

Taming Amygdala

Weekly Routine to Calm the Sympathetic Nervous System

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Breathing Exercises (see examples below) 3 x daily					
Progressive Muscle Relaxation / Body Scan					
Guided Meditation					
Visualization Techniques					
Music-Stimulated Relaxation					
Exercise - Cardio					
Yoga, Tai Chi or Qigong					
Baths, Massages, Nature Time – Body Relaxation					
Retreats or Time Away					
Alternate Nostril Breathing Technique					
3 Minute Breathing space					
Aroma Therapy					

Descriptions of Exercises

***Breathing Exercises**

What is it? The way you breathe affects your whole body, therefore when you breathe deeply it sends a message to your brain to relax. It allows for you to disengage from negative thoughts, sensations or distractions in order to regain relaxation, energy, and self-control.

Benefits: When you breathe deeply to relax your heart rate, breathing and blood pressure decreases. It reduces the stress response which can improve the immune system and reduce the likelihood of heart disease, improve relaxation, self-control, self-esteem, prevent the relapse of responding negatively to unwanted stimuli.

Tips: sit and lie in a comfortable position in a quiet distraction-free setting. Put one hand on your belly and one hand on your chest

<https://www.webmd.com/sleep-disorders/muscle-relaxation-for-stress-insomnia>

***Progressive Muscle Relaxation / Body Scan**

What is it? A deep relaxation technique that tenses or tightens one muscle group followed by a relaxation phase which works to release the tension

Benefits: Relieves headaches, pain, high blood pressure, digestive disturbances, anxiety

Tips: lay or sit in a comfortable position, tensing and then relaxing muscle groups in a specific order such as starting with the lower extremities (feet, legs, etc.) and moving upward ending with your chest, abdomen, and face.

<https://bebrainfit.com/relax-muscles/>

***Guided Meditation**

What is it? In guided meditation, a narrator may explain the dynamics of the mind or different meditation techniques.

Benefits: Meditation can lower stress and anxiety, depression, sleep better, improve immune functioning, and chronic pain.

Tips: Find a quiet space where you are uninterrupted, either lay or sit comfortably, choose a comfortable posture, and begin to breathe deeply in through the nose and out through the mouth.

<https://www.headspace.com/meditation/guided-meditation>

***Visualization Techniques**

What is it? The act of using mental imagery to achieve a more relaxed state of mind. Similarly to day-dreaming, this technique uses your imagination to relax the body when in a state of worry.

Benefits: This technique can not only relax your nervousness but also can reduce your nervousness by improving your relaxation response.

Tips: Make sure you are in a comfortable environment and minimize distractions such as cell phones. To begin, slow down the breath by incorporating some deep breathing exercises. Then, begin visualizing a place or situation that you find very relaxing. Think about your experience there using all of the senses.

<https://www.mentalhelp.net/articles/visualization-and-guided-imagery-techniques-for-stress-reduction/>

***Music-Stimulated Relaxation**

What is it? A relaxation technique that uses music to produce energy or vibration that feels right, good, and comfortable for that person.

Benefit: Listening to relaxing music can increase the effectiveness of the immune system. When music is paired after exposure to a stressor, it significantly reduces the negative emotional state. Once the music has gone through our ears and reached the brain it stimulates the reward pathways which are linked to positive emotions.

Tips: Find a comfortable position on a chair or on the floor. Research shows that Celtic, Indian stringed-instruments, drums, and flutes are very effective at relaxing the mind. Sounds of rain, thunder, and nature sounds may also be relaxing particularly when mixed with other music, such as light jazz, and classical music.

<https://positivepsychologyprogram.com/relaxation-exercises-techniques-music-meditations/>

***Exercise - Cardio**

What is it? “The mind is the body and the body is the mind”- when you take care of one part of the body you are helping the whole system. Studies suggest that a 10-minute walk could be just as effective as a 45-minute workout. The repetitive motion of the exercises has a meditative effect on the brain.

Benefits: Running and/ or walking can stimulate your “feel good” neurotransmitters which are serotonin and norepinephrine. This response can occur during and after an exercise. It lowers stress hormone levels and is great for your overall physical and emotional health.

Tips: Nature has a very calming effect on the mind. Therefore, pairing a cardio exercise outside within nature can increase the meditative effects.

<https://www.health.com/depression/these-are-the-best-exercises-for-anxiety-and-depression>

***Yoga, Tai Chi or Qigong**

What is it? Yoga uses a combination of breathing techniques, exercise and meditation to improve mood. Specifically Restorative Yoga, Gentle Yoga or Yin Yoga is best for calming the nervous system. Qigong is described as a mind, body, spirit movement practice that incorporates postures, breathing techniques, and self-massage. Tai Chi promotes serenity through gentle flowing movements paired with breathing exercises.

Benefits: These practices allow clients to integrate mindful breathing and body awareness. It gives the ability to heal an individual on every level of their being (emotional, physical, mentally and spiritually) as well as promoting a healthy lifestyle, improving mood and benefiting one’s overall fitness.

Tips: First-time practitioners should consider seeking guidance by watching videos or going to a class. Yoga classes titled restorative yoga, gentle yoga or yin yoga would all be great to go to. These teachers can help guide you with specific postures and breathing techniques geared towards your level.

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress->

[management/in-depth/tai-chi/art-20045184](https://www.cmhcweb.com/management/in-depth/tai-chi/art-20045184)

<https://www.cmhcweb.com>

Recommendations from Dr. Schreiber- Pan:

search Lee Holden for guided Qigong exercises. An example of one of his quick guided sessions can be found here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ac08kMK-dyI>

search Rodney Yee for guided restorative yoga sessions. An example of one of his quick guided sessions can be found here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yBP85ISVri4>

***Baths, Massages, Nature Time – Body Relaxation**

What is it? Massages involve kneading, pressing, or patting different muscle groups with the use of massage therapist hands accompanied with different oils. There are many variations of massages such as sweetish, acupuncture and deep tissue. A heated bath can always be relaxing and calm your body down from stress. Walking or surrounding yourself with nature has also been proven to have a calming effect on the mind which has the ability to ground you. Even just looking outside a window can have a calming effect.

Benefits: Massage therapy can help the body relax which in turn allows the body to let go of anxious and fearful thoughts. It can help manage the fight or flight response by imposing the relaxation response. Baths can allow you to relax the entire body which can calm anxiety and lower blood pressure. Nature allows you to unplug from your everyday life. When you leave your stressors behind you are able to recenter and focus your mind, allowing for your body to relax, your brain can recharge and your stress levels can lower. The fresh air also improves one's blood pressure.

Tips: one can learn how to self-massage or go to a massage therapist for relief. Try your baths with Epsom salt magnesium sulfate in the salt has been shown to calm anxiety and lower blood pressure. Also, you can add lavender and other essential oils to breathe in calming scents.

<https://www.verywellmind.com/massage-therapy-for-panic-disorder-2584306>

<http://mentalfloss.com/article/60632/11-scientific-reasons-why-being-nature-relaxing>

***Alternate Nostril Breathing Techniques**

What is it? One cycle of the alternate nostril breathing flow starts with a full exhale. Then inhaling and use your right thumb to close your right nostril. Then, inhale through your left nostril and then close your left nostril with your fingers. Open the right nostril and exhale through this side. Next, inhale through the right nostril and then close this nostril. Open the left nostril and exhale through the left nostril.

Benefits? Similarly to other breathing techniques, this technique can relax your body and mind, reduce anxiety and promote overall well being. It also has been shown to lower an individual's blood pressure, heart rate and respiratory rate. Ultimately, this exercise will help you clear and relax your mind.

Tips: Find a comfortable space with little distraction. Then, sit in a comfortable position with your legs crossed. Place your left hand on your left knee, lift your right hand towards your nose

<https://www.healthline.com/health/alternate-nostril-breathing#benefits>

***3 Minute Breathing Space**

What is it? There are three main steps to this exercise. The first is attending to what it is. This step invites the individual to observe one's thoughts and emotions. One notes these experiences, accepts it and does not try to change it. The second step is focusing on the breath by taking deep complete breathes through the nose and out through the mouth. The third step is attending to the body. At this step the individual notices, observes and accepts ones body sensations.

Benefits: This exercise allows the individual to practice noticing, accepting and then letting go of one's emotions, thoughts, or body sensations. All of these internal functions are related therefore when your breath is slowed and controlled, your body becomes less tense, your blood pressure lowers and your thoughts are controlled.

Tips: Find a safe space with little distraction. Sit in a comfortable position and start to get in touch with your emotions, thoughts, or body sensations.

***Retreat or Time Away**

What is it? We are living in a time period where we are constantly connected, overstimulated, and overwhelmed which can not only lead to feelings of anxiety but poor mental health outcomes. Taking time or going on a retreat will allow you to disconnect and slow down from our fast-paced lifestyle. This could be disconnecting from your phone for a time period or going on a guided retreat for a week or weekend.

Benefits: By going on a retreat or taking time away one can restore their mental focus, become in-touch with their inner self, and regain a sense of stability. Taking time away or going on a retreat will allow you to regain a positive state of mind, decompress and release stress by becoming in sync with the rhythms, sounds, aromas and energies of the natural world around you.

Tips: Going on holistic retreats can surround you with like-minded people who also want to benefit from this experience. At the Chesapeake Mental Health Collaborative there is a Peace in the Wild weekend nature retreat. During this retreat you will be able to eat purely, practice health enhancing exercises such as QiGong, and practice letting go in nature. For more information on this retreat starting on June 14th visit <https://www.cmhcweb.com/peace-in-the-wild>.

***Aromatherapy**

What is it? Aromatherapy is the practice of using different essential oils to enhance your psychological and physical well being. There are two different methods to aromatherapy. One way is by inhaling a scent by a candle, diffuser, droplets of oil into a bath, or spraying an area. The second is by applying oil onto your skin.

Benefits: The benefits of aromatherapy include pain relief, mood enhancement, and increased cognitive functioning. It can help balance you emotionally, reconnect with your inner self, and be mindful of your external sensations. It can also help heal nausea, headaches or fatigue or insomnia as well as promote skin and hair health.

Tips: You can either receive aromatherapy treatments or practice aromatherapy in your own home. This can be by applying bath & shower oil, lighting a candle, skin care products, or using a spray. To benefit from these different methods, make sure to seek out a quiet and comfortable space where you can fully relax and indulge into the different scents. There are also different oils used for different reasons. The best essential oils for anxiety and stress include lavender, Roman chamomile, bergamot, ylang ylang, orange, rose, frankincense and vetiver.

<https://draxe.com/essential-oil-uses-benefits/>