

Fact Sheet

Relaxation and Distraction

Being in hospital can be emotionally challenging at times. This handout provides some information about relaxation and distraction techniques, which may help you to calm down in times of stress, unwind or take your mind off things.

Relaxation Techniques

Relaxation techniques can be useful for coping with distress and pain, for reducing muscle tension, and for calming a busy mind. A range of methods can be used. Some of the simplest breathing techniques offer significant physical and emotional benefits. Relaxation can also be a good way to manage anxiety or stress symptoms.

Some ideas:

- **Informal techniques** include listening to calming music, having a warm shower, reading a book, or watching a favourite television program. Different techniques work for different people. So pick something you know works for you, as just spending 15 minutes doing this can make all the difference.
- There are many **formal relaxation techniques** including breathing exercises, different types of muscle relaxation, various types of meditation, and guided imagery/visualisation techniques (see examples below).
- When completing relaxation exercises **choose a quiet and calming environment**, with few distractions, and find a comfortable position.
- **Be patient** with yourself if you get distracted or if your mind races – this is perfectly natural.
- **Regular practice** is important as it prepares you for when you really need to relax. Remember, it takes time to learn to relax!
- **Make relaxation time an important part of your daily routine.** If possible, include others as it will benefit them too.
- **Be creative** – surround yourself with things that help you create a relaxing image in your mind (e.g., dim lighting, quiet sounds, or a soft blanket).
- If you need help, **seek assistance** from a health care professional.



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Exercises to try

Calm breathing

Sit or lie in a comfortable position, and breathe slowly and evenly. Quietly say “in” to yourself as you breathe in, and then “relax” as you breathe out.

Repeat this over and over again. Focus as much as you can on these two simple words.

Imagine that with every breath out, each time you say “relax”, you are becoming more and more calm and relaxed.

If you get distracted or if your thoughts wander, gently take your mind back to “in” and “relax”. Refocus as often as you need to.

A peaceful place

Begin by finding a comfortable position and breathing slowly. Take a few gentle breaths, exhaling slowly.

Picture yourself in a peaceful place, or a somewhere that has special meaning to you. You may be on the beach, in a rainforest, by a lake, or just at home in a comfortable chair.

Use your imagination to create a tranquil and peaceful place. Involve your senses to create a vivid scene – what can you hear, see, smell, touch or feel?

Picture yourself feeling calm and relaxed.

When you are ready, shift your attention back to the present, but remember that you can return to this scene whenever you want or need to relax.

Distraction Techniques

Distractions can be beneficial, especially in the early days of your recovery. There are many different ways of using distraction.

Here are some suggestions:

- **Do an activity that** you find pleasurable, interesting, or mentally challenging (e.g., reading, watching a movie, listening to music, or doing a crossword puzzle). Try to really immerse yourself in this activity.
- **Focus on activities** or tasks that need to be done, such as therapy exercises.
- **Talk** to someone about a completely different topic.
- **Change locations**— go somewhere different! If you can’t leave the hospital sometimes going into a different room or outside into the garden can help. If you can’t leave your room, concentrate on something in that room and try to describe to yourself what you see (e.g., the colours of the wall, carpet pattern, what people are wearing etc.). Or listen carefully to all the different sounds around you.
- **Mind games** such as counting, word games, categorising objects, or focussing on a particular object can be distracting.
- Laughter can be very distracting – **try watching a funny movie.**
- **Redirect your attention** to happy memories or about something you are looking forward to doing.



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