

# Ready, Set, . . . Relax!

Use the techniques below to begin to learn how to reclaim your body from stress and anxiety. By engaging your mind and your body in these activities you should find that you are able to reduce stress and cope with anxiety provoking situations more comfortably.

Please note, these techniques are not intended to replace the advice and treatment of qualified health professionals. If you are experiencing overwhelming stress or anxiety more than a few times a month, we encourage you to seek the advice of a therapist or physician.

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Here are some pointers that apply to all the exercises that follow:

- Get as comfortable as possible. Some of these exercises can be done while waiting in the doctor's office or at some other time when there is nothing to do but wait. It is not necessary to lie down to do them.
- Remain passive. Just watch your mind work. Whatever thoughts come to mind are okay. Do not work at it, just let it happen.
- Take note of all sounds in the environment and let them pass.
- Focus inward on breathing as a natural, easy process.

## Whole Body Tension

Tense everything in your whole body; stay with that tension, and hold it as long as you can without feeling pain. Slowly release the tension and very gradually feel it leave your body. Repeat three times.

## Visual Imagery

Open your imagination and focus on your breathing. As your breathing becomes calm and regular, imagine that the air comes to you as a cloud - it fills you and goes out. You may imagine the cloud to be a particular color.

## Eye Fixation

With your head level and your body relaxed, pick a spot to focus on (eyes are open at this point). When ready, count five breaths backward. With each breath allow your eyes to close gradually. When you get to number one, your eyes will be closed. Focus on the feelings of relaxation.

## Counting Ten Breaths Backwards

Allow yourself to feel passive and indifferent, counting each breath slowly from ten to one. With each count, allow yourself to feel heavier and more relaxed. With each exhale, allow the tension to leave your body.

## Shoulder Shrug

Try to raise your shoulders up to your eyes. Hold for the count of four. Now drop your shoulders back to a normal position. Repeat three times.

## Shoulder Rotation

Rotate your shoulders back, down and around, first one way, then the other. Do one shoulder, then the other. Now do both at the same time. Note: This is also good for back, arms, and neck.

## Cat Stretch

Stand - feet slightly apart. Take a deep breath as you stretch arms over head. Slowly exhale as you lean forward, bringing arm and head down. Do slowly and gently five times.