you notice that, put that thought on a leaf and let it sail and continue for a little while placing each further thought on a drifting leaf

Seeping Away

- Sit up straight with your feet comfortably planted on the floor.
- Take a couple deep breaths and close your eyes (once getting better at this exercise, you can keep your eyes open).
- Pay attention to how your body feels – notice muscles that may be tense
- Notice your own tiredness and focus on it for a moment
- Notice that tired feeling be throughout your body
- Start feeling that tiredness pull downwards – starting to seep out of your body and into the chair and the ground
- Slowly notice it seep out through your scalp and face, your neck, arms, body, seat, and legs.
- Stick with that feeling for a moment before moving out of the exercise.

Boxing Up

- Sit up straight with your feet comfortably planted on the floor.
- Take a couple deep breaths and close your eyes (once getting better at this exercise, you can keep your eyes open).
- In your mind, start picturing a calm place (for example a field or your living-room)
 - If you have found a place that seems to work for you, use the same place each time.
- Start noticing that thoughts and ideas are moving through your mind
- Picture a large box
- Start noticing individual thoughts as they are moving through your mind
- Mentally and unhurried grab each thought in turn and put it in the box
 - There might be a lot of thoughts at first, but take your time and grab one at the time – if some fly by while you take your time putting others in, then that is okay
- When the thoughts have slowed down and most of the thoughts have already been put in the box, close it and tie it up
- Imagine putting this box somewhere out of the way – you can always come back to it if you want to, but for now it is out of the way so it does not clutter up your calm space (for example behind a bush or in the garage)
- Let yourself stay in this calm space for a while before leaving it, but taking some of that calm with you

Racing Track

- This exercise is meant for racing thoughts - thoughts that appear to be moving too fast and creating discomfort because of it
- Sit up straight with your feet comfortably planted on the floor.
- Take a couple deep breaths and close your eyes (once getting better at this exercise, you can keep your eyes open).
- Notice your thoughts racing – racing past you on a track – running and running.
- As you watch the racing thoughts race past for a while, notice that you are actually watching them from the stands
- The speed of your thoughts may or may not remain dizzying
- As the racing continues, although perhaps at some distance, picture yourself leaving the seating area to go behind the seat and get a nice warm hot-dog from a vendor
- You may notice some remaining knowledge of the thoughts racing back at the track – and perhaps some noise of it coming through to you
- Notice what might be a presence of two speeds of thought at once – the thoughts racing on the track that you can let pass in the background – and the calmer more deliberate thoughts that now may go on in the foreground