

Your Portable Guide to Stress Relief

Mini relaxations are helpful to use *in the moment* to ease fear and reduce pain. They are helpful to reduce stress before an important meeting, while you are stuck in traffic, or when you are in an uncomfortable social situation.

When you've got 1 minute

Place your hand just beneath your navel so you can feel the gentle rise and fall of your belly as you breathe. Breathe in – your hands should rise. Pause for a count of three. Breathe out – your hands should fall. Pause for a count of three. Repeat as necessary.

When you've got 3 minutes

While sitting down, take a break from whatever you're doing and check your body from head to toe for tension. First relax your facial muscles and allow your jaw to fall open slightly. Let your shoulders drop. Let your arms fall to your sides. Allow your hands to loosen so that there are spaces between your fingers.

Uncross your legs or ankles. Feel your thighs sink into your chair, letting your legs fall comfortably apart. Feel your shins and calves become heavier and your feet grow roots into the floor. Now breathe in slowly and breathe out slowly. Each time you breathe out, try to relax even more.

When you've got 5 minutes

Spend five minutes on self-massage. Start by kneading the muscles at the back of your neck and shoulders. Make a loose fist and drum swiftly up and down the sides and back of your neck. Now use your thumbs to work tiny circles around the base

of your skull. Slowly massage the rest of your scalp with your fingertips. Then tap your fingers against your scalp, moving from the front to the back and then over the sides.

Now massage your face. Make a series of tiny circles with your thumbs or fingertips. Pay particular attention to your temples, forehead, and jaw muscles. Use your middle fingers to massage the bridge of your nose and work outward over your eyebrows to your temples. Finally, close your eyes. Cup your hands loosely over your face and just inhale and exhale easily for a short while.

When you've got 10 minutes

Try imagery. Start by sitting comfortably in a quiet room. Breathe deeply and evenly for a few minutes. Now picture yourself in a special place. Choose an image that conjures up good memories. What do you smell? Hear? See? Drink in the colors and shapes that surround you. Focus on sensory pleasures such as the 'swoosh' of a gentle wind; soft, cool grass tickling your feet; the salty smell and rhythmic beat of the ocean.

Passively observe intrusive thoughts and then gently disengage from them to return to the world you've created.