

Relaxation Module

.....

The Relaxation Module has been organized so that materials can be handed out sequentially. More advanced skills are built on the preceding foundation.

This module includes informational handouts and instructional exercise handouts on abdominal breathing, grounding, relaxation, mindfulness, meditation and tension release.

These exercises will assist with stress management and provide a positive benefit to overall physical and mental health.

These skills are easy to learn and more effective if demonstrated in your office.

Introduction to Relaxation

Stress Response

- Our body has a natural, healthy mechanism for responding to perceived threats (stress), called the Fight, Flight or Freeze response.
- Our body responds by releasing chemicals (e.g., adrenaline) that cause various body systems to change, including our central nervous system. This produces many symptoms including increased heart rate, rapid breathing and increased agitation.
- Our central nervous system has two parts:
 - 1 The Sympathetic nervous system that stimulates the Fight, Flight or Freeze response.
 - 2 The Parasympathetic nervous system that triggers the relaxation/calming response.

Why Relax?

- You can't be physically relaxed (parasympathetic response) and physically stressed (sympathetic response) at the same time.
- Abdominal breathing and relaxation techniques trigger the parasympathetic response, calming your body and mind.

Orientation to Relaxation Training

- Relaxation is a skill that can be learned through repeated practice.
- We are aiming to train the relaxation response so that it becomes almost automatic.
- Initially, you may not notice any major difference in how you feel.
- During a practice session, you may experience some unusual feelings in your body, such as warmth, heaviness or a tingly sensation. These sensations are signs that your muscles are loosening and relaxing.
- Feel free to move around as much as necessary in order to maintain comfort.
- It is best to have your eyes closed during a session in order to block out visual distractions.
- Home practice should be carried out once a day. Try to establish regular times for the practice sessions. Many people find it useful to do their practice sessions at bedtime as it helps them to get to sleep easily.

Abdominal Breathing

Purpose

- Your breathing is directly related to the level of tension you carry in your body.
- If you breathe shallowly, in your chest, you will become more tense and more anxious. This kind of breathing stimulates the sympathetic branch of your nervous system, which is connected to the “fight, flight or freeze” response.
- If you breathe deeply, in your abdomen, you will become more relaxed. This type of breathing stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system, which triggers a relaxing and calming response.

Process

TO DISCOVER HOW YOU ARE BREATHING NOW:

- Put one hand on your chest and one hand on your abdomen (belly). Pay attention to how you are breathing for a few moments. Observe which hand (if any) is moving.
- If it is your top hand, you are breathing mostly in your chest — shallowly. This kind of breathing will increase body tension and stress/anxiety.
- If it is your bottom hand, then you are breathing in your abdomen. This will help you to relax and calm down.
- The idea is to learn to breathe in your abdomen more.

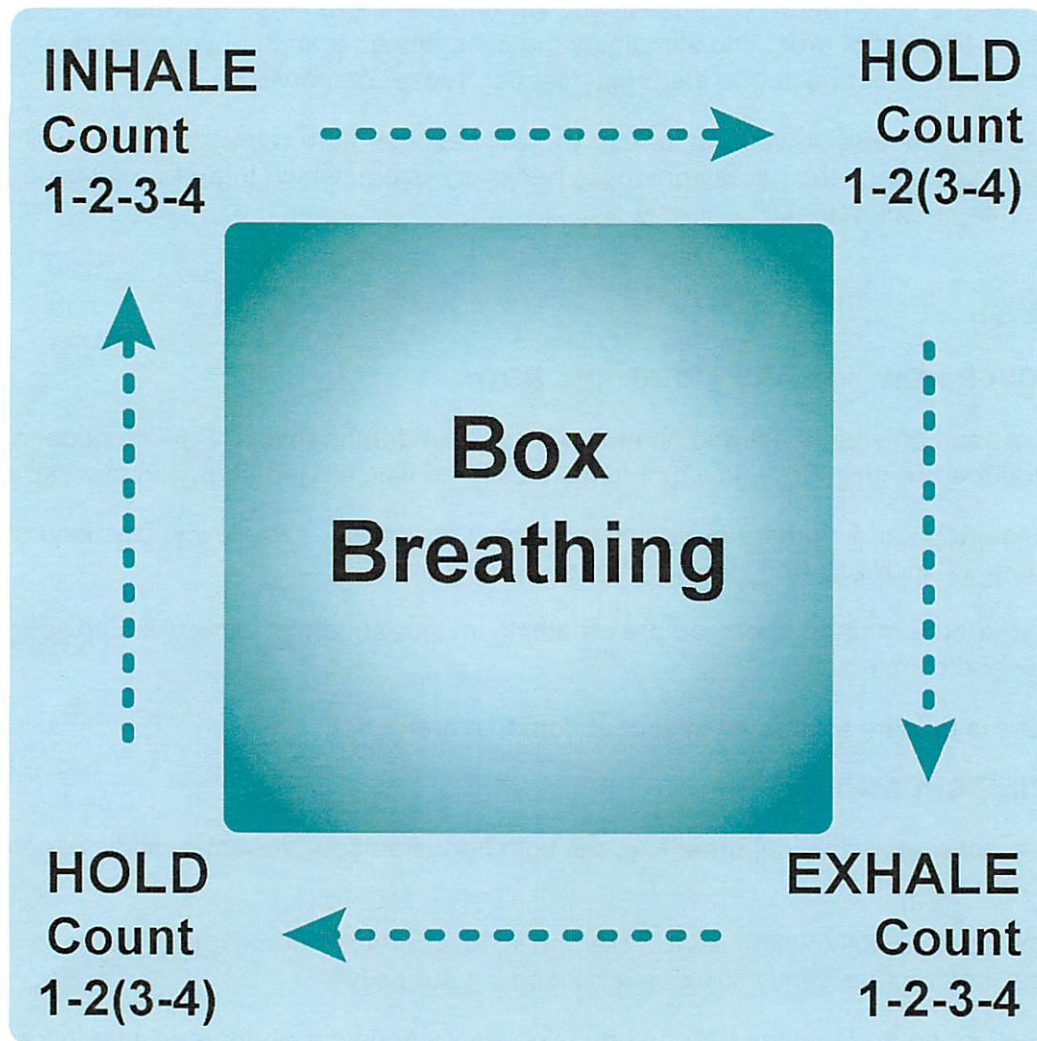
PRACTICING BREATHING:

- When practicing abdominal breathing, put both hands on your abdomen and close or lower your eyes.
- First, breathe out fully. Then, as you breathe in, let your abdomen expand. You can imagine that you are gently filling up a balloon in your belly.
- Then just let go and feel the balloon emptying slowly and your abdomen flattening as you exhale.
- The more fully you breathe out, the easier it is to breathe in deeply.
- Practice breathing this way for 5 minutes twice a day.

Variation – Box Breathing

Box Breathing incorporates brief holding of breath following inhalation and exhalation.

This is very useful during severe anxiety or panic to prevent hyperventilation.



Grounding

Purpose

- Grounding is a calming and centering method that helps you to become more focused in your body and on the present moment. It reminds you of your strength and ability to cope in the present.

Process

- Sit in a chair with your feet flat on the floor and your hands placed palms down on the large muscles of your thighs. Gently press your feet into the floor for a few moments and release. Feel your strength.
- Alternatively, you can ground while walking or standing. Just become aware of your feet firmly planted beneath you.
- To calm the mind and help to focus in the present, take some deep breaths while repeating a calming statement. Choose one thought that you repeat each time you do the grounding, so that saying it becomes a habit. For example,

“I AM LEARNING TO STAY IN THE PRESENT.”

“THIS IS ME. I AM HERE. I AM ALIVE. I WILL COPE.”

“I AM LEARNING TO COPE.”

- You could also ground by focusing on a detailed description of an object in your environment (i.e., colour and shape) and breathing.

Body Scan

Purpose

- Body scan is a relaxation technique that can be used to quickly check the level of tension in your body and to release it.

Process

- Body scan involves scanning your body from feet to head and doing two steps for each part:
 - 1 Focus on body area and note tension.
 - 2 Breathing deeply, imagine that your breath goes into that part of the body. As you breathe out, the tension is released with your breath.
- You can take 5 minutes or 30 seconds to do a body scan, making use of it in a variety of settings and situations.

Passive Relaxation

Purpose

- Passive relaxation is a relaxation technique that involves taking time to focus your attention on relaxing your body and mind.
- It incorporates deep breathing and body scan.
- It takes approximately 20 minutes.
- This technique is very important in learning to truly relax your muscles and engage the parasympathetic relaxation response.
- This technique needs to be practiced regularly (ideally every day; minimum 3 times per week).
- By regularly practicing a longer technique you will, with time, increase the effectiveness of the shorter techniques.

Process

- Get into a comfortable position. Close your eyes and concentrate on deep breathing for a few minutes.
- Focus your attention on each body part (feet, legs, buttocks, abdomen, back, hands, arms, shoulders, neck, jaw, eyes, scalp) and mind.
- With each part, direct your breathing there. Breathe out any tension and breathe in relaxation. Instruct each part to relax (i.e. relax feet, relax, relax).
- You may wish to use relaxing music.

Variations

- You may incorporate visualization. While you are relaxed, imagine being in a special place in nature. Imagine what you see, hear, smell, taste and feel. Experience all the sensory details of your special place.
- You may also make self-statements (autogenic). Repeat to yourself:
“My.(name body part) is warm.”
“My.(name body part) is heavy.”
“My.(name body part) is relaxed.”
For mind, substitute words *peaceful*, *calm* and *relaxed*.

Stress Busters

Purpose

- Shorter techniques are more flexible than the longer ones. They allow you to relax and/or release tension quickly in a variety of different settings (e.g., at lunch break, at a meeting, while waiting in line at a store, at a red light etc.)
- This flexibility means that you can use these techniques to calm yourself before, during or after stressful situations, or to short-circuit a stress response.
- Different short versions will suit different situations so having a number of short versions offers you the flexibility to choose one that fits the moment best.

Process

- Take a few deep breaths.
- Sigh.
- Laugh.
- Yawn, unclench or move jaw.
- Shrug your shoulders several times.
- Periodically remind yourself to keep shoulders down and jaw unclenched.
- Massage your temples and the upper back of your neck.
- Raise your eyebrows and hold them up until the count of 3; release and repeat several times.
- To relieve eyestrain, rub your palms briskly together, cup hands and place them over open or closed eyes.
- With open or closed lids — rotate your eyes in circles slowly, top, right side, bottom, left side; relax and reverse. Repeat 3 times.
- Neck roll: Always move your neck very gently and slowly. Let your chin drop down to the center of your chest. Keeping your chin close to your body, slowly move your head to look over your left shoulder. Slowly return to center and repeat on the right side.
- Stretch.

One Minute Stress Break

