**STRESS RELEASE/RELAXATION/GROUNDING TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES**

*These were included in the Mental Health Wellness Workshop on Feb. 8, 2022*

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This is a list of some ways people have identified that have helped them

**reduce stress and increase resiliency**:

* Slow my breathing down
* Listen to music
* Doing a puzzle
* Reading
* Crocheting
* Nature walks
* Listen to the birds outside
* Meditation
* Repetitive motion…. Ironing, washing dishes by hand, etc.
* Laugh
* Admire or make art
* Practice deep breathing
* Choose a creative endeavor
* Engage quiet time at the start of your day
* Get outside, for any length of time
* Be active, in any way
* Practice compassion
* Cultivate relationships
* Practice expressing gratitude
* Limit what is toxic for you (e.g. limit the news)
* Spend time with animals
* Be aware of decision fatigue
* Get good sleep
* Have low expectations and high flexibility

**Grounding/calming techniques/tools:**

*Note: Always work within your own body limitations and comfort level*

***Progressive muscle relaxation:*** *Many find this useful before bedtime*

* Lie down or find comfortable, supportive seating.
* Notice where you are holding tension
* Beginning with your toes and feet, tightly tense the muscles, hold for several seconds, then fully release and pause to feel the sensation of release
* Work your way up your body using this same procedure – calves, thighs, buttocks, belly, torso, hands, arms, shoulders, neck, head, face, and jaw
* After you’ve made your way completely through your body, tense your entire body, hold several seconds and fully release yourself into the floor/chair/bed
* Notice what parts of your body feel more relaxed and where you are still holding tension – notice without judgment
* Remain in this relaxed state for as long as you wish and return slowly to whatever is next for you

**5-4-3-2-1 Technique:** *This can be done virtually anywhere to ground you in the present moment and refocus your brain*

Notice and name –

5 things you can see (look for details you may not have noticed),

4 things you can feel,

3 things you can hear,

2 things you can smell,

1 thing you can taste (you may want to have a mint or something to wake up your taste buds)

**4-7-8 Breathing:** *This is an excellent reset tool and anxiety reducing technique*

Breath in through your nose for 4 counts, hold the breath for 7 counts, breath out through your mouth for 8 counts. Repeat 3 – 4 times.

**Alternate nostril breathing:** *Produces relaxation, reduces anxiety, improves focus,* *restores balance in the left and right hemispheres of the brain*

1. Seat yourself comfortably
2. With your right hand, bring your pointer finger to rest at the top of your nose between your eyebrows. The thumb and middle finger will be used to alternately close nostrils
3. Close your eyes if you wish; breathe in and out through your nose with both sides open
4. Close your right nostril with your right thumb. Inhale through the left nostril
5. Pause and close the left nostril with the middle finger, then open your right nostril and release the breath slowly through the right side;
6. Pause briefly, then inhale through the right side slowly.
7. Pause, then open your left nostril and release breath slowly through the left side.
8. Repeat 5-10 cycles, allowing your mind to follow your inhales and exhales.

**3 Large Sighs:** *A quick and immediate release*

Take in a big breath, filling your lungs. Then release with a big audible sigh. Release your shoulders as you release your breath. Do this 3 times in a row.

**Noticing color:** *This focuses your brain on something other than whatever is causing stress*

Go for a walk outside (inside if necessary) and notice each item that is red (or color of choice) An alternative is to look for a series of items that represent each color of the rainbow.

**Permission Slips:**

Write yourself a permission slip (like your caregivers had to do when you were in school). You can give yourself permission to release something, allow something, or take on something. Be creative. E.g. *Kathy, I give you permission to just be yourself; I give you permission to let go of this troubling thought . . .*

**Self hug:** *Helps fulfill the need for touch*

Place one hand under the opposite armpit. Wrap the free arm across your body and around the opposite shoulder. Be aware of the sensation of a loving touch. Feel free to improvise your form of self-hug.

**Healing Light Meditation:**

Close your eyes. Quickly scan your body and become aware of a general sense of how it is feeling – anything tight, sore, tired, can you notice your feet? Then turn your attention to your breathing and listen for 4 breath cycles. Now imagine a warm, safe, healing light enter your head as you inhale, going wherever it is most needed. As you exhale, allow yourself to let go of whatever you can. Repeat with your neck, shoulders, chest/back, stomach/low back, arms and hands, hips, legs and feet. If you’d like repeat a second time in reverse. Then become aware of your breath again for 4 breath cycles. End with another quick body scan and then gently open your eyes.

**Foot Tracing:**

Remove your socks and shoes. Take a finger and slowly trace the outline of each toe, making sure not to hold your breath in the process. Then see if you can recreate the feeling of that pathway with your mind. Repeat on the other foot.

**Tree Imagery:**

Standing, feel your feet connected on the ground and imagine that roots grow from them deep into the earth. Then sense your body as the trunk of a tree – solid, strong. And let the top of your head (and your arms/hands if you enjoy it) feel like the top of the tree/branches growing toward the light.

**Guided Relaxation:**

Search YouTube for “guided relaxation” or “grounding meditation”. You can even add time length to your search. There are also great apps like Calm and Insight Timer that include lessons.

**TIPS for Creating a Relaxation Practice**

Creating a relaxation practice is about training your mind and body to make time to slow down and remember what neutral feels like. It is a commitment to giving yourself all the benefits of relaxation (Google benefits of relaxation!). When you are ready to gift yourself with this time, consider the following:

* Make a list of stress indicators: headache, crabby, tired, anxious, tension, dizzy, or whatever it might be for you so you know you are stressed.
* Determine your needs and capacity to incorporate relaxation time. How long can you give yourself? Do you need one longer time weekly, a set time daily, or multiple short breaks? First time in the morning, right before bed, when you shower, before you start work, on lunch break, before you make dinner, after you exercise, when you pray? How will you remind yourself – add it to the calendar, set a timer, notice your stress level, when you think of it?
* Be gentle with yourself! If you can’t relax as much as you would like, focus on the amount you can relax and the fact that you are choosing to try giving this to yourself. If you can only do five minutes, don’t feel guilty – use those five minutes! If you feel anxious as you try to rest, notice that and make a note to either journal or talk with someone about it. If you have to force it, it might not be the best time. And tell yourself it will get easier with practice – don’t give up! It takes time!

**Other tips from:** <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/relaxation-technique/art-20045368>

As you learn relaxation techniques, you can become more aware of muscle tension and other physical sensations of stress. Once you know what the stress response feels like, you can make a conscious effort to practice a relaxation technique the moment you start to feel stress symptoms. This can prevent stress from spiraling out of control.

Remember that relaxation techniques are skills. As with any skill, your ability to relax improves with practice. Be patient with yourself. Don't let your effort to practice relaxation techniques become yet another stressor.

If one relaxation technique doesn't work for you, try another technique. If none of your efforts at stress reduction seems to work, talk to your doctor about other options.

Also, bear in mind that some people, especially those with serious psychological issues and a history of abuse, may experience feelings of emotional discomfort during some relaxation techniques. Although this is rare, if you experience emotional discomfort during relaxation techniques, stop what you're doing and consider talking to your doctor or mental health provider.