

Meditation Techniques

The relaxation response: bringing your nervous system back into balance

Stressful situations throw your nervous system out of balance. Relaxation techniques can bring it back into a balanced state by producing the *relaxation response*, a state of deep calmness that is the polar opposite of the stress response.

Meditation Technique #1: Breathing Meditation



The key to deep breathing is to breathe deeply from the **abdomen** rather than shallow breaths from your upper chest. You inhale more oxygen, which decreases tension, shortness of breath, and anxiety.

- Sit comfortably with your back straight. Put one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach.
- Breathe in through your nose. The hand on your stomach should rise. The hand on your chest should move very little.
- Exhale through your mouth, pushing out as much air as you can while contracting your abdominal muscles.
- Continue to breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Try to inhale enough so that your lower abdomen rises and falls. Count slowly as you exhale.

Meditation Technique #2: Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Before practicing Progressive Muscle Relaxation, consult with your doctor if you have a history of muscle spasms, back problems, or other serious injuries that may be aggravated by tensing muscles.

The most popular sequence:

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|----------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Right foot* | 6. Left thigh | 11. Right arm and hand |
| 2. Left foot | 7. Hips and buttocks | 12. Left arm and hand |
| 3. Right calf | 8. Stomach | 13. Neck and shoulders |
| 4. Left calf | 9. Chest | 14. Face |
| 5. Right thigh | 10. Back | |

*If you are left-handed you may want to begin with your left foot instead.

Meditation Technique #3: Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the ability to remain aware of how you're feeling right now, your "moment-to-moment" experience—both internal and external.

- **A quiet environment.** Choose a secluded place in your home, office, garden, place of worship, or outdoors.
- **A comfortable position.** Get comfortable, but avoid lying down as this may lead to you falling asleep.



- **A point of focus.** It can be internal (feeling or imaginary scene) or external (flame or meaningful word or phrase) that you repeat it throughout your session. Choose to focus on an object in your surroundings to enhance your concentration.
- **An observant, noncritical attitude.** Don't worry about distracting thoughts that go through your mind or about how well you're doing. If thoughts intrude during your relaxation session, don't fight them. Instead, gently turn your attention back to your point of focus.

Meditation Technique #4: Visualization Meditation

Visualization requires you to employ not only your visual sense, but also your sense of taste, touch, smell, and sound. Close your eyes and let your worries drift away. Picture your restful place as vividly as you can—everything you can see, hear, smell, and feel. Try using at least three of your senses.



Ex. Dock on a quiet lake

- Walk slowly around the dock and notice the colors and textures around you.
- Spend some time exploring each of your senses.
- Hear the birds singing.
- Smell the pine trees.
- Feel the cool water on your bare feet.

Meditation Technique #5: Yoga

Although almost all yoga classes end in a relaxation pose, classes that emphasize slow, steady movement, deep breathing, and gentle stretching are best for stress relief.

Satyananda	A traditional form of yoga. It features gentle poses, deep relaxation, and meditation, making it suitable for beginners as well as anyone primarily looking for stress reduction.
Hatha yoga	A reasonably gentle way to relieve stress and is suitable for beginners. Alternately, look for labels like <i>gentle</i> , <i>for stress relief</i> , or <i>for beginners</i> when selecting a yoga class.
Power yoga	Has intense poses and a focus on fitness. It is better suited to those looking for stimulation as well as relaxation.

If you're unsure whether a specific yoga class is appropriate for stress relief, call the studio or ask the teacher.

Resource: <http://www.helpguide.org/>