

# Keep Calm and Relax!

## What to Know

Stress might be a large part of your everyday life, causing different emotional and physical problems. You can make your mind and body stronger and healthier by learning how to relax. Practicing relaxation activities can help you feel better.

Below are some activities you can do to relax.

**1. Yoga.** The movement and breathing done in yoga activate the relaxation response. Yoga moves you out of the sympathetic nervous system ("fight or flight") and into the parasympathetic nervous system ("rest and digest").

### Yoga Relaxation Exercise

From your hands and knees, lower your hips toward your heels. Spread your knees wide apart while keeping your big toes touching. Soften your belly onto the tops of your thighs. Rest your forehead on the floor and your torso on your thighs. Knees can be together or apart. Extend your arms forward, with palms facing down, or bring them back to rest alongside your thighs, with palms facing up. Breathe in for a slow count of five, then breathe out for a slow count of five.

**2. Breathe.** Conscious, controlled breathing is one of the easiest and fastest ways to relax. Slowing your breathing moves you into the relaxation response. You can do a deep breathing exercise to relax before tests, calm down when you are upset, and fall asleep more easily.

### Square Breathing Exercise

Also known as four-square breathing or box breathing, this exercise can be your go-to relaxation skill.

- Sit comfortably in a chair with your feet on the floor and hands in your lap.
- Inhale slowly through your nose for a count of four, allowing the air to fill your belly.
- Hold the breath for a count of four.
- Exhale slowly for a count of four.
- Hold your breath for a count of four.
- As you breathe, visualize a healing blue light washing over your body.
- Do this for four minutes and repeat the exercise four times a day.

**3. Meditation.** Meditation is using your mind and thoughts to get quiet, calm, and focused. It can train your mind to slow down, relax, and stay positive. Meditating for five minutes a day can help reduce stress and anxiety. Even a few minutes of meditation can make a big difference in your day!

#### Basic Mindfulness Meditation Exercise

- Sit quietly with your eyes closed and breathe normally.
- Pay attention to your breath. Repeat the phrase, "breathing in, breathing out," to keep your mind focused on inhaling and exhaling.
- When a thought comes into your mind, label it as "a thought" and allow it to float away like a cloud moving across the sky.
- Gently bring your attention back to your breath. Practice for as long as you wish.

**4. Music.** Rhythm has a big impact on the nervous system and encourages deep relaxation. Music can also reduce frustration, anger, and aggression. Listen to uplifting songs for at least 20 minutes each day.

**5. Positive Visualization.** Mental imagery is a powerful tool for dissolving physical and mental tension. You can also regulate your emotions and relieve stress.

#### Visualization Exercise

- Find a private, calm space and get settled in a comfortable position (seated or lying on your back).
- Close your eyes and take a few slow, deep breaths.
- Imagine yourself in a beautiful location, one of your favorite places. It might be a beach, the woods, or a cozy spot in your home.
- Visualize the environment around you. Imagine the sound of waves, or the rustling of the wind in the trees. Feel the warmth of the sun or the cool ocean breeze.
- Stay in the scene, visualizing every aspect of it. Imagine all the details associated with that place: the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and how it feels. Remember you can return to this place whenever you want to relax.

**6. Exercise.** Physical activity is a great way to relax because it gets your mind and body active. You can run, swim, skateboard, join an athletic team, or dance. Try to get physically active every day.

**7. Express yourself.** Relax and process your feelings, ideas, thoughts, and emotions through writing or creating art. Something as simple as drawing can help you relax.

**8. Spend time in nature.** Spending just a few minutes outside sitting in the grass or going for a walk can calm you down.

**9. Scan your body.** Scanning your body for two minutes helps you understand where you are holding tension.

### Body Scan Exercise

Sit comfortably or lie on your back and scan your body from your toes to your head. As you move through each body part, notice how it feels. Breathe deeply into each body part, imagining fresh breath flowing to each part you are scanning.

What else can you do to relax?

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No matter how busy you are, you can make time to relax every day. This worksheet will help you develop a habit of relaxation.

### **What to Do**

Do at least 2-3 of the above activities every day for two weeks. Use the following chart to record what you do. Note the date, activity, and how you felt at the end of the day after doing relaxation activities.

Date	Activities	How did you feel at the end of the day?

Date	Activities	How did you feel at the end of the day?

### Reflections on This Exercise

What did you learn from this exercise that you did not know before?

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Is it important to you to develop a relaxation habit? Why or why not?

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