

Relaxation

This factsheet is for guidance only and has been produced with assistance from healthcare professionals

Learning to relax

Breathlessness can often cause anxiety and feelings of panic. Anxiety tends to make the feeling of breathlessness stronger, which in turn leads to more anxiety. It is important to remember that breathlessness in itself is not harmful and your breathing will get better on resting. It is also possible to try to control the level of anxiety you are feeling and relaxation is one way of helping with this. Relaxation is a useful skill that you can learn and there are different exercises that can help you.

How can I control my anxiety?

- Recognise what triggers or sets off your anxiety
- Write down the kinds of things that worry or concern you
- Try not to worry about future events, concentrate on the present
- Try to identify problems and solve them one at a time
- Tell your health care team how you are feeling
- Learn a way of relaxing that works for you

Preparing for relaxation

Relaxation may not come easily initially, but like any new activity, the more you practise the easier and more effective you will find it. Try to allow yourself some time each day to practise your relaxation exercise.

Positioning

- Ensure that your neck, shoulders and arms are relaxed
- Sit or lie with your legs uncrossed
- Try to have your elbows supported at your side on cushions or on the arm of the chair
- Let your shoulders and arms sink down into the cushions.
- Try to close your eyes. If this is too difficult, choose a spot in front of you, on the wall or floor and keep your eyes fixed on this point. When you are relaxed it will be easier to keep your eyes closed.

When you finish your relaxation exercise

- Become aware of the real surroundings by listening to the sounds around you
- Be aware of how relaxed you feel
- Start to move very gently by stretching your arms and legs before moving from your position

Relaxation exercises

It might be helpful to have someone read these out to you for the first few times until they become familiar.

1. Visualisation

Try to visualise a relaxing scene. It could be your favourite place, a walk that you know, a garden or the beach. It could equally be somewhere from your imagination, somewhere that makes you feel happy and secure, but not places that hold bad or sad memories

Your chosen scene

When you feel that your chosen scene is developing in your imagination, use your five senses to make it more real to you.

- What can you see? What are the shapes and colours of the trees, leaves, grass, fences, clouds and sky in your scene?
- Try to see the small details using your imagination
- Slowly move on to add to this with the senses of smell and sound
- Ask yourself what you can hear (maybe seagulls, waves or wind) and smell in your special place.
- Imagine picking up a small object, such as a shell, some sand or a flower

- In your mind feel it; what is its texture, how does it smell?
- Use the sense of taste to add to your image: can you taste the sea air?

From time to time, remember to note how comfortable and happy you are in this special place. Make sure you reinforce the experience as positive. When you feel relaxed and it is time to finish, walk away from the scene in your mind and gently re-enter the real world.

2. Letting go of distressing thoughts

- Spend a few moments taking control of the pace and regularity of your breathing
- Close your eyes and imagine that you are sitting on the bank of a river
- You are warm and relaxed, and able to breathe freely
- You see many leaves slowly drifting downstream
- When a distressing thought or feeling comes into your mind, try to see this as a leaf and let it drift away from you down the river
- When it has gone, return to gazing at the river waiting for the next leaf to float by with a new thought
- Try not to think about the contents of each leaf. Just observe it and then let it go
- Sometimes the same leaf may come up many times or several leaves will seem related to each other, or the leaves may be empty. That is okay.
- Do not allow yourself to be concerned with these thoughts. Just watch them pass in front of your mind's eye

3. Body scan

- Begin by focussing your attention on your feet, trying to release the tension in your muscles
- Begin with your toes, working up through your ankles to your calves and shins, over your knees and along your thighs
- Notice how loose your legs feel now
- Become aware of your tummy and then your chest. Feel the tension flowing out of your body
- Now think of your shoulders, travelling down to your elbows, through your forearms, and into your wrists, hands and fingers.
- Become aware even of your fingertips
- Notice how loose your arms feel now
- Next, focus your attention on your lower back and pelvis. Try to release any tension you are feeling here
- Allow this feeling of looseness to rise up your back, to the back of your chest and shoulder blades.
- Let the feeling continue up into your neck and scalp, to the crown of your head
- Slowly begin to focus on your forehead and move down to your jaw
- Imagine that you have a giant paintbrush, sweeping over your body, following the same route and creating a feeling of calm and relaxation
- Feel that every part of your body is relaxed.

Apps/ You Tube

You may wish to research and download an app or appropriate music to support your relaxation to follow. There are some useful You Tube videos with guided relaxation exercises; everyone has individual preferences so it's helpful to view a few to find something that's useful to you.

Environment

Prior to starting relaxation activity, try to alter your environment to provide optimum opportunity to relax. You may wish to close the curtains or dim the lights. Try to be in a quiet place. You may wish to place a blanket over you to keep warm.

This leaflet is based on written information developed by the Cambridge Breathlessness Intervention Service.
cuh.org.uk

This leaflet is updated regularly. For the most up to date information please visit loros.co.uk/care

In cases of comments or complaints, please contact:

Chief Executive, or Director of Patient Services and Clinical Quality, LOROS, Groby Road, Leicester LE3 9QE or, Care Quality Commission, East Midlands Office, Citygate, Gallowgate, Newcastle Upon Tyne NE1 4PA

Alternative languages:

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If you need this information in your own language, please contact the PA to our Patient Experience Lead on 0116 231 8435

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Jeśli potrzebuje Pan/ Pani, aby niniejsze informacje zostały udzielone w Pana/ Pani języku ojczystym, prosimy o kontakt z PA Kierownika ds. Pacjentów pod numerem 0116 231 8435.

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