

Learning how to relieve stress by turning on the relaxation response



What makes up the relaxation response?

The relaxation response consists of two main steps:

- 1 Repeating a word, sound, thought, phrase or muscular activity, and
- 2 Returning to the repetition, if you get distracted by other thoughts.

The response can be achieved by **using the mind to calm the body**--slow breathing, prayer, mindfulness--or **using the body to calm the mind**--yoga, petting an animal, gardening, running, rowing, surfing, dancing, paddling, and other repetitive sports.

How does the relaxation response shut down the fight-or-flight response?

Relaxation Response decreases:



- heart rate
- blood pressure
- breathing rate
- muscle tension
- your perception of stress

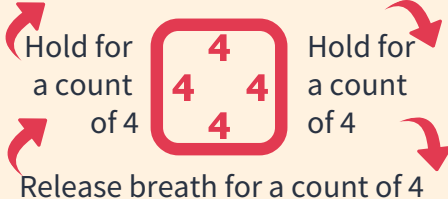


Turning on the relaxation response brings your brain into the present moment and lets you realize you are safe. **When you are in the present moment and feeling safe, your mind and body turn off the stress response.**

What are some easy exercises to bring on the relaxation response?

Box Breathing

Breathe in for a count of 4



Physiologic Sigh

1. Take a deep breath in.
2. Take another small sip of air to fill your lungs.
3. Release the air to a count of 7-10.
4. Repeat.

Body Scan

1. Check your body for tension.
2. Start at your head and go to your toes contracting & relaxing each muscle.



These exercises are **free, accessible at any time** of the day or night, and **require no equipment**. Doing these exercises or a similar activity for just a few minutes several times a day can prevent stress from building up.



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Adapted from a 2022 SPIN Conference workshop, "Stress Management Basics for Stressed-out People", by **Dr. Matthew Wappett** from Utah State University. You can access the video of his presentation at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d5RF6syOxBE>. Also check out the National Institutes of Health infographic "Press Reset on Stress" at <https://files.nccih.nih.gov/press-reset-on-stress-flyer.pdf>.