

# **Primary Children's Hospital's**

# **Relaxation Workbook**

**Compiled by Behavioral Health Inpatient Consultation and Liaison Team**

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**\*Workbook is a work in progress , thus future editions may reflect edits or changes as necessary**

## **Introduction**

Relaxation exercises are special things we can do to help managing our physical and emotional responses to pain or stress. This workbook will help you learn five different relaxation exercises:

**1) Deep Breathing**

**2) Progressive Muscle Relaxation**

**3) Imagery**

**4) Counter Stimulation**

**5) Changing the Channel in Your Brain**

You may find that you like all of the different exercises, but you may also find a favorite, which is just fine. Once we practice these together, you will practice these in the hospital and at home. You should practice these exercises until you get really good at them. Learning these exercises is just like learning to ride a bike or play a sport, it is important to be patient and practice them.

## Deep Breathing

1. It is easiest to learn deep breathing while lying down. Scan your body for muscle tension, starting at your feet and working your way up your legs, stomach and chest, arms, and face. Rate your tension using the “Stress-O-Meter” (page 12).
2. Place one hand on your stomach and one hand on your chest. Notice how your hands rise and fall as you naturally breathe in and out. If you are lying down, you should notice that the hand on your abdomen rises more than the hand on your chest. Breathe-in slowly and deeply through your nose into your stomach to push up your hand as much as feels comfortable. Your chest should move only a little.
3. It may take a while to get the hang of step 3. Once you do, focus next on your breath. Breathe-in through your nose. Make an “o”-shape with your mouth and breathe-out of your mouth, as if you were blowing bubbles. You might make a quiet whooshing sound like the wind as you slowly exhale out. If it is difficult for you exhale slowly, gently smile with your teeth together and try making an “sh”-sound instead, like that of a leaky tire. Drag the “sh” sound out as long as possible before breathing-in again.
4. Now put it all together. Take several slow, deep breaths, raising your stomach when you breathe-in, and lowering your stomach when you breathe-out. Focus on your stomach rising and falling and the sound of your breath as you become more and more relaxed. You may become so relaxed that you notice a sensation of light-headedness. This is ok and completely normal.
5. Scan your body for tension and compare with the tension you felt in Step 2.
6. In order for deep breathing to be effective in reducing stress, you must practice daily when you are not stressed for about 5-10 minutes at a time. If you have difficulty falling asleep at night, deep breathing may help. Make one of your practice sessions while lying down in your bed just before falling asleep.
7. Once you have become comfortable with deep breathing when you are not tense, you can begin using deep breathing to relax yourself when you notice yourself getting tense. The nice thing about deep breathing is that nobody knows you are doing it, so you can practice it anytime and anywhere.

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## Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Can be practiced lying down or in a chair. Each muscle or group is tensed for 10 seconds and then relaxed for 20 seconds. However, if you experience pain or discomfort with tensing your muscles, just visualize the tension in the muscles, and then relax them. Tense (or visualize), and then relax the following muscle groups:

1. Upper and lower arms: Bring both arms to your shoulders, as if making a muscle, and make a fist with each hand.
2. Legs and thighs: Straighten your legs and raise your feet off the ground. Point your toes towards your knees, tensing the muscles in your calves and thighs.
3. Shoulders: Draw your shoulders up towards your ears, as if shrugging your shoulders.
4. Neck: Press your head tightly backward against the chair. You might also try rolling your head around on your neck slowly in one direction and then the next direction, noticing point of tension in either direction.
5. Lips: Press your lips together tightly, as if you've just applied ointment to your lips. You might also try puckering your lips, like a kiss.
6. Jaw: You can either clench your teeth (not too tightly) or open your mouth wide.
7. Eyes: Close your eyes somewhat tightly. Do not squeeze them shut too tightly.
8. Forehead: Raise your eyebrows upward so that your forehead wrinkles.
9. Repeat the tension exercise for each muscle group at least once, maybe more for muscles that are more difficult to relax. You may also find it helpful to say to yourself one or more of the following phrases during the 20 seconds of relaxation:

*Let go of the tension.*

*I feel calm and rested.*

*Relax, smooth out, and unwind.*

*My muscles feel warm, heavy, and limp*

Just like with deep breathing, you will want to practice muscle relaxation several times during the day and may find it helpful to practice at night before falling asleep as well. If you master muscle relaxation when you are not tense, you will be able to use muscle relaxation to automatically relax your muscles when you notice you are becoming tense.

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## Imagery

When used as a relaxation technique, “imagery” is just as it sounds...*imagining* yourself in a relaxing scene. Your imagination is a very powerful tool. In fact, just by imagining a relaxing place or thinking relaxing thoughts, you can improve your mood, reduce pain, and feel less stressed. There are many different types of imagery. We will focus on visual imagery of a relaxing scene that includes all five senses. Consider the following example of a beach scene:

You are reclined in a chair on the shore of a beautiful beach. You can **hear** the waves crashing against the shore, the sound of seagulls flying overhead, and people splashing about in the water. You **feel** the sand beneath your feet, the warmth of the sun and a slight breeze brushing gently against your skin. When you look around you **see** white, glistening sand stretching for miles in either direction and an endless blue sky over the blue-green ocean. You take in a deep breath and **smell** the salt in the air mixed with the sweetness of cocoa butter from your suntan lotion. You can even **taste** the salt in the air. You lie there with your eyes closed and take in the warmth of the sun and the sounds of the ocean, feeling quite relaxed and comfortable.

On the following page, write-out your relaxing scene in as much detail as possible, using the guides provided. Your imagery scene will be unique to you. It can be set indoors or outside. Try to think through all five senses to get as much detail as possible. Be sure it is a peaceful, safe, and comfortable place. It's usually best to imagine a scene without other people in it, but again, every person's relaxing scene is different. It will be helpful to either tape it to play later for practice, or else have someone read it aloud to you. You can also just read the next pages a few times to yourself and then close your eyes and try to remember what you just read.

**Your Relaxing Scene**

**Where** are you?

---

What are you **doing**?

---

What do you **see**?

---

What do you **hear**?

---

What do you **smell**?

---

What do you **taste**?

---

What do you **feel**?

---

**Pressure** (what is pressing against your feet or body)

---

**Temperature** (is it cool or warm where you are?)

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**Dampness** (is it damp or dry?)

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**Wind** (is it calm, windy or breezy?)

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Note: Some sensations may be easier for you to imagine than others. That's ok...just go with the ones that come easily and continue incorporating the other sensations as you are able. As with Deep Breathing and Muscle Relaxation, practice makes perfect!

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## Counter Stimulation

Sometimes the signals to our brain that we are in pain or are stressed become so strong that it is difficult to think about or try doing other things. In these situations it is very important to find ways to disrupt that signal of stress or pain. One way that we can do that is by sending another loud signal to the brain using our five senses, this is called counter stimulation. We have listed below ideas for different ways to send your brain a competing signal using each of our five senses.

### **TOUCH/SENSATION**

Touching or holding different materials that engage your senses can help you feel less pain or distressing sensations in other parts of your body. Focus all of your attention on what it feels like in your hands. Experiment with different items and see what works best for you. Other things that engage the sense of touch are helpful too. Here are some ideas:

- Ice or Heat packs
- Something rough or scratchy, like sandpaper
- Something soft, like fur or a fuzzy blanket
- Something sticky or messy, like clay or playdough
- Massage or tap your fingers across your skin
- Rub your hands together until you can feel heat

### **SIGHT**

Looking at sights that are interesting and pleasing to the eye and require a lot of focus can help your body to feel less discomfort. Try a few of these and see what you like best.

- A picture book
- The sky
- A fish tank
- Watching your pets play
- Looking outdoors (mountains, lakes, etc.)
- Looking at photos
- Watch a TV show or movie

### **SOUND**

Distracting yourself with different sounds can help your brain and body to not feel distressing symptoms as much. Try focusing your attention on different sounds and see which ones are the most helpful.

- Listen to music
- Have a conversation or listen to someone talking
- Close your eyes and focus on all of the sounds you can hear

### **SMELL**

Smell is a powerful sense that can be very distracting. Experiment with different smells that are either relaxing or energizing. See which ones you most prefer.

- Citrus smells (lemon, orange, grapefruit)
- Flowers, Fresh herbs, Scented candles, Scented oils, like lavender or vanilla
- Cooking smells
- Body lotions, Shampoo

### **TASTE**

Engaging our sense of taste can help distract our body from unpleasant sensations. Some people prefer sweet, while others prefer sour or salty. Everyone is a bit different, so experiment with different flavors to see what you find most distracting.

- Hard candies (like butterscotch, peppermint, or cinnamon candies)
- Chewy foods like taffy
- Foods that burst when you bite them, like grapes or cherry tomatoes
- Cold or Hot foods, like ice cream, soup, or herbal tea
- Sour foods, like lemon, lime, grapefruit, or green apples

## Changing the Channel in Your Brain

Have you ever noticed that your brain can sometimes get “stuck” on a thought that is not very helpful? Most people have had the experience of having a worried or upsetting thought happen in their brains over and over, and it can be hard to know how to make the thought go away. When our bodies are not feeling well, we are more likely to have our brains get “stuck” on a bad channel. For example, when you’re feeling sick or in pain you might have the thought “This pain just hurts so bad, it’s never going to go away! I can’t deal with this.” This thought might just keep playing in your mind, kind of like a bad television show.

When a really bad TV show that you don’t like is playing on your television, do you have to keep watching it? No! You can change the channel to something you like better. The thoughts in your brain are like that too; when they get stuck on a bad thought, or bad channel, you have the power to change the channel to something more enjoyable or helpful. However, it takes practice!

### **Here are the steps for changing the channel:**

**Step 1.** First, you have to catch yourself when you’re having a “bad channel” thought. These are thoughts that are worrisome, upsetting, make you feel worse, or that are just downright unhelpful. Try to notice when you are having one of these thoughts. When you catch one, label it by saying to yourself “that’s a bad channel thought”.

**Step 2.** After you’ve caught your bad channel thought, you should imagine yourself using a remote control to press the button and change the channel, just like you do with your TV. Imagine changing the channel over to a positive thought that is more enjoyable.

**Step 3.** Think about what channel you want to watch. Is your channel funny? Silly? Happy? Proud? Think of a good memory, something that makes you feel proud, or happy, or that makes you laugh. Try to imagine that memory in your mind the way it happened in real life and build up all of the details so that it feels like you’re really there. Or you can think of something in the future that you’re looking forward to. Do you have something like that? If so, think of what it will look or feel like when you’re doing that thing. For example, if you’re looking forward to going camping with your family when you feel better, you might imagine what it will be like when you go camping, how warm the campfire will feel, imagine the sound of the crickets chirping, and so on. Really focus on all of the details, like you’re making a movie in your mind. Let your body relax as you focus on the new channel.

**Step 4.** Practice changing the channel in your brain over to a new channel of your choosing whenever you catch your mind wandering back to the stressful thoughts. Have a few different “channels” or memories that you enjoy so that you always have something good to switch over to when you need it.



## **Apps**

**www.meditationoasis.com**-meditation podcasts for free

**HealthyStar (ebook)**- relaxation exercise for younger children

**RelaxMelodies**- white noise ambience for sleep, meditation, yoga

**Gaze HD Beach Lite and Gaze HD Beautiful Views** - 6 calming beach scenes

**MyCalmBeats**- breathing exercises

**Breath2relax**- Psychoeducation component stress management

**Tactical Breather**- Manage physiological/psychological response to stress; Geared for older teens/adults

**BellyBio**- teaches and monitors diaphragmatic breathing

## **References**

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