

Relaxation Techniques

Count-Of-Three Method

When you are anxious and your breathing is shallow and irregular, try this:

1. Inhale slowly through your nose while silently counting to three.
2. Hold your breath for the count of three.
3. Exhale slowly through your nose while silently counting to three.
4. With your breath expelled, count to three.
5. Repeat steps 1 - 4 several times. Once you have the rhythm, you do not need to continue counting; but maintain the same timing and pauses.

Practicing Controlled Breathing

As with any skill, breath control takes practice to develop. Focus on breathing from the diaphragm instead of the chest. The slow and deliberate inhalation-exhalation sequence will help maintain your composure and control over anxiety during particularly stressful times, such as taking tests. Also, by focusing on your breathing, you may be less likely to focus on distractions, such as other students taking the test. Deep breathing also aids in the relaxation of the shoulder and neck muscles; it allows you to feel strong, centered, and ready for action. Finally, it provides a short mental break and can renew your energy.

Progressive Relaxation

In each step, you'll tense a muscle group and then relax it. Pay close attention to how it feels to be relaxed as opposed to being tensed. Also notice how the tension and discomfort drains from your body and is replaced by comfort and relaxation. For each muscle group, perform each exercise twice before progressing to the next phase. As you gain skill, you may begin focusing just on relaxation.

Get comfortable. Loosen any tight clothing and uncross your legs. Take a deep breath, let it out slowly, and relax.

1. Extend your arms in front of you and make a fist with each hand. Notice any uncomfortable tension in your hands or fingers. Hold that tension for 5 seconds, then let go halfway and hold that for 5 more seconds. Now, concentrate on relaxing your hands completely for 10-15 seconds.
2. Tense your upper arms tight for 5 seconds and focus on that tension. Let the tension out halfway and hold for 5 seconds, again focusing on the tension. Now, relax your upper arms completely for 10-15 seconds, noticing the developing relaxation. Rest your arms limply at your sides.
3. Curl your toes as tight as you can. After 5 seconds, relax halfway and hold for an additional 5 seconds. Now, relax toes completely and focus on the relaxation. Continue relaxing toes for 10-15 seconds.
4. Point your toes away from you and tense your feet and calves. Hold the tension hard for 5 seconds and let it out halfway for another 5 seconds. Next, relax your feet and calves completely for 10-15 seconds.
5. Extend your legs and raise them about 6 inches off the floor while tensing your thigh muscles. Hold that tension for 5 seconds, let it out halfway and hold for another 5 seconds before finally relaxing muscles completely. Concentrate on your feet, calves and thighs for 30 seconds.
6. Tense your stomach muscles as tight as you can for 5 seconds. Let out that tension halfway and hold for an additional 5 seconds before relaxing. Focus on the spreading relaxation until your stomach muscles are completely relaxed.
7. To tighten your chest and shoulder muscles, press the palms of your hand together and push hard. Hold that for 5 seconds, let go halfway and hold for another 5 seconds. Now, slowly relax the muscles and concentrate on

that relaxation until your muscles are completely loose.

8. Push your back to the floor as hard as you can and tense your back muscles. Let the tension out halfway after 5 seconds and hold that reduced tension for 5 seconds. Now, relax your back and shoulder muscles completely.
9. Keeping your torso, arms, and legs relaxed, tense your neck muscles by bringing your head forward until your chin “digs” into your chest. Hold for 5 seconds, release halfway, and hold for another 5 seconds. Now relax completely by letting your head hang comfortably.
10. Cue-controlled relaxation is the final goal of progressive relaxation. Breathing can facilitate relaxation. Take a series of short inhalations, about one per second, until your chest is filled. Hold for 5 seconds; exhale slowly for 10 seconds while thinking of the words “relax” and “calm.” Repeat this process 5 times.

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