

## 5-4-3-2-1

(a self-hypnosis tool for deep relaxation)

This technique can be used to relax in stressful situations, and to re-centre yourself. It can help with pain, trouble sleeping, anxiety and scary thoughts, nightmares and symptoms of post-traumatic stress<sup>4</sup>.

- Find the most comfortable position you can and find something pleasant to focus your eyes on.
- Breathe normally. Your eyes can stay softly open unless you wish to close them or are using this to fall asleep. Keep your head and eyes quite still.
- Open your senses... Now name, **out loud** (to deepen the effect): 5 things you see, 5 things you hear and 5 physical sensations you are aware of in your body. Notice each detail, maybe taking a breath between each one.
- Naming an item more than once or counting on your fingers is fine. If you lose count simply begin again. If pain or discomfort is present, notice what needs to be noticed, then move on to notice other sensations.
- Now proceed to **4 sights, sounds and sensations**; then **3, 2, 1 of each category**.
- Repeat the whole cycle as needed to deepen the effect.
- After, take 5 regular breaths to reorient. To fall asleep, let eyes close at any point.

## Place of Refuge

(visualization for comfort and safety)

Allow your body to rest as comfortably as possible, and prepare yourself for an experience of peace and calm. If you wish, play some music that relaxes you... Let your breath be just as it is, allowing your body to breathe in its own way...

Scan your body for tension or pain, starting at the top of your head and letting awareness flow down through your body – taking your own time... simply noticing.... Wherever you find tightness, pressure or discomfort, invite softening, widening, and easing....

When you feel ready, allow an image or feeling of peacefulness and safety to arrive in your awareness – a beautiful place of refuge – a safe haven from your worries and cares – and when you're there, you feel comfortable, secure, and at ease... everything in this place is just right for you... the perfect temperature... the most soothing sounds... just the right people, objects or animals are present... the most comforting smells or tastes....

Spend as much time as you like in this place... rest... be at peace.... Know that you can return here at any time you wish for refuge, respite, relaxation, and comfort....

## References

Charlie Johnson, MSW and  
Denise Webster, RN, PhD

*Recrafting a Life: Solutions for Chronic Pain and Illness* (2002)  
Brunner-Routledge

Kelly McGonigal, PhD  
*Yoga for Pain Relief* (2010)  
New Harbinger

Belleruth Naperstek  
www.healthjourneys.com

With thanks to the yoga  
psychophysiology teachings of  
Paul Jerry, PhD and Vijai Sharma, PhD

Other relaxation and stress management  
tools are available from Victoria Hospice  
Psychosocial Services.

1952 Bay Street  
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# Relaxation Techniques

Pursed Lip Breathing

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Eye Breathing

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Anxiety Reduction Breathing

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Relief Breath

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Place of Refuge

<sup>4</sup> This can be done safely anywhere except while driving or biking as it narrows peripheral vision.

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## Pursed Lip Breathing

(for shortness of breath)

Shortness of breath can be physically and emotionally anxiety-provoking and impact quality of life. This technique is one of the most helpful things you can do when you feel short of breath. The lip position helps keep the breathing tubes open and maintains better pressure in the air sacs in the lungs. It can reduce breathlessness, slow rapid breathing, help empty stale air out of the lungs. This method of breathing can increase breathing volume and lengthen the exhale, which helps with anxiety. It also encourages the contraction of the abdominal muscles, moving the diaphragm up to empty the lungs more fully, allowing the fullest possible in-breath<sup>1</sup>.

- **Breathe in slowly through your nose** as though smelling something delicious. Relax your neck and shoulders as much as possible.
- Lean slightly forward and **softly, gently, s-l-o-w-l-y blow out through pursed lips** as though cooling hot soup or using the breath to flicker a candle. Do not force the air out.

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1 At first, breathe without counting; over time, gradually lengthen exhale towards one-and-a-half times as long as the inhale (2 in to 3 out for example).

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## Eye Breathing

(for acute pain or anxiety)

This intervention can rapidly help separate you from feelings of pain, discomfort or disturbing thoughts. It can be used in emergency situations and times of acute pain or anxiety while waiting for medical interventions to take effect.

- Sit or lie as comfortably as able, breathing as normally as possible.
- Begin to link your eyes closing with your own breathing rhythm, just as your breath is right now.
- **Open your eyes while breathing in and allow them to close while breathing out.**
- Continue breathing, establishing a distinct rhythm all your own.
- As you inhale (eyes open) and exhale (eyes closed), you may want to imagine adding a colour to the inhale – any colour that you find soothing or healing – a colour that offers the kind of peacefulness and comfort you are looking for.
- After a while, you might consider colouring the exhale as well – any colour that represents something you want to eliminate or release.
- Continue breathing... (eyes open) breathing in that healing colour, (eyes closed) breathing out that releasing colour, as long as needed.

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## Anxiety Reduction Breathing

(in-cool, out-warm)

This technique stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system – activating the body’s natural relaxation response. It can be practised at anytime and anywhere<sup>2</sup>.

- Bring your attention to the breath, just as it is, allowing your body to breathe in its own way.
- Let your attention come to your nostrils or the back of the nose, wherever the sensation of air moving is strongest and **feel the breath moving** there.
- Begin to notice the temperature difference between in-breath (cool) and out-breath (warm) and pay attention – feeling this difference for one to several minutes.
- If you like, silently repeat to yourself “in-cool, out-warm” to deepen the effect.
- Continue for a few minutes to allow the practice to work. Your body’s own relaxation response will help distress and anxiety subside naturally<sup>3</sup>.
- When you feel finished, count yourself up through five regular or deeper breaths, becoming increasingly alert and refreshed at each breath.

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2 In case of clinical depression, balance this technique with some deeper breathing or gentle activity.

3 This technique can be used alone or while waiting for medication to take effect.

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## Relief Breath

This breath can be used in times of pain (acute or chronic), stress, or anxiety. It can increase your sense of safety and comfort, and your ability to respond to challenging situations.

- Begin by slowing your exhale slightly by breathing out through softly pursed lips.
- Let your belly draw back and widen with each exhale.
- To inhale, close your lips and release any belly tension – this relaxing will allow the most natural in-breath possible to flow through your nostrils and into your lungs.
- Over time, intend towards gently lengthening the exhale to a count of 6 or 8, and inhale for a count of 3 or 4.
- Allow the out-breath to be intentional and complete without strain, and the in-breath to be as relaxed and effortless as possible.
- Continue for as many rounds as desired.