

# RELEASE MIND AND BODY TENSION

## De-Stress at Your Desk

When we're stressed, we hold tension not only in our bodies, but in our minds as well. Tense stress responses can get locked in by hard-wired nervous system cues. Being aware and taking steps to release that tension can help you feel more comfortable and productive and improve overall well-being.

**Be sure to check with your health care provider before starting any new activity or exercise routine.**

### Stretching exercises

Stretching should feel pleasant and invigorating. Don't stretch to the point of discomfort. Breathe normally as you stretch. Notice where you hold tension and target those areas. Try out the basic exercises we reviewed and explore the links below for additional routines that can be done right at your desk. Try for a twice daily routine or any time you feel tense.

#### WebMD: Stretches at Work

[www.webmd.com/fitness-exercise/ss/slideshow-stretches-at-work](http://www.webmd.com/fitness-exercise/ss/slideshow-stretches-at-work)

#### Healthline: Work Stretches

[www.healthline.com/health/deskercise](http://www.healthline.com/health/deskercise)

#### Mayo Clinic: Office Stretches

[www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/multimedia/stretching/sls-20076525?s=1](http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/multimedia/stretching/sls-20076525?s=1)

### Ergonomics

How we position our bodies throughout the day can make a difference. If you notice certain areas are consistently strained or tense, your office set-up may be playing a role. Cornell University has outlined some best practices that can help you create an optimal workstation:

<http://ergo.human.cornell.edu/cuergoguide.html>

### Breathing exercises

Breathing exercises are one of the simplest ways to release tension. Breathing slowly and rhythmically makes your body feel like it does when you are relaxed. This sends a message to your brain to calm down. It also relaxes you by clearing the mind of other thoughts as you focus on your breathing. Here are some examples of basic breathing exercises:

#### Belly breathing

- › Sit in a comfortable position.
- › Put one hand on your belly just below your ribs and the other hand on your chest.
- › Take a deep breath in through your nose, and let your belly push your hand out. Your chest should not move.
- › Then loosely pucker your lips and exhale through your mouth, letting your belly hand go back in.
- › Take your time with each breath. You might like to add a calming word, such as "Peace" or "Calm" with each inhale and exhale. Try to repeat 5-10 times.

#### 4-7-8 breathing

- › To start, put one hand on your belly and the other on your chest as in the belly breathing exercise.
- › Take a deep, slow breath from your belly, and silently count to 4 as you breathe in through your nose.
- › Hold your breath as you silently count from 1 to 7.
- › Breathe out slowly through your mouth counting to 8. Try to get all the air out by the time you reach 8.
- › Repeat 3 to 7 times or until you feel calm. (Count can be reduced proportionally if you feel uncomfortable.)

## Mental visualization

Mental visualization, also called guided imagery, is a method in which you use your imagination to direct your thoughts to a peaceful, relaxing place. Because of the way the mind and body are connected, when you use your senses to imagine a scene, you feel and react as if you were actually there. Here is an example:

- › Find a comfortable place to sit or feel free to lie down if you're in a private space. Close your eyes. Take a few gentle, deep breaths and let your body relax.
  - › Picture a setting that is calm and peaceful for you. It might be a tropical beach, a mountainside, a quiet meadow, a cool dense forest, a sparkling stream, or any other place that is pleasing and relaxing.
  - › As you imagine this scene, think of what it would feel like to be there – all the sensations in this peaceful setting. What would you see, hear, smell, feel?
  - › Try picturing a path. What do you notice as you move slowly forward on the path? Imagine what you would experience via your five senses.
- › Take a few minutes to feel the calm in this relaxed and pleasant space. Breathe slowly and naturally.
  - › When you're ready, take a nice deep breath, count to three, exhale and open your eyes.
  - › As you go back to your day, see if you can retain some of that sense of calm.

You can do this exercise yourself or follow a guided recording. You could make one of your own, use an app or find one of many guided meditations online, such as at the link below.

## Assorted guided practices

**HelpGuide:** [www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/relaxation-techniques-for-stress-relief.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/relaxation-techniques-for-stress-relief.htm)

### References

Healthline. (2020a, May 5). *Stretches to do at work every day*. <https://www.healthline.com/health/deskercise>

Healthline. (2020b, September 10). *The benefits of guided imagery and how to do it*. <https://www.healthline.com/health/guided-imagery>

Healthwise. (2020a, February 9). *Stress management: Breathing exercises for relaxation* <https://www.cigna.com/knowledge-center/hw/medical-topics/stress-management-uz2255>

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