



Stress BUSTERS

Doing Stress Simply

Let's Manage Stress

Relaxation exercises are effective. They are useful for reducing stress and help you feel less tense and more relaxed. For many of us, relaxation means flopping on the couch and zoning out in front of the TV. This does little to reduce the impact of stress. Instead, you need to activate your body's natural relaxation response. Put the brakes on stress by slowing your breathing and heart rate, lowering your blood pressure and bringing your body and mind back into balance. There's no single relaxation technique that works for everyone. Find one that resonates with you and do it regularly to help reduce stress and anxiety, boost your energy and improve your sleep and overall health and wellbeing.

Here are a few relaxation techniques you can try.

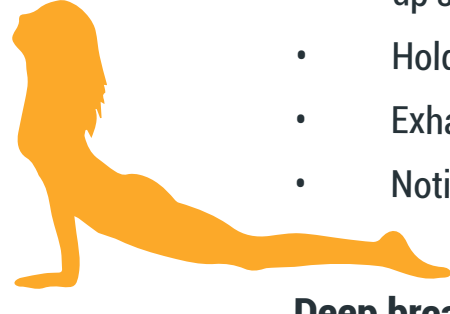
Breathing

Breathing and stretching exercises are great for relaxation.

Morning breathing

Try this exercise when you first get up in the morning to relieve muscle stiffness and clear your breathing passages. Then, use it throughout the day to relieve back tension.

- From a standing position, bend forward from the waist with your knees slightly bent, letting your arms dangle close to the floor.
- As you inhale slowly and deeply, return to a standing position by rolling up slowly, lifting your head last.
- Hold your breath for just a few seconds in this standing position.
- Exhale slowly as you bend forward again from the waist.
- Notice how you feel at the end of the exercise.



Deep breathing

Deep breathing is easy to do and is very relaxing. It is one of the best ways to lower stress. It sends a message to your brain to calm down and understand what is happening, in order to best manage your stress. Try this basic exercise anytime you need to relax or relieve stress.

- Sit or lie flat in a comfortable position, with one hand on your belly just below your ribs, and the other hand on your chest.
- Take a deep breath in through your nose, and let your belly push your hand out.
- Breathe out through pursed lips, as if you were whistling. Feel the hand on your belly go in, and use it to push all the air out.
- Do this breathing 3 to 10 times. Take your time with each breath.
- Notice how you feel at the end of the exercise.

Mindfulness Meditation

Using mindfulness to stay focused on the present might seem straightforward, but it takes practice to reap all the benefits. Here's a basic mindfulness meditation:

- Find a quiet place where you won't be interrupted or distracted.
- Sit on a comfortable chair with your back straight.
- Close your eyes and find a point of focus, such as your breathing - the sensation of air flowing into your nostrils and out of your mouth or your belly rising and falling; a meaningful word that you repeat throughout the meditation, or even focusing on the sounds around you.
- Don't worry about distracting thoughts that go through your mind or about how well you're doing. If thoughts intrude your mindfulness practice, don't fight them, just acknowledge your thoughts/distractions and gently turn your attention back to your point of focus, without judgment.



The 60 - second challenge

A brief relaxation activity requires between 60 to 90 seconds, so it can be done easily and quickly. Practice one or more of the following activities several times each day. This will help keep you calm and will reduce tension when it occurs.

Getting started:

Assume a passive and comfortable position. Although, you can do these exercises in any position, even as you prepare for an anticipated stressful event.

- Deep breathing: exhale slowly and tell yourself and your muscles to relax.
- Whole body tension: Tense every muscle in your body, stay with that tension and hold it for 3-5 seconds. Slowly release the tension and very gradually feel it leave your body.
- Shoulder shrugs and head rolls: Try to raise your shoulders up to your ears. Hold for the count of four then drop your shoulders back to the normal position. Rotate your head and neck.
- Use your imagination: Imagine air as a cloud and focus on your breathing. Imagine that the air comes in as a cloud - it fills you, making you feel light and calm and goes out, leaving you feeling relaxed.



The sensory exercise

Make use of all of your senses. Focus on the sensory sensations and how that makes you feel. Be in the moment.

Smell

- Smell a flower
- Inhale the scent of coffee, Fresh air or the scent of the air around you

Touch

- Wrap yourself in a blanket
- Pat a dog or cat
- Cuddle a soft toy

Sight

- Look at a favourite photo
- Picture a place that is peaceful
- Look at the nature around you
- Surround yourself with the colours that you like

Taste

- Sip tea, coffee or water
- Chew gum or a sweet
- Eat something that you like; perhaps a fruit or chocolate
- If nothing is available "taste the air" around you - savour the taste

Movement

- Run in place or jump up and down
- Dance or stretch
- Go for a short walk
- Squeeze a rubbery stress ball

Sound

- Sing or hum a favourite tune
- Listen to your favourite music
- Listen to nature - birds in the trees, wind blowing leaves
- Take a moment to notice the sounds around you

On reaching out

When things seem a bit tough, it's ok to ask for assistance or reach out to others around you.

Sometimes the task might seem as trivial as doing a chore or perhaps it's just the need to talk to someone; maybe it's just the need for a friendly shoulder to lean on. Reach out to a lecturer, tutor, course mate, a family member or friend. They could assist or direct you to other sources of help.

If you need to talk to a therapist, you can get in touch with the CCDU



visit our website or email: info.ccd@wits.ac.za

or call the 24-hour Wits Student Crisis Line – **0800 111 331**