

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

Coping better with stress and anxiety

This method can help you to cope better with stress and anxiety in your daily life. It is based on evoking muscular tension that enables relaxation response. It can be applied to reduce tension, lessen the pain and alleviate physical manifestations of stress.

Therapeutic breathing

Start to breathe slowly and deeply - take deep breath in through the nose (count of 2), and then exhale through your mouth (5 seconds count as you breathe out). Then pause (3-5 seconds count). Take your time to practise this method.

Repeat a few times.

By progressively extending each exhalation, you learn to slow down your breathing rate (Heart Rate). The walls of the small blood vessels dilate and relax, allowing the blood to flow more freely with a reduced pressure.

Relaxed position

Sit comfortably in a chair, support your head on a cushion, or lie down on the bed with your legs slightly raised.

Close your eyes, and make sure you feel comfortable, undisturbed and relaxed.

Relaxation Method

Once your breathing pattern is established, follow the sequence:

1. Press your head down into a cushion, or against the headrest in a chair.
Take a deep breath in, tense up as you exhale pressing the head down and tightening the muscles in the neck for 5 seconds, then relax and loosen up.
2. Press your shoulders down, hold the position, and then relax (follow the same procedure).
3. Press down your lower back, hold, and then relax.
Please note: if you have lower back pain, you might feel more comfortable with bent knees in lying down, resting your knees on a rolled-up blanket.
4. Press your hips down, recognise the tension, and then relax.
5. Clench your fingers as hard as you can, hold that position, and then relax.
6. Stretch your fingers outwards, hold a maximum stretch, and then relax.
7. Tense your thigh muscles, hold the tension, and then relax.
8. Press your heels down, hold, and then relax.
9. Then tense all muscles together, feel the tension, and then relax.
10. Repeat the sequence to feel more relaxed.

Here are a few recommendations that can help you cope better with anxiety:

- Think of a stressful situation, which makes you feel stressed, and analyse how you respond to that. For example, can you recognise muscular tension, tensing shoulders or breathing faster? Is your pulse increasing... sweating... do you feel a tension headache or nauseous...? This relaxation technique can help you control the manifestations of stress.
- Can you make any changes in your daily life to cope better with the anxiety?
Making healthier lifestyle choices can maximise your resilience to the stressful situations and reduce the impact of stress on your body; and consequently, your general health.
- Develop a systematic action plan to resolve the problem issue that makes you feel anxious. That could help you manage the stressful situation more effectively.
- Monitor your progress to become aware of your body responses to the anxieties. Apply the relaxation method on regular basis to remain in control over stress.