

Sustaining Change

Please fill in the sentences below. In writing down what you have learned and potential triggers or setbacks that may occur, you will find yourself more committed to the changes you have made and better prepared for potential obstacles to maintaining those changes.

I have learned....

What was most useful to me was...

I can do _____ to protect myself from a potential setback

Some situations that may trigger previous maladaptive thoughts/feelings/behaviors are....

The signs that I am at risk are....

I can do _____ to maintain control

If I lose control or experience a set back, I will speak to (person) or do (behavior) _____ which has been helpful in the past

Relaxation Strategies

Relaxation techniques are useful venues through which physical and emotional tension can be released. When we perceive a situation to be threatening, our bodies naturally tense, preparing us to respond. While this response has important functions, when the threat is imagined, our bodies tense up unnecessarily and thus, we need to train our bodies to relax during these times of worry and/or panic. Learning to relax requires practice like any new skill we acquire. As such, it is important to practice routinely, so when we find ourselves in distress we can use these techniques strategically and successfully.

Some benefits of relaxation:

- Increasing energy levels
- Enhancing performance
- Managing pain
- Increasing stress coping abilities
- Improving sleep

Breathing done right

Breathing as a form of relaxation is more effective when we breathe using our stomach muscles instead of our chest muscles. Find yourself a comfortable place to sit and place one hand on your chest and one on your stomach over your belly button. Take three deep breaths and notice which hand moves the most. If it's the hand on your chest, try exhaling deeply and breathing in slowly, ensuring that your stomach extends as you inhale.

There are many associated techniques that make use of breathing. These include:

- Meditation
- Mindfulness
- Progressive muscle relaxation

- Bio feedback
- Visualization
- Massage
- Yoga
- Martial Arts
- Exercise

For more information on these techniques, check out: www.getselfhelp.co.uk

Breathing exercises made simple:

This exercise can be done in any location as it only takes a couple of seconds. It can be particularly beneficial during stressful times but it is also important to practice regularly even when you are not stressed.

- Take a deep breath, breathing in slowly and holding it in for 5 seconds, noticing your stomach expanding
- Breathe out slowly, counting to 5
- Breathe in once more, making the breaths as slow and deep as the ones before.
- Exhale, trying to empty your lungs of all the air. If you are alone, it may be helpful to make a sound as you breathe out. Exhale for as long as you can.
- Repeat the sequence

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)

Find yourself a comfortable position either lying or sitting down. Try to find a place where you will not be distracted by background noise. Make sure your whole body is supported (e.g. if you are sitting, place your arms on the arms of the chair and your feet flat on the floor).

- Close your eyes, notice the chair or floor supporting your body. Take three slow, deep breaths and picture the tension being released from all parts of your body.
- Notice your head, let any tension from your forehead be released. Do the same with your eyes, mouth, cheeks, and jaw. Allow your teeth to part and feel the tension escape.
- Now notice your neck, allow the chair to support the weight of your head and feel your neck relax. Picture the tension being released until your head feels heavy. Do the same with your shoulders.
- Move down to your arms and hands, allow them to feel heavy and limp.
- Observe your back muscles that extend from your neck to your hips. Release the tension and feel yourself sinking into your chair. Allow your legs and feet to let go and relax.

- Pay attention to your breathing, noticing your stomach rising and falling. Keep breathing, allowing each breath to become deeper and slower.
- You should be feeling relaxed, limp, and heavy. Concentrate on your breathing.

When you are ready, count down from 5 to 1 and open your eyes, move your extremities and stretch, slowly become more alert to your environment. Take a second to stay in this moment before getting up.