

Introduction

Welcome to this collection of relaxation exercises. You will find five shorter and three longer exercises followed by a piece of instrumental music. This is an invitation for you to take quiet time to rest and relax. You might want to start with a shorter relaxation exercise choosing the theme that feels right for you in this moment.

With practice, you can become more familiar with the different themes and longer exercises. Find a comfortable place to sit or lie down; making sure that you won't be disturbed. This might mean turning off your phone and finding a quiet room away from other people. Make sure you can stay warm with extra cushions or blankets nearby.

When you're ready, start listening to the instructions. If you start to experience any physical or emotional discomfort, stop following the exercise and do what you need to do to look after yourself. Seek support from your healthcare provider if you have any concerns.

This is your time to nurture yourself with rest and relaxation.

The mindful breath

This is a shorter relaxation focusing on your breathing. Once this relaxation becomes more familiar you can do this anywhere and at any time. Begin by practicing in a comfortable, seated position, finding a comfortable posture with your feet on the floor, sitting upright with your back supported and your hands resting comfortably in your lap. If you want to lie down find a restful position on your back with legs stretched out and arms by your sides. Use pillows or cushions to keep yourself comfortable.

And now close your eyes or keep them gently open, turning your attention to your breathing, allowing your body to breathe in its own rhythm. Notice whether it's fast or slow, light or deep. Noticing what you feel when you breathe in and when you breathe out. If you want to, saying the words to yourself in your mind, 'breathing in, breathing out'. Or simply, 'in and out'. If it feels comfortable, breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Or continue to allow the air to flow in a natural way for you.

Now focusing on the sensation of breathing out. If it feels comfortable try making the out breath a little longer, counting to guide you if that helps. Practicing breathing in and breathing out. And now allow your breathing to return to its natural rhythm.

Rest in this space for the next few moments. And when you're ready open your eyes and start making small movements. Bring your attention back to this room as this relaxation comes to a close.

Visualisation (short)

This is a shorter relaxation, imagining pictures and scenes that have positive associations for you. It is called visualisation, and can help you feel more calm and at ease.

Begin by finding a comfortable posture, with your feet on the floor, sitting upright with your back supported, your hands resting on your lap. If you are lying down, find a restful position on your back, with your legs stretched out and arms by your sides. Use pillows or cushions to keep yourself comfortable. Close your eyes, or keep them gently open.

And now turn your attention to what you can picture in your mind's eye. Bring to mind a colour that you find soothing. Imagine any shade of the colour spectrum – red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet. Now visualising this colour as a fabric that you find comforting. Imagining velvet, brushed cotton, silk or smooth fleece.

Now picture this fabric as a blanket. Feel yourself wrapping the blanket around your shoulders, or lying down on it gently. Observe any soft sounds you can hear as you settle down. Sensing your body warmed by the blanket, its colour flowing through you. Notice how the blanket smells, any comforting, familiar scents. Spend some time resting in this space.

When you are ready, open your eyes and start making small movements. Bring your attention back to this room, as this relaxation comes to a close.

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Visualisation

This is a longer relaxation, imagine pictures and scenes that have positive associations for you. This is called visualisation, and can help you feel calm and at ease. With practice, you can bring any image or scene to mind. For this relaxation, you will be guided to imagine an outdoor space. Begin by finding a comfortable posture, with your feet on the floor, sitting upright with your back supported and your hands resting on your lap. If you are lying down, find a restful position on your back, with your legs stretched out and arms by your sides. Use pillows or cushions to keep yourself comfortable. Close your eyes, or keep them gently open. And now turn your attention to what you can picture in your mind's eye.

Bring to mind a peaceful garden, park or other outdoor space. This may be a place you know, or somewhere you can imagine. You may have a clear image of the space, or just a sense of it. Letting the image take shape in its own way, in your imagination.

Picture yourself making your way to this garden. You may be walking along a path, opening a gate, or stepping outside from a building. Once you have reached your garden, pause for a moment to look around at all you can see. Noticing the shape of the garden. It may be a small patio, or a vast field stretching out into the distance. Observing what you can see within your garden. You may see trees, plants, flowers, wildlife. There may be buildings, sculptures or other objects created by your imagination. Look up at the sky, take in the world around you. Getting a sense of the time of day and year, the season that you find yourself in.

Now imagine moving through this outdoor space. Notice how the ground feels beneath your feet. Move at your own pace, observing what you can feel in your body. Notice the sensations on your skin. You may feel the warmth of the sun, soft rain or a gentle breeze. Sensing the freshness of the air as you take a few deeper breaths.

Now listen for any sounds you can hear. You may hear the sounds of birds, insects, and animals. The leaves rustling in the breeze. There may be the sound of water. Continuing to explore your senses, observe what you can smell. You may imagine the scents of your favourite flowers or trees, or freshly cut grass. Look around you for anything edible in this outdoor space. This may be ripe berries or fruit, or even a stall with your favourite food or drink. You may want to imagine taking a bite or enjoying a drink, savouring the taste.

And now continue to explore your garden. This is your time for what you feel will nourish you. You may want to keep walking through the space. You may see yourself doing something you find meaningful. Or you may find somewhere to simply rest. Spend a few more moments here in your garden or outdoor space. And now it's time to start making your way back to where you first stepped into your space. Take some time to look around you again, know that you can come back to this space any time you want to, in your mind's eye. You may want to send yourself a little thank you for taking this time to bring to mind calming pictures and scenes.

Now it's time to slowly come back to being here, in this room. Keeping your eyes closed, notice the seat of your chair or the surface you're lying on. Feel how solid it is, how supported you are. Hear the sounds around you. When you are ready, open your eyes and start making small movements, as this relaxation comes to a close.

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Senses

This is a shorter exercise, focusing on experiencing your five senses in this moment. When this is more familiar to you, you can do it anywhere and at any time, and it may help you to feel more grounded and calm.

To practice this at home, begin by pausing wherever you are in this moment. Start by looking around you. Count 5 things you can see. Now, bringing your attention to physical sensations. Count 4 things you can feel. Focusing now on sounds around you. Count 3 things you can hear. Moving down to your nose. Count 2 things you can smell. And now turn to the final sense. Notice 1 thing you can taste.

Now that you have journeyed through all the senses, you may want to return to the sense that helped you feel particularly calm and at ease. Seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling, tasting. Or you may want to simply rest comfortably in this space for the next few moments, until you are ready to carry on with your day.

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Relaxing the Body

This is a shorter relaxation, focusing on sensations in different parts of your body. With practice, you can learn to observe and let go of tension, and feel more relaxed.

Begin by finding a comfortable posture, with your feet on the floor, sitting upright with your back supported and your hands resting on your lap. If you are lying down, find a restful position on your back, with your legs stretched out and arms by your sides. You can use pillows or cushions to keep yourself comfortable. Close your eyes, or keep them gently open, with a soft gaze.

And now, turn your attention to the feelings in your body. Starting at the top of your head and moving down, noticing any tension and letting it go. Softening the muscles in your forehead, your eyes, your mouth and jaw. Shoulders, arms and hands. Softening the tummy as you breathe. Hips, legs and feet. Imagining any tension flowing out through your feet into the ground below you.

Rest in this space for the next few moments. You may feel the beginnings of a smile resting gently on your lips. When you are ready, open your eyes and start making small movements.

Bring your attention back to this room, as this relaxation comes to a close.

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Muscle Relaxation

This is a longer relaxation, focusing on sensations in different parts of your body. With practice, you can learn to observe and let go of tension in your muscles, and feel more relaxed. Begin by practicing in a seated position. Finding a comfortable posture, with your feet on the floor, sitting upright with your back supported and your hands resting on your lap. If you are lying down, find a restful position on your back, with your legs stretched out and arms by your sides. You can use pillows or cushions to keep yourself comfortable. And now, turn your attention to what you can feel in your body.

Start by observing one of your hands. Noticing sensations in your thumb, your index finger, middle finger, ring finger and little finger, your palm and the back of your hand. You may feel warmth, numbness, tingling. You may feel sensations more clearly in some parts of your hand than others. Now if you want to, clench your hand into a fist. Notice what you can feel as you squeeze the muscles tightly. Let go and allow the muscles of the hand to relax. Notice how the muscles feel when they are relaxed. And now, turning your attention to your other hand. Notice sensations in your thumb, your index finger, middle finger, ring finger and little finger, your palm and the back of your hand. This time, without tensing first, allow the muscles in this hand to relax.

Having practiced with your hands, moving now through different parts of the body. Without tensing the muscles, notice sensations and allow the muscles to relax. Starting at the top of your head, noticing sensations in your face.

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Softening the muscles in your forehead, your eyes, your mouth and jaw. Noticing sensations in your head and neck, allowing any tension to melt away. Letting your shoulders ease down. Sensing this relaxation as a wave, flowing down through your arms and into your hands. Allowing your chest to move gently as you breathe in and out. Soften and relax your tummy.

At the back of your body, the soothing wave flows from the top of your head, down your back and into your pelvis and hips. Relaxing the muscles in your thighs, your legs and in your feet. Imagining any tension flowing out through your feet and into the ground below you.

You may want to return to the top of your head. Allowing warm waves of relaxation to flow down, loosening any tightness you feel in your body. Continuing to flow down through your body, relaxing muscles from top to toe.

And now letting go of this flowing wave. Sensing your whole body sitting on your chair, or lying down. Resting comfortably in this space for the next few moments. You may want to send yourself a little thank you for taking this time, observing what you are experiencing in this moment.

Now it's time to slowly come back to being here, in this room. Keeping your eyes closed, notice the seat of your chair or the surface you're lying on. Feel how solid it is, how supported you are. Hear the sounds around you. When you are ready, open your eyes and start making small movements, as this relaxation comes to a close.

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