

# Relaxation Exercises

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service  
(CAMHS), NHS Lothian

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## What is Relaxation?

Being relaxed is the opposite of being anxious. It is easy to know what the difference is if you notice what is going on inside your body and your mind at different times. Look at the two lists below. One shows what it can feel like to be anxious, while the other shows what it can feel like to be relaxed.



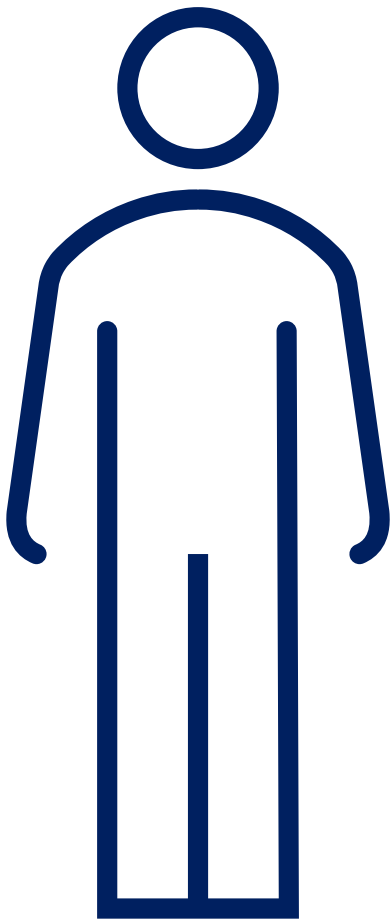
| Anxious               | Relaxed                                |
|-----------------------|--|
| Cross, jumpy          | Happy, calm                            |
| Heart beating fast    | Heart beating slowly                   |
| Breathing fast        | Breathing slow and easy                |
| Skin pale or sweaty   | Skin pink and not sweaty               |
| Muscles trembling     | Muscles relaxed                        |
| Stomach or head aches | No stomach or headaches                |
| Thoughts racing       | Thoughts normal                        |
| Can't concentrate     | Can concentrate                        |
| Mind full of worries  | Mind able to do what you want it to do |

Everyone feels anxious some of the time and relaxed at other times. If you were just about to take an exam, you'd probably feel anxious. If you were getting ready to fall asleep, you'd probably feel relaxed. No one is relaxed all the time! Usually there is a balance between the two.

Sometimes that balance is wrong and you can find that you spend a lot of time feeling anxious, and not enough time feeling relaxed.

## What happens if the balance is wrong?

If a person spends too much time being anxious and not enough time being relaxed, this can make them quite unhappy. It may make them feel tired, cross, sad, or like they can't concentrate properly during the day.



### Signs of anxiety and worry



Poor sleep or bad dreams



Sore head



Feeling hot or sweaty



Dry mouth or tight throat



Heart beating faster or harder



Breathing faster or feeling like it's difficult to breathe



Feeling sick, having a sore tummy or having 'butterflies'



Needing to go to the toilet more often



Legs feeling like jelly or shaky

Other people might notice they're anxious as they might not seem their normal self (for example they may argue a lot, get into fights or just seem unhappy).

If the balance is wrong in your life, this booklet can help you change it for the better, by learning some simple ways to relax and to enjoy relaxing. Just try out some of the relaxation exercises and relaxation tips here.

The exercises will help you relax by using your breathing, your muscles and your imagination to get rid of stress and feel relaxed. Different people like different ways of relaxing, so try out different exercises until you find your favourites.

## Relaxation Tip 1 – Set things up right!

It's very difficult to relax if there are lots of things going on around you. Relaxing somewhere like a busy hospital waiting room is difficult, while relaxing while lying on your own private beach would probably be easy!

So, to make relaxing easier, try the following:

- Choose a quiet room that is comfortably warm
- Wear comfortable clothes that aren't too tight. Taking your shoes off can be nice, but keep socks on to keep your feet warm
- Make enough time to relax. If you know you have to rush off somewhere soon you will find it more difficult to relax. You only need 15 minutes or so for the exercises in this booklet
- Choose somewhere private if you can so that you won't be disturbed by other people.

## Relaxation Tip 2 – Practice

Practice! Relaxation is a skill, just like playing football or a musical instrument. The more you practice, the better you will get. Don't get discouraged if you find it difficult at first.

## Relaxation Tip 3 – Use a helper

A good way of trying out some of the exercises in this booklet is to get a helper (like a parent or carer). The helper can be in charge of the booklet, and help you remember what to do. Some of the exercises are easier if there is someone to read out things that are written there. If you don't have a helper, you might be able to record what you need to do on a phone and play it back for yourself.

## Relaxation Exercise 1 – Warming up

When our minds are tense, our bodies are tense too. Relaxing your body will help relax your mind as well. Warmed up muscles relax more easily, so it's a good idea to warm up a little before a relaxation session. You can do this in lots of ways – stretching, shaking, or walking around.

Try to see if you can shake every part of your body about. Work the shaking right up through your legs, up to your shoulders, down into your arms and right into your hands. Can you feel the relaxation tingling through your body?



Which warm ups do you like?



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## Relaxation Exercise 2 – Tense – Stretch – Relax

You can do these exercises standing, sitting or lying down. It may help to have a helper to read out the exercise to you. There is a second version of this exercise at the back of this booklet to try – see which you prefer. Close your eyes tightly. Rest your head, flop out your arms, and let your legs go limp.



### Hands

Pretend you are holding a lemon in each hand. Squeeze that lemon hard. Try to make every drop of juice come out of it and drip from your fingers. Squeeze it so hard that all the pips come shooting out and you can smell the lemony smell in your nose.

Now stretch, open your hands. Spread your fingers. Try to make your fingers grow and grow – stretch them right out. Now, stop your hands. Let them go. Feel how heavy they are. They are so heavy they could almost fall through the floor.

Now try to do this with a picture in your mind. Imagine your tight fist is a flower bud, opening slowly in the sunshine. Feel the petals stretch out in the warm sun. Now the flower closes up again.

### Whole body

Imagine you are a tree! Bend your knees, reach your arms down low as far as you can, and imagine they are branches. Take a deep breathe in and move your branches in a big circle, up and round, right up above your head, and straighten your legs. Stretch as high as you can reach – stand on tip toes if you can. Now breathe out and let your branches fall down to your side. Do this 2 or 3 times.



## Shoulder back and neck

These are all places where you can get tense. Imagine you are a monkey! Move your shoulders as high as you can. Hunch them up, right up to your ears and breathe in. Now breathe out, and as you breathe, drop your shoulders and dangle your arms by your sides, just like a monkey. Do this 4 or 5 times.



Now stretch up your neck. Make it feel long, like a giraffe's. Pull your shoulders down as low as they will go. Stretch your neck. Make it as long as you can. Now stretch it just a bit more! RELAX! Let all your muscles go floppy. Do this 4 or 5 times.



## Face

Do you have a favourite animal? Imagine you are that animal. Make the animal lick it's lips, swallow, hum and clench it's teeth tight.

Now yawn a big yawn – stretch it's mouth open as wide as it goes. Make the animal screw it's eyes tightly shut.

Now make a happy face, with a big smile

Now make a surprised face, and raise your eyebrows as high as they will go. Really make your animal's mouth move and say "eee...ooo...eee...ooo". Stretch your lips for "eeee". Then make them round for the "oooo", just like you were blowing out a candle. Now let you animal relax, and all its muscles go floppy. Imagine someone is stroking its head very gently.



## Relaxation Exercise 3 – Breathing

Breathing is an important part of relaxation. When we breathe in, we get oxygen from the air which our bodies need for energy. When we breathe out, we get rid of the carbon dioxide that we don't need. Air helps give us the energy to run, talk, sleep and do all the other things we want to do.

Most of the time, we breathe without thinking about it. When we are tense or anxious, we may not breathe properly. This can stop the body working as well, so it is important to practise slow, even breathing.

Make sure you are sitting comfortably with your back straight and all your muscles relaxed. Keep your eyes closed if you can. If you prefer, you can do this exercise lying down. Put your hands on your chest just above your tummy. Breathe in slowly through your nose and then let the breath out slowly through your mouth, just like you are blowing out a candle. Notice how your ribs and tummy move out when you breathe in, and move in when you breathe out.

Imagine you have a big balloon inside your chest. As you breathe in, imagine the balloon slowly filling up. As you breathe slowly out, let the balloon become smaller and smaller. Keep noticing how your tummy and your chest move in and out as you breathe.





Now breathe as if you were a dog. Imagine you are all puffed out. Take a deep breath and as you breathe out make three short panting sounds: “ha, ha, ha”. Then a long, tired “HAAAAAAH”. Try this several times.



Now breathe like a small, laughing mouse. Breathe in, and as you breathe out, in short bursts say “hee, hee, hee, hee”. Make your tummy move with each “hee”.



Now breathe as if you were the wind. Breathe out and blow the sea onto the land. Breathe in and suck the sea back out again. Now, blow it onto the land again. Keep the sea moving as you breathe in and out. Breathe in some lovely big breathes. As you breathe out, get rid of all the bad pictures and thoughts you have in your mind. Breathe out all your worries and all the things you don't like about yourself. Watch them all drift away.



## Relaxation Exercise 4 –

### Relaxing the mind with daydreaming

An important part of relaxing is learning to “switch off” our thoughts. Often our thoughts race around our heads all day, and it is especially important to slow them down and switch them off if these thoughts are worrying or upsetting us. Day dreaming is a lovely thing to do and can be very useful in helping us relax.

First of all, make sure your body is relaxed and your breathing is even. Think of something which really makes you happy or of someone you really like. It could be imagining running through long grass or cuddling a soft furry rabbit. It might be hearing the sound of the sea and birds singing. It might be imagining a big red rose in your hand and what it smells like. It could be a good time you had with friends or your family. Imagine anything you like – whatever makes you feel good.



What daydream/s make you happy?

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## Relaxation Exercise 5 - Mind Journeys

In this exercise, you will visit some special places, inside your own mind. Different people like to visit different places. The visits written down here are just some of the places you can go: if you have your own favourite, you can write down your own mind journey. If you do write your own journey, make it as detailed as you can, and describe what you will see, hear, smell, and feel on every step of the journey.



My journey...

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Just like with some of the other exercises, it can be useful to have a helper to read things out or to record things beforehand. You could play it on your phone whenever you want, or on a parent's phone. When you read each journey, do it slowly, and allow plenty of pauses to think in.

Before you start, get yourself comfortable. Lean back in a big chair or lie on a bed. Make sure your body is relaxed and your breathing is calm before you start.

## Journey 1 – The Island of Peace

In front of you is a sunny beach, with golden sand. The calm sea is a blue-green colour, and little waves lap the shore. Along the beach there are tall palm trees and big colourful tropical flowers. The palm trees are whispering gently in the warm breeze. The sea looks warm too. You can feel the warm grains of sand under your toes. This is your own special place.

You lie down on the sand, with your eyes closed. The sand is warm underneath your body. You can feel the warm sun on your face and a little breeze as well. In the distance you can hear the palm trees, still whispering. You can smell the scent of the tropical flowers, and hear the waves lapping at the shore. You feel relaxed and at peace, and your mind is at rest.

Breathe lightly and say the word “Calm” in your head each time you breathe out. Listen to the waves, and the palm trees. Now the warm water is further up the beach and you can feel it around your body. It is gently lifting you up and making you lighter, taking your weight off the sand. You gently float in the warm water. Your breathing is calm and relaxed.

Now the water is slowly flowing away, and it lets you softly down, down, and back onto the warm sand. You can feel the sandy grains underneath your body again, and the warm sun on your front. As the water ebbs away, it takes with it the last of your worries. You are at peace, and the stress and anxiety has floated away on the sea. You feel warm, content, and safe. Spend a few moments enjoying these feelings. Now slowly bring yourself back from the island of peace. Open your eyes gradually, and, when you are ready sit up.



## Journey 2 – The Country House

You are in a large, old house, in a downstairs room. The room is light and airy. You are sitting on a big comfortable sofa. Outside it is a hot summer's day. The sunlight is streaming through the windows. There are some doors in the room that lead out into the garden. Imagine yourself getting up, and walking across the carpet to the doors. The carpet is thick and warm; and you can feel it under your feet. You reach the open doors and you can feel the heat of the day. Outside there is a stone pathway and a big green lawn. You step onto the stone pathway and as you do you feel the warmth of the stones beneath you. You walk forwards towards the grass and step onto it.

Now you can feel the cool, soft grass under your feet and between your toes. Walk slowly through the garden, feeling the warm sun on your body. You can smell the warm sweet smells of the gardens: flowers and cut grass. It is quiet, expect for a gentle rustling of the breeze in the top of the trees and some birds and crickets. In the distance you can hear some water trickling.

You start walking towards the sound, slowly enjoying the warmth, the sounds and smells of the hot summer's day. You come around corner in the garden and see a fountain. It looks cool and inviting, so you walk to it. You sit on the edge of the fountain. Feel the coolness of the stones as you sit down. Run your hands gently through the water, and feel yourself cooling down. Now you slowly get up and begin to walk away from the fountain. The sun is hot, and the garden is quiet. You stop under the shade of big tree, and lie down on the grass. You can feel the softness of the grass under your body and the warmth of the air. Off in the distance you can hear the breeze rustling the tops of the tress, and birds singing.

After a while, you slowly sit up, and then start walking back to the house. Walk slowly back to the path that leads back to the door that left you into the garden. As you step onto the path you can feel the warmth of the stones, very different to the coolness of the grass. Walk up the path slowly. As you step from the path into the room, it feels cool and refreshing. Go back to the sofa, and sink down into it. Now bring yourself slowly back into this room. Gradually open your eyes and begin to think about the movements you will make you sit up. When you are ready, slowly sit up and make yourself comfortable.



## Journey 3 – The Cosy Room

Here is the beginning of a mind journey, which you can add to yourself. Imagine you are curled up in a big comfy armchair. You are near a blazing log fire, while rain beats steadily against the window. You feel very safe and relaxed. Think about how the chair feels. How does the warmth of the fire feel on your skin? What noises does it make? What about the rain? How does it sound on the window? What else is there in the room?



Build up the picture any way you want.....maybe with the help of someone.

My cosy room -



A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing, intended for the user to describe their 'cosy room'.

## Relaxation Tip 4 – Quickie Relaxation

Sometimes you may feel stressed and anxious and want to relax, but you just don't have a quiet place or enough time to do the relaxation exercise in this booklet.

If this is the case, try:

- Walking outside for a minute, and taking a few deep breathes to clear your head and stretch your body
- Sitting down, closing your eyes and breathing slowly and calmly. Each time you breathe out; say in your head "Calm"
- Look out of a window to something far away. Empty your mind just for a few seconds of all your worries and anxiety, and just concentrate on what you are looking at
- Get a piece of blu-tack, plasticine, or squishy toy. Pull it about and press it in your hands. Concentrate on what it feels like and forget everything else, if only for a few moments
- If you have one, stroking or talking to a pet can be very comforting and relaxing.



## More Relaxation – Tense- and- Relax part 2

If you have a helper, get them to read this detailed script out for you. Once you have practised it a few times, you should be able to tense and relax all your muscles much more quickly, even tensing everything at once and then relaxing everything at once.

### **Hands and arms**

Make a fist with your left hand. Squeeze it hard. Feel the tightness in your hand and arm as you squeeze. Now let your hand go and relax. See how much better your hand and arm feel when they are relaxed. Once again make a fist with your left hand and squeeze hard. Good. Now relax and let your hand go. (Repeat the process for the right hand and arm).

### **Arms and shoulders**

Stretch your arms out in front of you. Raise them high up over your head. Way back. Feel the pull in your shoulders. Stretch higher. Now just let your arms drop back to your side. Okay, let's stretch again. Stretch your arms out in front of you. Raise them over your head. Pull them back, way back. Pull hard. Now let them drop quickly. Good. Notice how your shoulders feel more relaxed. This time let's have a great big stretch. Try to touch the ceiling. Stretch your arms way out in front of you. Raise them way up over your head. Push them way, way back. Notice the tension and pull in your arms and shoulders. Hold tight, now. Great. Let them drop very quickly and feel how good it is to be relaxed. It feels good and warm and lazy.

### **Shoulders and neck**

Try to pull your shoulders up to your ears and push your head down into your shoulders. Hold it tight. Okay now relax and feel the warmth. Again, pull your shoulders up to your ears and push your head down into your shoulders. Do it tightly. Okay, you can relax now. Bring your head out and let your shoulder relax. Notice how much better it feels to be relaxed than to be all tight. One more time now. Push your head down and your shoulders way up to your ears. Hold it. Feel the tenseness in your neck and shoulders. Okay. You can relax now and feel comfortable. You feel good.



## **Jaw**

Put your teeth together really hard. Let your neck muscles help you. Now relax. Just let your jaw hang loose. Notice how good it feels just to let your jaw drop. Okay, bite down again hard. That's good. Now relax again. Just let your jaw drop. It feels so good just to let go. Okay, one more time. Bite down. Hard as you can. Harder. Ok, you're really working hard. Good. Now relax. Try to relax your whole body. Let yourself go as loose as you can.

## **Face and Nose**

Wrinkle up your nose. Make as many wrinkles in your nose as you can. Scrunch your nose up really hard. Good. Now you can relax your nose. Now wrinkle up your nose again. Wrinkle it up hard. Hold it just as tight as you can. Okay. You can relax your face. Notice that when you scrunch up your nose that your cheeks and your mouth and your forehead all help you and they get tight, too. So when you relax your nose, your whole face relaxes too, and that feels good. Now make lots of wrinkles on your forehead. Hold it tight. Okay, you can let go. Now you can just relax. Let your face go smooth. No wrinkle anywhere. Your face feels nice and smooth and relaxed

## **Stomach**

Now tighten up your stomach muscles really tight. Make your stomach really hard. Don't move. Hold it. You can relax now. Let your stomach go soft. Let it be as relaxed as you can. That feels so much better. Okay, again. Tighten your stomach really hard. Good. You can relax now. Settle down, get comfortable and relax. Notice the difference between a tight stomach and a relaxed one. That's how we want it to feel. Nice and loose and relaxed. Okay. Once more. Tighten up. Tighten hard. Good. Now you can relax completely, you can feel nice and relaxed.

This time, try to pull your stomach in. Try to squeeze it against your backbone. Try to be as skinny as you can. Now relax. You don't have to be skinny now. Just relax and feel your stomach being warm and loose. Okay, squeeze in your stomach again. Make it touch your backbone. Get it really small and tight. Get as skinny as you can. Hold tight now. You can relax now. Settle back and let your stomach come back out where it belongs. You can feel really good now. You've done fine.

## Legs and feet

Push your toes down really hard. You'll probably need your legs to help push. Push down, and spread your toes apart. Now relax your feet. Let your toes go loose and feel how nice that is. It feels good to be relaxed. Okay. Now push your toes down. Let your leg muscles help you push your feet down. Push your feet. Hard. Okay. Relax your feet, relax your legs, and relax your toes. Feel what it's like to be relaxed. No tenseness anywhere. You feel kind of warm and tingly.

## Ending

Stay as relaxed as you can. Let your whole body go limp and feel all muscles relaxed. In a few minutes I will ask you to open your eyes and that will be the end of the relaxation session. Gently move your arms to loosen them, and now gently move your legs. Move your head around. Slowly open your eyes. Very good.



### Breathing

- Square Breathing: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=GXvk\\_WbcLS4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GXvk_WbcLS4)
- 4-7-8 Breathing: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=UxbdX-SeOOo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UxbdX-SeOOo)



### Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- <https://youtu.be/aaTDNYjk-Gw?list=PLbKieNZA5bBQgAnSGJJCUMRPDsHgoSz1W>



### Guided Relaxation Stories

- Cosmic Kids, Guided Relaxation Stories: [www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL8snGkhBF7njO0QvtE97AJFL3xZYQSGh5](http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL8snGkhBF7njO0QvtE97AJFL3xZYQSGh5)
- Mood Cafe: [www.moodcafe.co.uk](http://www.moodcafe.co.uk)
- Sesame Street Monster Meditations: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=3EKPfQYi7GQ&list=PL8TioFHubWFuQ84KAuK0AbITXsZtbMJFO](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3EKPfQYi7GQ&list=PL8TioFHubWFuQ84KAuK0AbITXsZtbMJFO)



You can download the [Hospichill app](#) (it's free) if you have a smart phone or tablet. There is a section called activities which has different relaxation exercises to try. You might know of other apps which you can use to relax you too.