

A hand is shown with fingers painted in vibrant colors: the thumb and index finger are blue, the middle and ring fingers are yellow, and the pinky is green. A yellow smiley face is painted on the palm. The background is a soft, out-of-focus mix of yellow and green.

# My Coping Toolbox

A LIST OF STRATEGIES  
THAT PEOPLE USE  
TO COPE WITH STRESS

# Introduction

## What is My Coping Toolbox?

My Coping Toolbox is a list of strategies that people use to cope with stress. These strategies are the tools in your toolbox to pull out when stressful situations occur, or when you need to cope with your physical symptoms.

As different strategies work for different people, it is important to have different strategies in your toolbox to try out.

Experiment to test out which strategy works for you. You may find that some strategies work in some circumstances but not in others.

Experiment to find out what works best and when they do work.



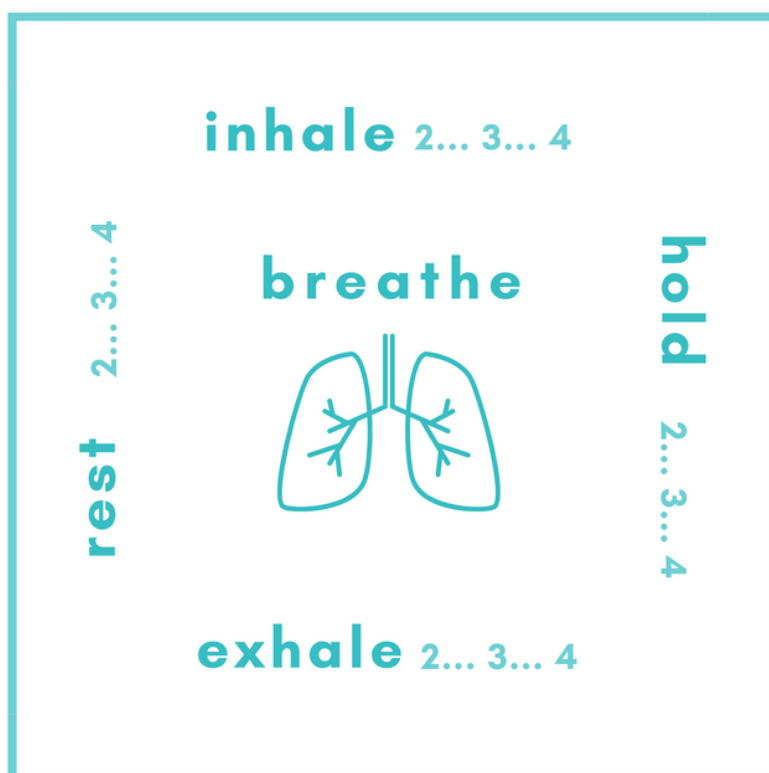
# 1

## Deep Breathing

Deep breathing slows down the heart rate and lowers blood pressure. Your mind takes a break from worries when you focus on your breathing.

“Box” breathing uses the count of 4 to guide your breathing.

1. Find a comfortable place to sit or lie down. Close your eyes if you wish.
2. Take a deep breath through your nose for a count of 4,
3. Hold your breath for a count of 4,
4. Breathe out through your mouth for a count of 4
5. Hold your breath for a count of 4.
6. Repeat a few cycles of this breathing pattern.



To help you focus, you can use a word or phrase to guide you. For example, you may want to breathe in "peace" and breathe out "tension".

Schedule a few minutes each day to practice “box” breathing.



## 2

### **Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)**

Our muscles can become tensed when we are stressed or anxious as our bodies prepare for potentially dangerous situations. Even when some of these situations are not really dangerous, our bodies can still respond in the same way. Sometimes, we don't even notice our bodies getting tensed. Muscle tension can be associated with physical sensations like chest tightness and tension headaches.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) is one technique that people have found helpful in releasing muscle tension.

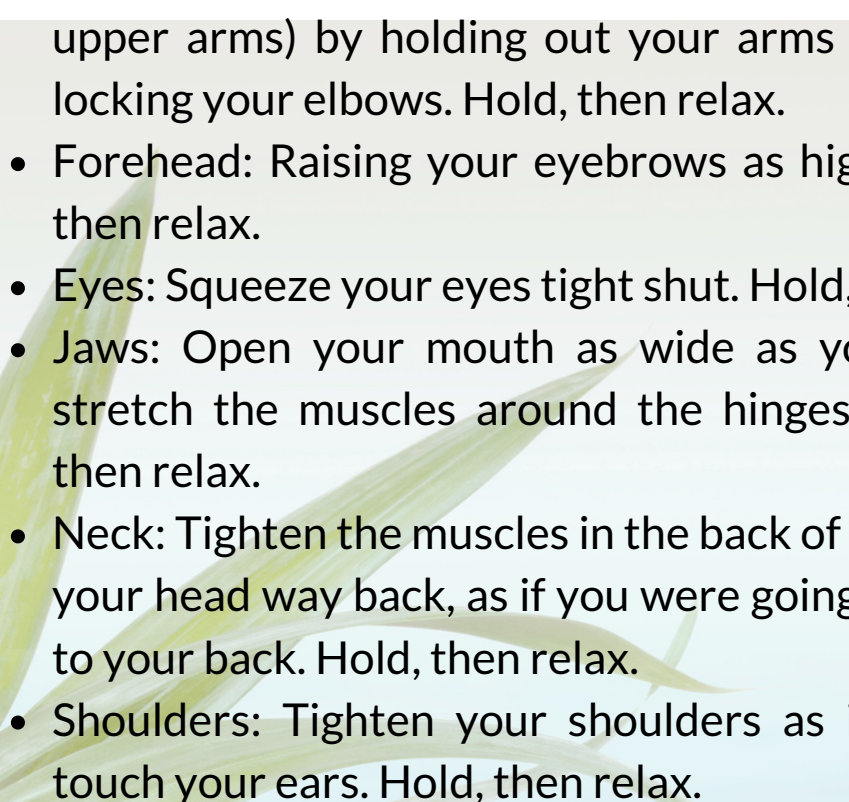
In this exercise, you will be focusing on one muscle group at a time, tensing up a particular muscle, holding for about 10 seconds, and then totally letting go of the muscle until its loose and relaxed.



# 2

## Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)

Follow these steps for the different muscle groups in your body:

- You can either lie down, or sit in a comfortable chair where your head is supported. Take three deep abdominal breaths, exhaling slowly each time, imagining the tension draining out of your body.
  - Fists: Clench your fists. Hold for 10 seconds, before releasing and feeling the tension drain out of your body.
  - Biceps: Tighten your biceps by drawing your forearms up toward your shoulders and make a muscle with both arms. Hold, then relax.
  - Triceps: Tighten your triceps (the muscles underneath your upper arms) by holding out your arms in front of you and locking your elbows. Hold, then relax.
  - Forehead: Raising your eyebrows as high as you can. Hold, then relax.
  - Eyes: Squeeze your eyes tight shut. Hold, then relax.
  - Jaws: Open your mouth as wide as you can so that you stretch the muscles around the hinges of your jaw. Hold, then relax.
  - Neck: Tighten the muscles in the back of your neck by pulling your head way back, as if you were going to touch your head to your back. Hold, then relax.
  - Shoulders: Tighten your shoulders as if you are going to touch your ears. Hold, then relax.
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# 2

## Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)

Follow these steps for the different muscle groups in your body:

- **Shoulder blades/back:** Tighten the muscles in your shoulder blades by pushing your shoulder blades back, trying to almost touch them together. Hold, then relax.
- **Chest:** Tighten the muscles of your chest by taking in a deep breath, filling up your lungs and chest with air. Hold, then relax.
- **Stomach:** Tighten your stomach muscles by sucking your stomach in. Hold, then relax.
- **Lower back:** Tighten your lower back by arching it up (don't do this if you have back pain). Hold, then relax.
- **Buttocks:** Squeeze your buttocks muscles together. Hold, then relax.
- **Thighs:** Squeeze the muscles in your thighs. Hold, then relax.
- **Lower leg:** Tighten your calf muscles by pulling your toes towards you. (Do this slowly and carefully to avoid cramps). Hold, then relax.
- **Toes:** Curl your toes downwards and push your feet to the ground. Hold, then relax.
- **Mentally scan your body for any left-over tension.** If any muscle group remains tense, repeat the exercise for those muscle groups.





# 3

## Taking a Mental Vacation

This is a place where you can visit in your imagination when you want to feel safe and secure.

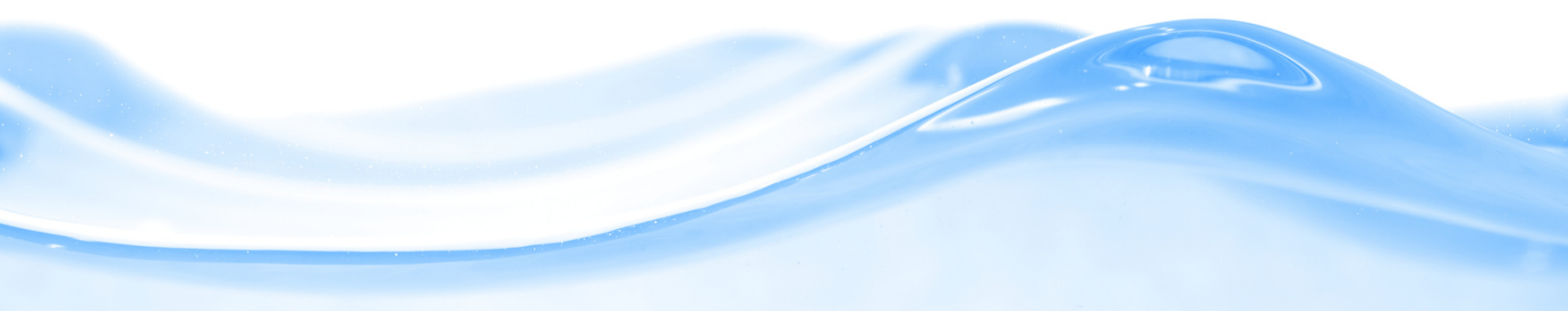
Close your eyes and take a deep breath in, filling your stomach like a balloon. Then breathe out, letting your stomach balloon fall flat. Continue breathing in and out slowly in this manner.

With your eyes closed, imagine your ideal place to relax. You can think of a relaxing place you have been to before, or you can create and design your own relaxing place. Remember this is a special place, free of stress and harm, no worries.

Try and use all your 5 senses to experience this mini vacation in your mind.

### For example:

Imagine yourself lying on a white sandy beach, with clear blue skies and gently lapping waves. You can smell the salty sea and feel the heat of the sun on your skin. Imagine your body sinking into the beach chair and feeling the warmth of the sand on your feet. Let go of any tension and continue to breathe with the rhythm of the rolling waves.



# 3

## Problem Solving

Stress often occurs when we face with problems that we think are hard to manage. We can learn to manage stress by managing the problems that we face. Use these 6 steps to help with problem solving

1. What is the problem? Define your problem.
2. What are your goals? Think about why is this a problem and what do you hope to happen if your problem is solved.
3. Brainstorm possible solutions to the problem. Make a list of all possible ways to solve the problem, both sensible and not so sensible.
4. Evaluate the solutions to the problem. Look at each solution and consider the good and bad of each solution.
5. Choose 1 solution and put into action.
6. Is the solution working? Remember you need time for the solution to work, and sometimes you will need to try more than one solution. Go back to step 1 if your solution didn't work.





# 4

## Coping Statements

Sometimes we get unhelping thoughts in stressful situations. Examples of these thoughts are “I can’t do this”, “I’m no good at anything”. Thoughts like these are unhelpful and are often not true.

Saying coping statements to ourselves when these thoughts come up are more helpful during stressful situations.

Examples of coping statements:

- I’ve done this before
- I know I can do this
- I just have to do my best
- It's ok to make mistakes
- Take it step by step, don’t rush
- I can handle it
- I did all right. I’m ok!



# 5

## Other Pleasurable Strategies

Here is a list of other strategies that you can try when feeling stressed or when having to cope with your physical symptom.

- Listen to music
- Go for a walk
- Stretch
- Play with a pet
- Take a bath/shower
- Talk to a friend
- Exercise
- Dance
- Go for a jog
- Play a sport
- Write in a journal
- Do something creative – an art project, poem, write a rap
- Read
- Take photographs
- Watch a movie
- Play a board game
- Singing
- Creating a video

