

MINI-RELAXATION EXERCISES: A QUICK FIX IN STRESSFUL MOMENTS

Mini-relaxations are stress busters you can reach for any time. These techniques can ease your fear at the dentist's office, thwart stress before an important meeting, calm you when stuck in traffic, or help you keep your cool when faced with people or situations that irritate you. Whether you have one minute or three, these exercises work.

When you've got 1 minute

Place your hand just beneath your navel so you can feel the gentle rise and fall of your belly as you breathe. Breathe in. Pause for a count of three. Breathe out. Pause for a count of three. Continue to breathe deeply for one minute, pausing for a count of three after each inhalation and exhalation.

Or alternatively, while sitting comfortably, take a few slow deep breaths and quietly repeat to yourself "I am" as you breathe in and "at peace" as you breathe out. Repeat slowly two or three times. Then feel your entire body relax into the support of your chair.

When you've got 2 minutes

Count down slowly from 10 to 0. With each number, take one complete breath, inhaling and exhaling. For example, breathe in deeply, saying "10" to yourself. Breathe out slowly. On your next breath, say "nine," and so on. If you feel lightheaded, count down more slowly to space your breaths further apart. When you reach zero, you should feel more relaxed. If not, go through the exercise again.

When you've got 3 minutes

While sitting, take a break from whatever you're doing and check your body for tension. Relax your facial muscles and allow your jaw to open slightly. Let your shoulders drop. Let your arms fall to your sides. Allow your hands to loosen so there are spaces between your fingers. Uncross your legs or ankles. Feel your thighs sink into your chair, letting your legs fall comfortably apart. Feel your shins and calves become heavier and your feet grow roots into the floor. Now breathe in slowly and breathe out slowly.

For more relaxation techniques and other solutions to control stress, check out the Special Health Report from Harvard Medical School, *Stress Management: Approaches for preventing and reducing stress* at http://www.health.harvard.edu/special_health_reports/stress-management-approaches-for-preventing-and-reducing-stress?utm_source=HEALTHbeat&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=HB111012.