
Self - help Techniques

Techniques for managing stress and reducing anxiety.

Breathing Techniques Working with your breath is one of the simplest ways to reduce tension and anxiety. The techniques are not difficult, but to be effective they need to be practised regularly.

Box breathing

Currently one of the most well-known techniques for calming the breath and promoting relaxation. It involves regularly alternating the phases inhale – hold – exhale – hold, with each phase lasting the same amount of time. You can imagine tracing the sides of a square or count silently (e.g. to 4).

How to do it:

- Inhale through your nose for 4 counts.
- Hold your breath for 4 counts
- Exhale through your mouth for 4 counts.
- Hold your breath again for 4 counts before inhaling.
- Repeat several times.

Nadi Shodhana

If your nose is clear, you can try this yogic breathing technique, which involves alternating breaths through the left and right nostrils. With a little practice, you'll get the hang of it — and you may notice a calmer mind, better concentration, and reduced anxiety.

How to do it:

- Sit comfortably with an upright posture and relaxed shoulders. Bring your right hand to your face: place your thumb on your right nostril, your ring and little finger on your left nostril, and rest your index and middle fingers either bent or on your forehead.
- Press your right nostril closed with your thumb and exhale through the left nostril.
- Inhale slowly and steadily through the left nostril.
- Close the left nostril with your ring finger and exhale through the right nostril.
- Inhale through the right nostril, keeping the left closed.
- Close the right nostril, open the left, and exhale.
- Repeat the full cycle (left exhale + inhale, right exhale + inhale) for at least 5 minutes. Try to keep the inhale and exhale about the same length, with the exhale slightly longer.
- Rest your hands in your lap and take a moment to notice how you feel.

Did you know?

Breathing through the right nostril (Surya Bhedana Pranayama) stimulates the sympathetic nervous system, while breathing through the left nostril (Chandra Bhedana Pranayama) stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system. Alternating between them supports balance.

4-7-8 Breathing

Similar to box breathing, the numbers here indicate how long each phase lasts. This technique can help reduce stress ("fight or flight" response), slow the heart rate, and support falling asleep.

How to do it:

- Preparation: Take a few deep breaths in through the nose and out through the mouth.
- Inhale through your nose to a count of 4.
- Hold your breath for a count of 7.

- Exhale through your mouth with an audible “whoosh” for a count of 8.
- Repeat steps 2–4 three times.

“Straw” Breathing

An effective stress-reduction technique that cools the tongue as you draw in air, creating a sensation of a “cool head” and inner calm.

How to do it:

- Purse your lips into an “O” shape and slowly inhale through your mouth until your lungs are full.
- Exhale through your nose, so the warm air does not reheat your tongue.

Did you know?

By preventing a quick inhale and drawing air in steadily, you naturally use your full lung capacity and slow your breathing rate.

Mindfulness is the ability to give full attention to the present moment, without judgement and with acceptance. Practising mindfulness helps with managing stress, improving concentration, and building psychological resilience in everyday life.

The Raisin Exercise

A simple yet rich technique that requires patience — in return, it offers the full experience of something as ordinary as a dried raisin. You can also try it with a dried cranberry, or even a small piece of chocolate. The key is to slow down and explore the experience with all your senses.

How to do it:

- Place a single raisin in your hand and examine it carefully. What do you see? Notice details such as its shape, wrinkles, ridges, colour, and reflections.
- Smell the raisin — you can gently roll it between your fingers to release more aroma. Can you detect it?
- Explore its texture by touch — is it soft or firm, smooth or wrinkled? How does it feel?
- Hold the raisin to your ear and gently squeeze it a few times. What sounds can you hear?
- Take a small bite, letting the piece rest on your tongue. What thoughts come to mind? After a moment, chew and swallow it slowly, noticing how the flavour changes. Continue with the rest of the raisin.
- Reflect on how you feel and what the experience was like.

5-4-3-2-1 Grounding (Five Senses Technique)

This technique requires no equipment and can be done anywhere. Like all mindfulness exercises, it anchors you in the present moment.

How to do it:

- Look around and silently name 5 things that catch your attention. Give each a moment of focus.
- Shift your attention to hearing. Identify 4 sounds — from your surroundings or your body (e.g. clothing rustling, digestion, heartbeat).
- Touch nearby objects or your clothing and name 3 things you can feel. What sensations do you notice?
- Focus on your sense of smell. Identify 2 scents or odours.
- Activate your sense of taste — notice 1 flavour you can detect.

Observing Your Surroundings

This technique is a natural part of mindfulness but can also be practised on its own to create a sense of calm and safety. The aim is simply to visually explore your surroundings.

How to do it:

- Sit comfortably and relax your shoulders.
- Slowly turn your head to the left, scanning the space with your eyes. Notice what you see without judging it.
- Slowly turn your head to the right, again looking carefully but without evaluation.
- Repeat 2–3 times.

Did you know?

Slow, mindful head-turning stimulates the ventral branch of the vagus nerve (nervus vagus), which promotes relaxation. The vagus nerve is a key part of the parasympathetic nervous system — it slows the heart rate, lowers blood pressure, and supports digestion.

Body Scan

The body scan is a form of relaxation that involves gradually focusing your attention on different parts of the body, without trying to change anything. It deepens awareness of the body and encourages relaxation.

How to do it:

- Sit or lie down comfortably. Close your eyes or leave them softly open.
- Bring your attention to your breathing. Don't change it — simply observe it.
- Notice where your body touches the floor or chair. Can you feel the weight of your body?
- Focus on your feet. Without moving them, notice what sensations are present.
- Slowly move your attention upward towards your head, pausing at each part of the body to notice any sensations — pressure, warmth, stillness, tension, pulsing, or other feelings.
- Experience your body as a whole, not just in parts. When ready, slowly open your eyes.

Body TechniquesThe mind and body are closely connected — by relieving tension in the body, we can positively influence our mental state as well.

Stretching

Sometimes, simply stretching is enough.

How to do it:

- Stand up and straighten your posture. Place your hands on your hips and gently arch your back.
- Reach your arms overhead as if picking apples from a branch above you, swaying gently from side to side.
- Extend your arms out to the sides and twist your torso several times to the left and right.
- Let your arms hang loosely by your sides, relax your shoulders, and roll them forward and backward a few times.
- Relax your neck. Lower your head forward and slowly trace several half-circles from left to right. Straighten your head, then slowly turn it to the left, and then to the right.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (Jacobson's Method)

This simple technique involves gradually tensing and then releasing specific muscle groups in the body — usually in a set order (e.g. from feet to head), holding the tension for about 5 seconds and relaxing for 15 seconds. By consciously tightening each muscle group and then letting go, you can achieve deep relaxation.

How to do it:

- Sit or lie down comfortably. Close your eyes and take several deep breaths in through the nose and out through the mouth.
- Tighten your glutes and thigh muscles, hold briefly, then release. Tighten your abdominal muscles and press your lower back into the floor. Notice the tension, then relax.
- Inhale, open your chest, and squeeze your shoulder blades together. Hold, then release.
- Clench your fists, bend your arms at the elbows, and tighten your forearms and biceps. Hold, then release. Tuck your chin toward your chest, push your shoulders forward to tense the neck, hold, then release.
- Tighten all the muscles in your face into a grimace, hold briefly, then release.
- Stay lying down for a moment, sensing your whole body.

Jumping in the Air

Remember the feeling of being a child, moving around for no reason other than joy? This technique can bring a smile to your face.

How to do it:

- Start by jumping on the spot a few times.
- Add your arms, swinging them in the air with each jump. This is not a workout — it can (and should) be silly, uncoordinated, and playful.
- If you feel like laughing, go ahead and let it happen.

Did you know?

Even a short burst (2–3 minutes) of intense movement releases endorphins, which bind to opioid receptors in the brain and create feelings of relaxation and euphoria.

You can also find self-help techniques on the **UK Point website**:

Section: [“Most Common Topics in the Psychological Counselling Centre”](#) – here, the resources are organised according to specific topics.

Additional materials
My mental health guide

- Provided under the auspices of the National Institute of Mental Health.
- The website offers information on mental health and also includes the option of self-assessment using standardised questionnaires.