

Non-Drug Pain Relief: Relaxation with Breathing Exercises

Relaxation is resting to lower tension. One way to relax is to use breathing exercises. Breathing exercises do not replace your pain medicine. They work with your pain medicine to help you have better pain relief.

How Breathing Exercises Help

Breathing exercises are used to help reduce the stress that can cause muscle tension. These exercises alone may not lower your pain, but they can help relax tense muscles that may add to the pain.

Supplies

- Relaxing music (CD, digital music or radio)
- Headphones
- A room that is comfortable and private

Directions

1. Find a quiet room where you can get into a comfortable position to relax. Close your eyes.
2. Do not fold your arms or cross your legs. This may cut off circulation and cause numbness and tingling.
3. Turn on the music at a volume you find relaxing.
4. Breathe in deeply. Let out your breath like you are whistling. Do this 3 times. This will help you to relax.
5. Think of a calm, peaceful setting or a place you have enjoyed visiting that will help you relax.

This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

6. Picture your body as very light, floating, weightless, very limp or comfortably warm. Think of a picture in your mind that will help you to relax and then begin your breathing exercises.
7. Breathe in deeply. Tense your muscles or any group of muscles you choose. For example, make a fist, clench your teeth, close your eyes tightly, or draw your arms or legs up as tightly as you can.
8. Hold your breath and keep those muscles tense for a second or two.
9. Relax your muscles as you breathe out.
10. Start with the muscles in your lower legs, focusing on one leg at a time. Work your way up your body to your head, tightening and relaxing each muscle group.
11. If you want a shorter relaxation exercise, combine muscle groups. For example, tense and relax the muscles in both legs together instead of each leg separately.
12. There is music available that will talk you through a series of breathing exercises to help you relax. If you use this method, focus on what the speaker is saying.
13. Use relaxation at least 20 minutes a day. It is best to try breathing exercises before your pain becomes severe, or while you are waiting for your pain medicine to work.
14. If you are keeping a Pain Management Log, write down the breathing exercises and how they worked for you.