**List of Relaxation Techniques and descriptions**

**Mindful eating**: Mindfulness is the ability to be fully aware and attend to your own experience at any moment, *without judgment.* In mindful eating, you work to be aware of everything you are doing when eating, including thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations that come up when eating. The key here is to practice doing this WITHOUT judgment. You just notice what is happening, without reacting to it in the moment. This is good practice for doing the same thing with anxiety. Mindful eating helps us practice just noticing something happening without reacting to it. We want to eventually do the same with anxiety – just notice it, without reacting to it.

<https://thecenterformindfuleating.org/FREE-Meditations>

**Controlled breathing:**

These are great for general relaxation, but also very useful during a panic attack to help restore things “back to normal.”

In all these, inhale through the nose and exhale through the mouth, preferably with pursed lips. Focus your mind closely on your breathing, and tune out everything else.

1. Box breathing - <https://www.healthline.com/health/box-breathing>
2. Belly breathing
   1. Sit or lie flat in a comfortable position
   2. Put one hand on your belly or just below your ribs and the other hand on your chest
   3. Take a deep breath through your nose, and let your belly push your hand out while doing this
   4. Breathe out through pursed lips as if you were whistling. Your belly should fall back to resting position.
   5. Repeat for 3-5 minutes at least (can do more if desired)
3. 4-7-8 breathing
   1. Inhale (breathe in) while counting to 4 in your head (about 4 seconds)
   2. Hold your breath, silently counting to 7
   3. Release the breath (breathe out) as you count to 8. Try to get all the air out of your lungs at a steady pace by the time you get to 8. If you run out of breath before you get to 8, slow down your exhale the next time.
4. Roll breathing
   1. [Roll breathing](https://www.uofmhealth.org/health-library/zm6264#zm6264-sec) helps you to develop full use of your lungs and to focus on the rhythm of your breathing. You can do it in any position. But while you are learning, it is best to lie on your back with your knees bent.
   2. Put your left hand on your belly and your right hand on your chest. Notice how your hands move as you breathe in and out.
   3. Practice filling your lower lungs by breathing so that your "belly" (left) hand goes up when you inhale and your "chest" (right) hand remains still. Always breathe in through your nose and breathe out through your mouth. Do this 8 to 10 times.
   4. When you have filled and emptied your lower lungs 8 to 10 times, add the second step to your breathing: inhale first into your lower lungs as before, and then continue inhaling into your upper chest. Breathe slowly and regularly. As you do so, your right hand will rise and your left hand will fall a little as your belly falls.
   5. As you exhale slowly through your mouth, make a quiet, whooshing sound as first your left hand and then your right hand fall. As you exhale, feel the tension leaving your body as you become more and more relaxed.
   6. Practice breathing in and out in this way for 3 to 5 minutes. Notice that the movement of your belly and chest rises and falls like the motion of rolling waves.
   7. **Caution:** Some people get dizzy the first few times they try roll breathing. If you begin to [breathe too fast](https://www.uofmhealth.org/health-library/sth149997#sth149997-sec) or feel lightheaded, slow your breathing. Get up slowly.
5. Morning breathing
   1. Try this exercise when you first get up in the morning to relieve muscle stiffness and clear clogged breathing passages. Then use it throughout the day to relieve back tension.
   2. From a standing position, bend forward from the waist with your knees slightly bent, letting your arms dangle close to the floor.
   3. As you inhale slowly and deeply, return to a standing position by rolling up slowing, lifting your head last.
   4. Hold your breath for just a few seconds in this standing position.
   5. Exhale slowly as you return to the original position, bending forward from the waist.

**Imagery**

This involves using relaxing imagery – basically “going to a relaxing place” in the mind. When doing this, I encourage using the 5 senses during the imagery. So, imagine what you see, hear, smell, taste, and feel (e.g. is it warm, cold, is there a breeze? Etc.)

5 minutes is usually sufficient. You can also search and listen to “guided imagery.”

Below is a sample (taken from <https://www.mirecc.va.gov/cih-visn2/Documents/Patient_Education_Handouts/Visualization_Guided_Imagery_2013.pdf>). But, this is just a sample. You can make up your own or use any number of other types of imagery.

*Close your eyes. Allow yourself to get comfortable. …. Begin with a few slow deep breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth, letting your body get relaxed. Let the chair fully support your body as you continue to breath and relax. Now, use your imagination to picture yourself walking slowly along a path. It’s a pleasant path, any kind that you wish. It’s a beautiful day, and you feel relaxed and happy. You can feel the warmth and energy of the sunlight on your skin. …… Soon you come to a gate. You know this gate leads to a special place where you feel welcomed, safe, and comfortable. Push the gate open and allow yourself to enter your very own private garden. Your garden is filled with your favorite things. Whatever is pleasing to you can be found in this place. Perhaps there are flowers, trees, animals, birds, water, or even music. Look around and notice what is in your garden. ….. See all the colors and objects that are in this place. Notice how beautiful they are. …. Look at the various shapes and see how varied they are…. Look at the ground, look at the sky, and see where they meet. …. Your garden is calm and tranquil. Everything peacefully co-exists in the garden. …… As you are looking, become aware of how things might feel in this private place of yours. Begin to explore this place with your sense of touch. Perhaps some things are soft and warm, and others are smooth and cool. Simply spend some time exploring, using your sense of touch as you continue to feel at peace and comfortable. …. Notice what the air feels like; is it cool or warm? … Is there a breeze or is it still? … Take the time to feel the peace and serenity in this private place. ….. As you continue to explore your garden by seeing and feeling, become aware of the sounds that you hear in your garden…. The sounds in your garden are pleasing to the ear and very comforting. Perhaps it is quiet in your garden, or maybe there are a number of sounds. Some of the sounds may be very soft, while others may be louder. Relax and listen for a while and see if you can identify the different sounds in your garden. ….. As you’re listening to the sounds in your garden, become aware of what smells you might smell. Take a deep breath in, and notice the fragrances that are present. Some of them may be familiar, while others may be unfamiliar. The fragrances are pleasant and soothing. ….. Take your time and enjoy your visit to the garden, using it in whatever way that you wish. Spend the time that is necessary for you to rejuvenate and to care for yourself……… When you are ready to leave, slowly walk back towards the gate of your garden. You have enjoyed your visit to the garden and feel relaxed and content. This good feeling will remain with you throughout the day. Push the gate open and return to the path that led you to the garden. As you make your way back up the path to the here and now, remember that you can use your imagination to return to your private garden at any time you wish. Visit your garden any time you would like to relax, to be comforted, or just to enjoy its beauty. ….. You are now ready to resume your day. Stretch gently and open your eyes, feeling refreshed and alert.*

**Daily self-care**

This option is as simple as choosing something fun that you want to do and making time to do it. Before you do the activity, it can help to tell yourself, “I need to do something for *me* today, which will help me relax and feel a little better.” Try not to tell yourself your doing the fun thing to “get away” or to “forget about things for a while” or to “escape.” In doing self-care, you are not escaping, you are taking the time to take care of yourself as a positive, active coping skill for anxiety. In this way, just by changing your thoughts about the reasons for the activity, you are using something called “approach coping,” which is healthier in the long term than “avoidance coping.”

**5-4-3-2-1 Grounding exercise**

This is another activity that is especially useful during panic attacks

Look around your immediate surroundings and name out loud 5 things you can see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you can hear, 3 things you can smell, and 1 thing you can taste. The order of these is arbitrary, you can just as easily name 5 things you can touch, 4 things you can see, 3 things you can smell, etc. You can also switch this up by naming 5 blue things, 4 red things, 3 yellow things, and so on. It really doesn’t matter what “topic” you choose. The point of the exercise is to just look at what is around you right now and name them (out loud). This is very useful for “snapping you out’ of a panic episode.

**Recite a well-known song, lyric, poem, story, or happy memory**

This is similar to 54321 grounding and most useful during panic attacks.

It involves choosing any well-known song, lyric, poem, story, or happy memory – anything that is easily accessible in your mind – and saying or singing it out loud. Again, the point of this is to snap you out of the panic and to stop the cascade of worried thoughts that go through one’s mind when they are panicking.

**Build a fort**

It may sound silly because it’s something kids do, but building and getting inside of a fort can be a great and fun way to help reduce anxiety and worry. Just like with the “self-care” activity, though, when you do this, it’s important to tell yourself that the fort is not an escape from the worry/anxiety – you are not “walling yourself off” from the anxiety. Rather, you are building yourself a place where you can relax and take care of yourself whenever you need to, to help yourself get ready to face your worries/fears again when you’re more relaxed. Historically, a fort was not just a place to take refuge from your enemies, but it was also a place to bolster your arms and prepare to fight back. That’s what you’re doing in your fort – you’re preparing to fight back against your worry/anxiety.

If it feels too corny to build an actual tent fort, or you just don’t have the energy to do it, any place can serve as a “fort” – your favorite comfy chair, your bed, a room in your house, pulling a hoodie over your head, etc. Be as creative as you want.

**Progressive muscle relaxation**

[Progressive muscle relaxation (PMR)](https://www.uofmhealth.org/health-library/uz2225) (<https://www.uofmhealth.org/health-library/uz2225>) is a tried and true method for general relaxation and anxiety management. It helps to relieve a lot of the muscle tensions associated that occur as a response to stress. It also stimulates the release of hormones that can help with relaxation.

The exercise is just what it sounds like – a systematic method of flexing/stretching muscles for a few seconds, and then relaxing them. When flexing muscles, squeeze hard enough that you feel it, but you don’t have to go so hard you hurt yourself.

The video linked below is a little long (24 minutes) and admittedly will likely be a bit boring for most teenagers, but it demonstrates PMR well and shows you some movements you can use. This is just an example, you don’t have to follow it exactly.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f7I2Upk5jqI>

**Yoga**

<https://yogawithadriene.com/free-yoga-videos/> Some free Yoga videos

Achieves many of the same benefits as PMR, but some people like Yoga better than PMR, as Yoga can be added to an exercise routine and is often done in group settings, so you get the social benefits too.

**Tai Chi**

Tai Chi is an ancient Chinese martial art designed to stimulate internal (emotional and cognitive) balance. It also has a great evidence base for actually being useful in treating anxiety, depression, and other mental health conditions.

Here is an example video of tai chi.

<https://www.webmd.com/fitness-exercise/video/beginner-tai-chi>

Here is a longer video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hIOHGrYCEJ4>

Tai Chi, Yoga, and PMR use similar concepts to achieve similar results, and many people often prefer one over the other. Feel free to use all three or select the one(s) you like most.

**Make a coping toolbox or treasure chest**

Some people enjoy having a toolbox or chest or box somewhere in their home with things they can do anything they need to relax. You can put puzzles, Sudoku, knitting, games, or other hobbies inside. It really doesn’t matter what you put in there, but it can feel good to have a “go-to” spot to get things that you enjoy doing when you feel you need a moment to relax.

For parents, I recommend the following guidelines/rules about the toolbox:

* + 1. The child may use the toolbox at any time, without needing to ask permission and regardless of mood/emotions.
    2. The child can never lose access to the toolbox as a punishment. Thus, don’t put anything inside that you might need to later take away.
    3. No electronics/screens allowed in the toolbox. While screen-time can be a great soothing activity, it is not recommended that children have free, unmonitored access to screens. ***Everything in the toolbox should be safe for your child to access without your supervision, if they want.***
    4. It is okay for children to use the toolbox even when they’ve just had “bad” behavior. You are not rewarding bad behavior in this case. Instead, you are teaching children how to better manage their emotions.
    5. ***I also recommend a “travel version” of a coping skills toolbox. A lunchbox or small purse-sized tote works well for this. Children can bring this with them to school too in their backpack, if they want.***

**­Aromatherapy**

Aromatherapy can help some people, and is relatively low risk (isn’t likely to cause harm), even if it doesn’t help anxiety that much. So, it is a low-risk way to “experiment” with things that may help anxiety. However, one should always ask a doctor before using essential oils, especially in children, as some can interact with other medications and can be toxic in children. So, ask your doctor about possible aromatherapies, if interested.