

# MIND-BODY *Practices*

Mind-body practices include a variety of relaxation techniques to reduce tension and promote health. The following infographic provides a synopsis of the most common relaxation techniques. Be sure to check with your health care provider before starting any new physical activity, and don't forget that relaxation techniques, like any other skill, take time to master. So be patient .... and relax.

## Progressive Muscular Relaxation

Progressive muscular relaxation involves slowly tensing and then relaxing each muscle in your body. The technique helps you to recognize when your body begins to tense up and have a better ability to return back to a relaxed state.

**How to do it:** Lie flat on your back in a comfortable position. Begin by maximally tensing your toes and then over the course of about 15 seconds progressively and completely contract the muscles in your feet, legs, thighs, pelvis, core, shoulders, arms, hands, neck, face, and head. Continue to breathe normally throughout this process. After all of the muscles in your body are tense, take one large, deep cleansing breath, and allow the tension to fall from your body into a state of total relaxation. Take several normal breaths from your belly and repeat. This exercise is particularly useful as a pre-bedtime routine.

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## Deep Breathing

When you are stressed, you tend to take short, shallow breaths from our upper chest. This limits oxygen and increases stress. Deep breathing helps maximize the amount of available oxygen in your whole body, which sends a message to your brain to calm down and relax. Deep breathing is one of the most useful relaxation techniques that is relatively easy to learn and can be practiced any time, anywhere.

### How to do it:

1. Sit or lie down in a comfortable position. Close your eyes.
2. Place one hand over your breastbone and the other over your belly. As you take a deep breath in through your nose, allow your belly to push out. The hand on your chest should not move.
3. Exhale through your pursed lips and let your belly to go in until all of the air has been blown out. Do not hold your breath at any point.

Practice this technique for 1- 10 minutes at least twice per day. Then use it any time you begin to feel tense, like when you are sitting in traffic, feeling overwhelmed, or dealing with a challenging situation.

## Meditation- Mindfulness

Meditation promotes physical relaxation and calmness while enhancing your overall health and well-being. Meditation helps you slow down in a busy world and find joy in the simple pleasures of your world. Meditation is an excellent way to start your day with a clear and emotionally calm state. Although there are many types of meditation techniques, most share three common elements: a quiet location without distraction, a comfortable position, and focusing your attention on a particular thought or activity, like breathing.

Mindfulness is a common form of meditation that teaches you to focus on being intensely aware of what you are sensing and feeling at that moment without judgment. It trains your mind to simply observe various situations without feeling the need to act. Imagine this process as being the difference between running around on a busy highway versus sitting comfortably in a quiet place on the side of the road as you watch the traffic pass.

### How to do it:

1. Sit or lie in a comfortable position with your eyes closed.
2. Breathe from your belly as you let your breaths come and go freely. Pay attention to all of the breathing sensations, like air moving through your nostrils, the rise and fall of your belly, and the relaxed state of your shoulders and upper chest.
3. When your thoughts go astray, gently return them to a focus on breathing.

Practice this for 1- 10 minutes at least once per day. Considering using an app like HeadSpace to help guide your meditation sessions.

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## Meditation -Visualization

Visualization is a type of meditation that focuses on a specific image. Visualization is sometimes called "guided imagery" which is thought to provide a mental escape by focusing on calm, peaceful images or situations.

**How to do it:** Visualization can be performed in a class where you are guided by an instructor, by using an audio recording, or using your own imagination.

1. Choose a quiet location with few distractions. Begin in a relaxed position, either sitting or lying down. Some people choose to play soothing music or select a site with nature sounds.
2. Breathe "from your belly" as described in the earlier section.
3. Once you are relaxed, envision yourself in the midst of a relaxing environment, like at the base of a beautiful waterfall, in a cabin sitting next to a warm fireplace, or on a remote tropical island. Maintain your focus solely on your imagined environment and your breathing. If your focus begins to wander, slowly bring it back to your imagined environment. Try to make this vision so real that you perceive all five senses. What do

you see? What are the sounds? What do you feel?

Sessions generally last 20-30 minutes but stay in your relaxed environment as long as you would like. When you are ready to quit, take one deep, cleansing breath, and open your eyes.

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## Yoga

Yoga is an exercise that emphasizes physical postures, breathing techniques, and meditation to promote physical and mental well being. Yoga helps reinforce proper breathing techniques while building flexibility and strength. There are many ways in which yoga can be practiced.

**How to do it:** Yoga classes follow a live or recorded instructor through various physical "poses" and breathing techniques. Classes typically last 60-90 minutes and should be performed 1-3 times per week. Performing an internet search for "yoga class" should provide you with several options. Be sure to consult with your health care practitioner before starting yoga or attempting any difficult poses.

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## Tai Chi and Qi Gong

Tai Chi and Qi Gong are exercises that combine slow, deliberate movements with meditation and breathing exercises. The techniques are sometimes described as "meditation in motion." Tai Chi and Qi Gong aim to capitalize on the benefits of meditation and breathing while improving flexibility, balance, and strength. Some styles of Tai Chi and Qi Gong incorporate "pushing hands" movements, which when practiced quickly, can be a form of combat or self-defense.

**How to do it:** Tai Chi and Qi Gong sessions are typically led by an instructor, who will guide you through various postures and gentle movements while focusing on breathing and relaxing. Performing an internet search for "Tai Chi" or "Qi Gong" will provide several live and video options. Be sure to check with your health care provider before beginning any new physical exercise.

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## Aromatherapy

Aromatherapy, sometimes called essential oil therapy, employs natural plant extracts and oils to promote health. Essential oils are made from the various flower herb and tree parts that give a plant its fragrant "essence." Essential oils are made by extracting this essence. Aromatherapy is thought to stimulate smell receptors that activate emotional centers in your brain.

**How to do it:** Aromatherapy may be performed by applying essential oils to your skin or breathing them through your nose. You should be aware that some people are allergic to essential oils, and sometimes

these products can irritate your eyes, skin, or mucous membranes. Be sure to check with your health care provider before applying or breathing any essential oil.

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## Hydrotherapy

Hydrotherapy is the use of water in any form or temperature for the purpose of healing. Water is thought to help stimulate circulation while enhancing immune and digestive functions. Warm water causes expansion of blood vessels, which increases circulation and promotes relaxation. When hydrotherapy is performed with mineral-rich water, it is called "balneotherapy."

**How to do it:** You can try hydrotherapy in various forms, including soaking in a pool, hot tub, sauna, sitz baths, or even by placing warm towels over your skin. Be sure to check with your health care provider before using a hot tub or sauna, especially if you have high blood pressure or are pregnant.

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## Bio -Feedback

Bio-Feedback trains you to observe shifts in your body functions with the help of electronic monitors (i.e. blood pressure, brain wave, heart rate, respiration, skin temperature, and muscular tension). Bio-Feedback allows you to better recognize when any of these functions are changing and trains you to control your body by changing your thoughts.

**How to do it:** Bio-Feedback involves placing sensors on various parts of your body. Although there are some home-based apps, most bio feedback sessions involve a therapist, who attaches leads and teaches you how to control your body's various physiological reactions with your mind.

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## Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

Cognitive behavioral therapy is a therapist-led psychotherapy session that encourages a hands-on problem solving for dysfunctional emotions, behaviors, and thoughts. CBT helps you become aware of negative thoughts so that you can change the way you view challenging situations and respond in a more effective way.

**How to do it:** CBT entails "talk therapy" with a mental health counselor for a limited number of sessions to help you identify harmful thoughts and employ strategies to resolve them. Ask your health care provider for a list of recommended therapists in your area.