Non-pharmacologic Pain Management Therapies

Thank you for choosing MCGHealth for your health care needs. We believe that relief of pain is an important part of your care. Your doctor and nurses will work with you and your family to meet the goal of effective pain management.

Relaxed (Diaphragmatic) Breathing

Since breathing is second nature to us, we rarely think about the way that we breathe. Learning to breathe abdominally (through the diaphragm) can promote relaxation, which improves physical and mental health. Most adults begin to breathe by moving their chest and/or shoulders. However, if you watch a baby breathe, you will see that they breathe by moving their belly. The diaphragm is the muscle that controls breathing. Though breathing is an automatic function, the movements of the diaphragm can be controlled voluntarily with training. Learning how to breathe abdominally using your diaphragm can be beneficial in many ways:

• Allows the most efficient exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide with the least effort
• Promotes general relaxation
• Improves circulation
• Removes waste products from the blood
• Slows down heart rate and breathing rate
• Frees the mind

Relaxed Breathing

The best way to begin relaxed breathing is lying down on your back. Once you are comfortable breathing in this position, you can then try it sitting and standing.

• Find a comfortable place and lie down on your back, or sit in a chair.
• Breathe in through your nose slowly, in a natural, gentle way.
• At the same time that you take in each breath, gently expand your belly to fill with air. Keep your shoulders and chest as still as possible. Imagine that you are filling a small balloon inside your belly with air each time you inhale.
• Breathe out through your mouth, emptying your belly and letting it relax. As you breathe out, purse your lips to create a little resistance to the exhale to keep it slow, like gently blowing on a candle to make it flicker. Breathe out as slowly as you can, making each exhale last.
• When you finish your exhale, wait quietly until your body naturally takes its next breath. Take your time.
• Each time you breathe in, imagine a balloon filling with air, and each time you breathe out, imagine the balloon deflating.
• It may help to put one hand on your stomach (over your belly button) and one hand on your breastbone. Watch to see which hand is moving more when you breathe in and out. Try to get the hand on your stomach to move more as you breathe, without forcing it.
• Be sure to breathe in a slow, gentle, and natural way. If you become dizzy or light-headed, take smaller breaths and slow down.

You should practice diaphragmatic breathing frequently for short periods of time. At first, maybe 10-15 times per day for 1-2 minutes each time. Try to practice in different situations, such as lying down, sitting, standing, on a bus/subway. With practice, relaxed breathing can become a quick and easy tool to combat stress.

**Muscle Relaxation**

Muscle tightness/tension is the body's signal that we are under stress. When we experience stress for prolonged periods of time, we may develop chronic tension in our shoulders, back, head, or other areas of our bodies. However, because we are so focused on external concerns, most of us are not usually aware of the tension in our bodies, unless it becomes painful.

Learning to relax your body not only helps prevent muscle tension from turning to pain, but can calm you mentally as well. Muscle relaxation trains you to be aware of tension in your body and control tight muscles that respond to stress. Relaxing your muscles is a skill that takes practice, but once you know how to do it, you can use it to reduce your emotional and bodily tension quickly and easily.

The following is a relaxation exercise that you can use to relax the muscles in your body. You may want to have someone else read it to you, or you can tape yourself reading it, so that you can concentrate on relaxing.

• Begin by getting into a comfortable position and closing your eyes. Use some relaxed breathing to calm yourself. Take about 4 slow, deep breaths.
• Relax your whole face. Start with your jaw and tongue. Are you clenching your teeth? Are you pressing with your tongue? Let all the muscles of your jaw and tongue relax. Allow your teeth to be slightly parted in a natural, unforced way. Your tongue should be loose inside your mouth, resting against the back of your teeth. Next, pay attention to your eyes and forehead. Make sure that you are not squeezing your eyes shut or furrowing your eyebrows. Let your eyes close so that your eyelids barely touch. Your whole face is completely relaxed.
• Now, relax your shoulders. Let go of all of the tension in your shoulders and let them drop. Let any feelings of tension in your neck flow away. Let your shoulders and neck muscles sink into a pleasant state of comfortable relaxation.
• Relax your arms, hands, and fingers. Are you flexing a muscle? Are you gripping anything with your hands? Let your arms feel heavy and relaxed, like a floppy rag doll.
• Let any feelings of tension in your back, chest, or abdomen dissolve and flow away. Let yourself become more and more limp and relaxed with every breath you take.
• Relax your legs, feet and toes. Let go of any tension from your legs. Let your leg muscles sink into a deeper and deeper state of pleasant comfort. Make sure you are not pressing your feet or toes. Let your feet and toes become completely relaxed.
• For the next minute or so, let your entire body become more and more relaxed. Enjoy this feeling of comfort and relaxation, and when you are ready, open your eyes slowly.
and remain quiet for another moment or two.

**Imagery/Visualization**

Imagery, or visualization, is a technique that uses your imagination to create mental pictures. It is used to focus your mind on something pleasant and comforting in order to ease stress and anxiety, and reduce muscle tension and pain. Imagery incorporates all of your 5 senses – sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch. You should try to practice visualization 1-2 times per day until it becomes natural for you. The easiest way to practice imagery is in bed in the morning when you wake up and at night before you go to sleep. With practice, you will be able to go to your special place just by closing your eyes. Try it using the following exercise.

To begin, lie down, get comfortable, and close your eyes. Use some relaxed breathing to calm yourself. Take about 4 slow, deep breaths.

Now, picture yourself in a quiet, special place. A place that is very beautiful and feels peaceful and safe. You are all by yourself and feel totally relaxed, safe, and at peace in this quiet, special place. It can be a place in nature, such as a beach...a lake...a mountain. Or it can be somewhere else, like a garden...a church...a favorite room.

Picture yourself in this quiet, special place as vividly as you can, using all of your senses. Look around. Notice what you see. The colors...shapes...what the light is like. Perhaps the blue of the sky, or the reflection of the light upon the water. Notice what you see in your special place.

Notice the sounds, what you hear. Perhaps the lapping of water against the shore, or the sound of wind rustling in the leaves. Listen to the sounds in your quiet, special place.

Notice the smells in the air. Perhaps the smell of the salt water...or the fresh clean smell of country air...or the smell of pine needles in the forest. Notice the smells.

Feel how warm, or cool the air is against your skin. And picture where you are. Are you lying down? ...sitting?...leaning against something?...standing?

Use all of your senses to make this special place as vivid and real as you can. Memorize the smells, sounds, and sights. Continue to enjoy being in your special place for a minute or two longer. Allow yourself to relax even more deeply. Remind yourself that you can come back and relax here whenever you want. When you are ready, open your eyes slowly and continue to remain still and enjoy your relaxation for another moment or two.

Reference: Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center web site: http://www.stoppain.org/content/pdf/5-youhaveneedstoooo.pdf