

# STRESS MANAGEMENT

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Techniques for Breathing, Progressive Muscle  
Relaxation, Sensory Distraction, Thought-Replacement,  
and Imagery

**SCOTTISH RITE**

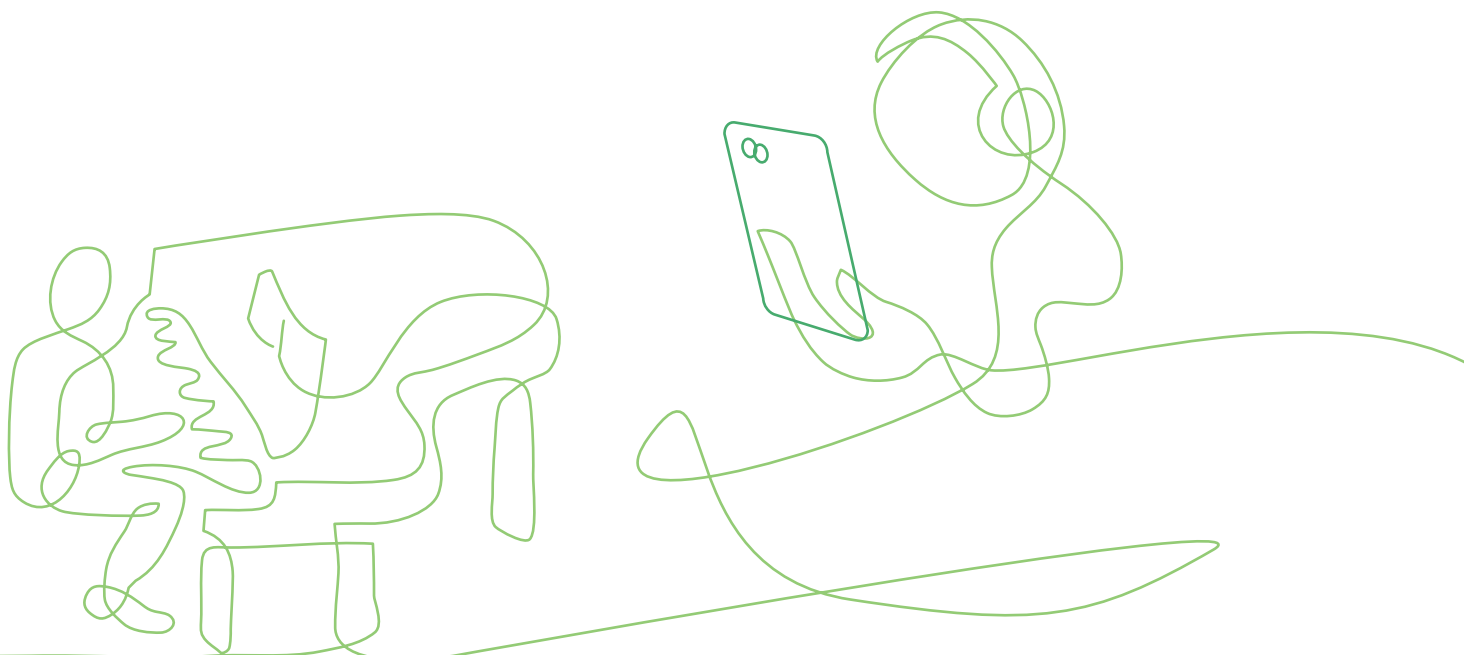


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\*This guide adapted from Intermountain Primary Children's Hospital.  
<https://intermountainhealthcare.org/ckr-ext/Dcmnt?ncid=529636546>



# Why Is It Important to Manage Stress?

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## STRESS MANAGEMENT

This workbook teaches several relaxation tools to support stress management. Learning to relax can help us feel calm when we are feeling sad, nervous or stressed. There are several different ways to relax. Some ways work better for some people than others. Try multiple relaxation strategies to learn which one works best for you. It is important to practice these skills often and when you are less stressed so that you can use them effectively when you need them.

Ways to help manage stress include:

**CONNECT AND HELP PROBLEM SOLVE:** When overwhelmed, some may struggle to break down a situation into smaller pieces. Talk about your problem with someone else to find the next step.

**REFRAME SUCCESS:** Expectations from parents may add pressure to perform and affect self-confidence. Do your best and look for progress instead of focusing on the results or winning. For example, if you make a B+ on an essay and you made a D on your previous assignment, that is progress.

**TEACH COPING SKILLS FOR LIFE:** Kids and teens can learn coping skills for managing stress in their lives. Try yoga, taking walks, diaphragmatic breathing (i.e., belly breathing), progressive muscle relaxation (i.e., tensing/releasing muscles) and other techniques to relax.

**MAKE ROOM FOR BREAKS:** Teach the importance of down-time for rest and recovery. Improving time-management skills and minimizing over-scheduling will improve stress management.

**ENCOURAGE:** Making time for interests and hobbies, including fun activities and time with friends, helps create balance and builds resiliency.

**PROMOTE HEALTHY SLEEPING AND EATING HABITS:** Stress is easier to manage and less likely to build up with healthy habits in place. A well-balanced diet and quality sleep support kids and teens in school, sports and social settings.

**ASK FOR HELP WHEN YOU NEED IT:** Talking through stressors with a licensed psychologist or mental health counselor can be a healthy outlet for chronic stress and help kids and teens learn positive coping strategies to use in the future when experiencing negative stress.



# Breathing Techniques

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## WHAT IS DIAPHRAGMATIC, OR BELLY BREATHING?

Your diaphragm is a muscle that helps you breathe. Diaphragmatic, or belly breathing, is a technique that strengthens the diaphragm while deeply breathing.

- You will learn to use the diaphragm and expand your belly instead of the upper chest muscles.
- Diaphragmatic breathing can help you relax, breathe more easily and strengthen your diaphragm.

Practice the following diaphragmatic breathing activity for 5 to 10 minutes. Notice any changes in relaxation that you experience.

**Step 1:** Sit comfortably in your chair with your knees bent and your shoulders, head and neck relaxed. If you like, close your eyes.

**Step 2:** Place one hand on your chest and the other on your diaphragm (belly), just below your rib cage. This will allow you to feel your diaphragm move as you breathe.

**Step 3:** Breathe in slowly through your nose, like you are filling up a balloon in your stomach, so that your stomach pushes your hand outward. The hand on your chest should remain still, and your breathing should only move the hand on your stomach in and out.

**Step 4:** Tighten your stomach muscles, letting them fall inward as you exhale through puckered lips. The hand on your chest should remain still. Remember to breathe from your belly slowly and calmly. Try not to hold your breath.

**Tip:** If you are having trouble seeing your belly moving in and out, lie down with your knees bent and place a book or stuffed animal flat on your belly. See if you can make the item go up and down.

## WHAT IS SQUARE BREATHING?

Square breathing is a way to control your breathing through counts of 4. It can help you calm down and relieve stress. You can also use square breathing with meditation by visualizing a four-sided object, like a window or picture frame.

Practice the following square breathing activity for 5 to 10 minutes. As you breathe, draw a square in the air with your finger beginning in the top left corner.

**Step 1:** Lie down or sit comfortably in your chair with your knees bent and your shoulders, head and neck relaxed. If you like, close your eyes.

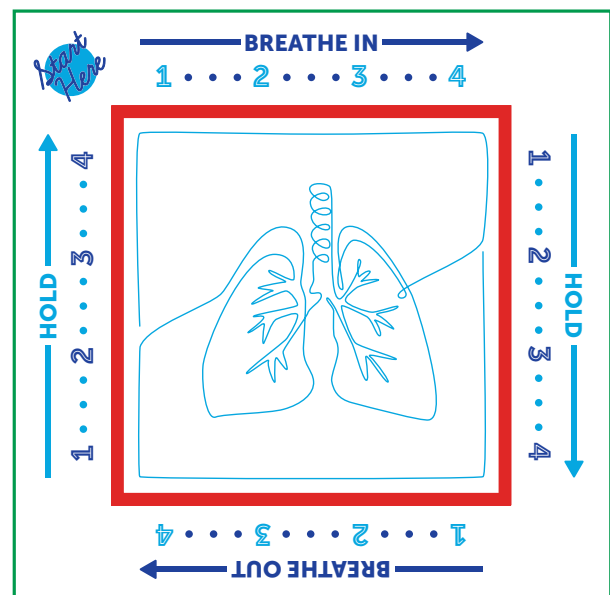
**Step 2:** Breathe in through your nose like you are smelling a flower while counting to 4.

**Step 3:** Hold your breath while counting to 4.

**Step 4:** Breathe out through your mouth like you are blowing out birthday candles while counting to 4.

**Step 5:** Hold your breath for 4 counts.

**Step 6:** Repeat.



## TIPS FOR SUCCESS:

Practice when you are not stressed or in a lot of pain.

- Practice daily.
- Practice in a quiet, comfortable space.
- Practice breathing by blowing bubbles to make it fun!

## FREE APPS:

Use the following apps to help you learn breathing techniques.

- Breathe2Relax
- Relax HD - Stress and Anxiety Relief
- Pranayama
- BellyBio Interactive Breathing

# Progressive Muscle Relaxation Techniques

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Progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) or “Tense and Relax” is the simple practice of tensing, or tightening, one muscle group at a time followed by a relaxation and release of tension in that muscle group. Practicing this skill helps you get better at recognizing and reducing tension in your body and decreasing stress, anxiety and discomfort. PMR practice allows the muscles to relax more thoroughly after releasing, which makes letting go of physical tension more effective and increases relaxation.

## MUSCLE RELAXATION EXERCISES FOR AGES 2 TO 10

**Hands and arms:** Pretend you are squeezing a whole lemon in your left hand. Squeeze it hard. Try to squeeze all the juice out. Feel the tightness in your hand and arm as you squeeze. Now drop the lemon and relax. See how much better your hand and arm feel when they are relaxed. (Repeat with the other hand.)

**Arms and shoulders:** Pretend you are a lazy kitten who wants to stretch. Stretch your arms way out in front of you. Raise them up as high as you can over your head and lean way back. Feel the stretch in your arms and shoulders. Now, really stretch, as far as you can. Now, let your arms fall down to your sides. Now, start the stretch again. (Repeat the exercise.)

**Shoulders and neck:** Pretend you are a turtle, sitting in the sun. It is nice and warm and quiet. Uh-oh. You hear something. To be safe, you pull your head into your shell. Pull your shoulders way up to your ears and push your head down to your chest. Stay in your shell, nice and snug. Now stretch back out into the relaxing sunlight. Pretend you hear another noise and practice getting back into your shell again. (Repeat the exercise.)

**Jaw:** You have a huge piece of bubble gum in your mouth, and it is really hard to chew. Bite down on it hard! Let your neck muscles help you. Now, relax and let your mouth hang loose. Notice how good it feels to let your mouth drop. Now, take another bite. (Repeat the exercise.)

**Face and nose:** Here comes a pesky fly, landing right on your nose. Try to get him off without using your hands. Wrinkle up your nose. Make as many wrinkles as you can. Scrunch your nose right up. Good, he is going away! You can relax your nose. Oops, he is coming back again. (Repeat the exercise.)

**Stomach:** Here comes a cute baby elephant! He is not watching where he is going. He does not see you relaxing, and he is going to step on your stomach. Don't move. Just get ready for him. Make your stomach very hard. Tighten up your belly really, really tight. Hold it. Whew! Looks like he missed you, so you can let your belly relax now. Make it really soft. That feels so much better. Get ready! Here he comes again! (Repeat the exercise.)

**Legs and feet:** Pretend you are barefoot and your feet are in a big, fat pot of mud. Squish your toes down deep in the mud. Try to stretch your feet all the way to the bottom of the bucket. Spread out your toes and feel the mud squish between them. Really stretch! Now, let them relax and let your toes go loose. Feel how nice that is. Now, let's try again. (Repeat the exercise.)



## MUSCLE RELAXATION EXERCISES FOR AGES 11 TO 18

Read through the following muscle relaxation exercises before you begin. When you are ready to begin, tighten muscles for 10 seconds and then relax for 20 seconds before repeating or going to the next exercise.

**Upper and lower arms:** Bring both arms to your shoulders as if making a muscle. Make a fist with each hand.

**Legs and thighs:** Straighten your legs and raise your feet off of the ground. Point your toes towards your knees, tensing the muscles in your calves and thighs.

**Shoulders:** Push your shoulders up towards your ears as if shrugging your shoulders.

**Neck:** Press your head tightly back against the chair, couch or bed. You might also try rolling your head around on your neck slowly in one direction and then the other direction. Pay attention to any tension in either direction.

**Lips:** Press your lips together tightly, as if you have just put on lip balm. You might also try puckering your lips, like a kiss.

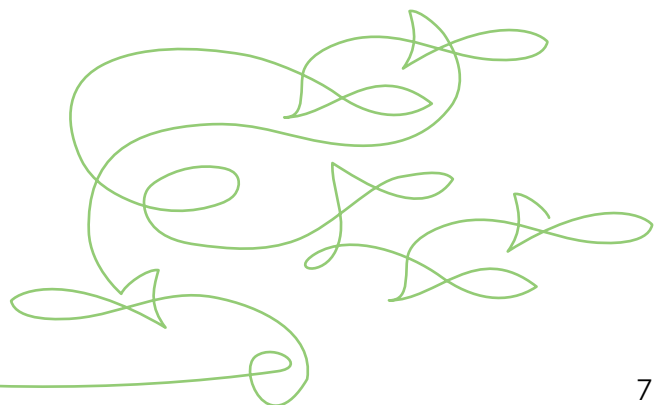
**Jaw:** Clench your teeth (not too tightly). Then open your mouth wide.

**Eyes:** Close your eyes somewhat tightly, but do not squeeze them shut.

**Forehead:** Raise your eyebrows upward so your forehead wrinkles. Repeat the exercise for each muscle group at least once. You can repeat the exercises several times for muscles that are harder to relax.

### TIPS FOR SUCCESS:

- Only tense and relax the muscles you feel comfortable using.
- If you are using PMR after surgery or to cope with the pain of an injury, skip that part of the body and focus on other areas to help relax.
- Practice when you are not stressed or in a lot of pain.
- Create a daily schedule to practice this skill.
- Practice in a quiet, comfortable space.



# Sensory Distraction

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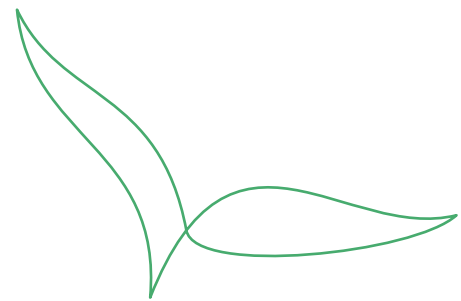
Sensory distraction, or counterstimulation, is a way of distracting the brain when it is sending pain or stress signals. Since the brain can only pay attention to one strong signal at a time, you can block stress or pain signals by sending another strong signal to the brain using your senses.

**TOUCH:** Bring your attention to how your skin feels using temperature or pressure.

- Apply ice or heat to sensitive parts of your body. For example, put ice packs under your armpits, on the back of your neck or under the soles of your feet.
- Use heavy objects, like weighted blankets.
- Play with materials like clay, putty or slime.
- Massage or push on pressure points.

**SIGHT:** Look around you and focus on a single object that you can see. Notice the colors, shapes and textures.

- Look at a picture book or photo.
- Watch fish in a tank or a lava lamp.
- Watch your pets play.
- Turn on your favorite TV show or movie.
- Look out your window or go outside into nature.



**SOUND:** Shift your attention to the sounds around you.

- Play music or listen to someone playing an instrument.
- Listen to the sounds around you.
- Use a fan, noise machine or vacuum for background noises.
- Turn on a clock, metronome or other paced sound.

**SMELL:** Bring attention to the smells around you and take deep, slow breaths.

- Smell citrus fruits, like lemons or oranges.
- Use essential oils, like peppermint, eucalyptus and lavender. Place them on a cotton ball or on your favorite blanket or stuffed animal.

**TASTE:** Focus on a taste and the feel of it on your tongue.

- Suck on hard candies or mints like peppermint, cinnamon or lemon.
- Let chocolate melt on your tongue.
- Eat frozen or cold fruit, ice water or ice cream.
- Eat tart or sour foods, like lemons, limes and apples.





# Thought-Replacement Techniques (Positive Self-Talk)

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Self-talk is the inner voice or internal conversation that we have with ourselves. The way you talk to yourself can have a big influence on how you feel and act. Negative thoughts or negative self-talk increases stress. With practice, you can learn to shift negative thoughts to positive thoughts and decrease stress using this cognitive behavioral technique.

To change negative self-talk into positive or neutral self-talk, it is important to first identify what you are expecting to happen.

*For example: I am afraid I won't be able to walk for a long time after surgery.  
I don't think my pain will ever go away.*

Next, be a detective and gather all of the evidence about the likelihood of that happening. Use the following questions:

1. Do I know for sure that this is going to happen?
2. What else might happen?
3. What has happened before?
4. Has this happened to anyone else I know?
5. How likely is it that what I am expecting to happen will happen?
6. What is the worst thing that could happen? What would be so bad about that?
7. Is worrying about this helping?
8. What alternative views are there?
9. What would you tell a friend who had the same thought?

## EXAMPLES OF POSITIVE SELF-TALK:

- I've got this!
- I can do hard things!
- I know how to help de-stress. I will use breathing exercises and distraction!
- Trying is the most important thing.
- No one is perfect.
- I will try my best.
- I can do it.
- I will be proud of myself if I try.
- Go for it!
- I have done it before; I can do it again.

# Imagery Techniques

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Imagining a relaxing place or thinking relaxing thoughts can decrease stress. You can use imagery to imagine you are somewhere else to feel more relaxed.

## BEACH SCENE

You are lying back in a chair on the shore of a beautiful beach. You hear waves crashing against the shore, the sound of seagulls flying and people splashing in the water. You feel the sand beneath your feet, the warmth of the sun and a slight breeze brushing gently against your skin. When you look around, you see white, glistening sand stretching for miles in either direction. You see an endless blue sky over the blue-green ocean. You take in a deep breath and smell the salt in the air. You can even taste it. You lie there with your eyes closed taking in the warmth of the sun and the sounds of the ocean. You feel relaxed and comfortable.

## MOUNTAIN SCENE

You are sitting on the porch of a log cabin in the mountains. When you look around, you see snow cresting the peaks, tall green trees and a few deer grazing in the meadow. You feel a cool breeze ruffling your hair and smooth boards beneath your feet. You smell lavender, sage and pine trees as you take a deep breath. You can hear a stream trickling nearby and the gentle creak of your chair on the porch. You taste warm homemade bread and take a sip of rich hot chocolate. Everything around you is peaceful and quiet.

## CREATE YOUR OWN HAPPY PLACE

Imagine a great memory that brings you happiness. This might be a vacation spot, the location of your favorite activity or sport, or a cozy space in your home - any place that helps you relax. Make sure this is a safe, comfortable place. When you picture this, imagine what you see, what you smell, what you feel and what you hear. This place could be a place where you have been before or a place you have imagined that makes you happy.

In the space below, write about your own happy place with as much detail as possible:

1. Where are you? Is it warm or cool? Sunny or cloudy? Calm or windy? Day or night?

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2. What are you doing? Are you alone or with friends or family?

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3. Describe all the things you see.

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4. Describe all the things you hear.

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5. Describe all the things you smell.

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**TIP FOR SUCCESS:**

- Read the scene or have someone help you memorize it.
- You can also record yourself or a parent reading the scene, and play it back when you need to relax.

## PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT

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