



## Ways to Relax and Unwind

### 1. Use your breath.

We often forget to focus on the simplest, shortest (and one of the most restorative) activities available to us: our breath. One suggestion is to take five deep breaths. As you do, notice the natural pause between your inhale and exhale, and then between your exhale and your next inhale. Your body has a built-in break!

Or try:

#### **Square Breathing:**

**Step 1:** Find a quiet place in which you can sit for ten to fifteen minutes without being distracted.

**Step 2:** Take note of your normal breathing pattern, and count how many seconds each inhale and exhale take.

**Step 3:** Once you have a baseline measurement, increase the length of the inhalation and exhalation by one second, in essence slowing down each in-breath and out-breath. Once you have acclimated to the new, slower rate, increase the inhalation and exhalation by another second. If you feel uncomfortable or out of breath, it probably means you're slowing down too fast. Continue gradually slowing down your breath until you are breathing as slowly as you can without ANY difficulty.

**Step 4:** Once you are comfortable with a slower breath, experiment by pausing after each exhalation and each inhalation. These pauses can be short, lasting one or two seconds, or long lasting up to ten seconds. However long the PAUSES last, just note you will probably have to adjust your rate of inhalation and exhalation to continue breathing comfortably, without feeling the need to gasp for air. The technique is called square breathing because originally the in-breath, out-breath, and both pauses were designed to be the same length, in the same way each side of a square is the same length. However, it doesn't really matter the ratio, as long as fewer breaths are taken each minute.

**Step 5:** Set an alarm and continue this for ten to fifteen minutes. Afterward, you will most likely experience an increase in relaxation, and a significant decrease in anxiety. Normally when we are anxious, the result in our body is that our breathing rate increases, and we take shorter, shallower breaths. When we are relaxed, the opposite



happens. By slowing down the breath, we trick our brain into thinking we are relaxed, and all of the relaxation neuro-chemicals are released

## **2. Release the tension in your jaw.**

Many of us carry tension in our jaw, often unknowingly. To loosen the tension, open your mouth wide for half a minute or so, breathing naturally through your nose. When you feel you've stretched a bit, allow your mouth to gently close.

## **3. Tend yourself.**

Tending is defined as "care with intention." And it can take many forms. Some people tend to their home by cleaning the sheets, washing windows and getting rid of unused and unloved items. Some tend to their body with a hot bath, self-massage and a dab of perfume. Some whip up delicious and nourishing meals in their kitchen. And on some days, tend to their finances and maybe go for a walk in the sunshine. Tending brings calm, order, and a deep reminder that I'm cared for.

## **4. Journal.**

Some people like to unwind by writing pages in their journal. Others prefer to jot down one or two lines about their day, but if this becomes another task on your to-do list, skip it.

## **5. Make a list of the day's triumphs**

Other people like to write down what they're grateful for. This is especially helpful for relaxing. When we're stressed, we tend to focus on everything that is going wrong, which makes it even harder to unwind. You could try writing down the top three good things that happened to you today.

Can't think of anything? Focus on the seemingly small things.



## **6. Get clear on what you need to do**

It's hard to unwind when our thoughts keep returning to our endless to-do lists. Get clear by sitting down for a few moments, making a list of what can be done today and in what order and then let the rest go until the next day.

## **7. Identify what you can and can't control.**

Getting clear also includes focusing on what you can and can't control. Some think about precisely what they're concerned about [and] then ask themselves if they have any control over it. If the answer is no and it often is - let it go. If the answer is yes, then do what you can and move on.

## **8. Create a bedtime ritual**

The ritual process gives you a specific time to focus on nurturing yourself and your needs. The key to creating a daily ritual is repetition. Here's an example:

"Turn on a nightlight by your bed. Turn off the other lights. Stretch across your bed, taking your time, exaggerating your movements. Feel the cool sheets against your body. Moving slowly open a book and read... Put the book aside. Take a minute to concentrate on the soft light. Turn off the nightlight, and curl into peaceful sleep."

## **9. Play.**

Play is a wonderful way to unwind, especially for grown-ups. Play is anything that's purposeless and pleasurable. Everything from finger-painting to playing tag to watching cartoons to digging in the dirt to throwing a Frisbee to going to the zoo to swinging on the swings at a park.

## **10. Use visualization.**

The brain can't distinguish between reality and imagination, so visualization can be a powerful tool to help you unwind in a snap. Try visualizing yourself at a favorite spot. Be as specific as you can. Note what's around you. Are you by the ocean? Is it a calm current or are the waves crashing? Are there kids playing? Are they making sand castles or playing in the water? Is the sand white and smooth? Or is it a sparkling black like the Muriwai Beach in New Zealand?



### **11. Participate in gentle movement.**

Gentle movement can release any pent-up energy we may be carrying. People tend to think that unwinding means being sedentary but actual unwinding often comes from doing something active and releasing the stress and anxiety that we may have built up over the week. Try taking a 15-minute walk.

### **12. Brush your teeth, and wash your face.**

People usually start their days with these two activities. By connecting to something that is part of your 'start the day' routine, you give your brain signals that you're starting fresh.

### **13. Support someone else.**

Sometimes the quickest way to unwind is to focus on someone other than ourselves. For instance, you can call a friend and talk about how they're doing. Listen intently to their concerns. What emotions are they communicating?

### **14. Be in nature.**

Head outside and sit on a bench or a blanket and let your mind get quiet while you engage all your senses. Engaging your senses is a powerful way to relax, What do you see, hear and smell?

### **15. Focus on the present moment**

It's not only natural environments that engage our senses. Take the time to listen to the little sounds such as a car passing, your computer and someone cooking, If you're walking by a building, what's going on inside?

### **16. Take a 20-minute catnap.**

A short nap can feel like a mini-vacation. But anything over 30 minutes takes you into deep sleep, and makes you groggy.

### **17. Savour scents**

Engage your sense of smell at home. Showering with lavender or peppermint body wash, applying rose hand gel or burning a scented candle.



### **18. Treat yourself like you would a loved one**

Think of one thing you'd do for someone really important to you in your life and take the time to do it for yourself. For instance, this might be anything from enjoying breakfast in bed to going out for lunch. Remember that when you treat yourself well, you'll be that much better for everyone else in your life

### **19. Take a bathroom break**

When you're feeling stressed at work or when you're out and about, just escape to the bathroom, close your eyes, breathe in for a count of 3, breathe out for a count of 3. Repeat this three or four times. Breathe normally for several minutes and tell yourself, "I am relaxed and energized."

### **20. Figure out what works for you.**

The best way to truly unwind is to really what works for you. Some people unwind with a vigorous run and others by sitting on the couch and watching a TV show. Simple trial and error will help you find the best strategies for you. Just remember not to judge yourself for whatever you choose. "Own it, use it, and unwind."