

Living and Coping with Worry, Anxiety and Depression

April 2020

A workbook to accompany the self-help video series available at:

<https://www.cpft.nhs.uk/services/pws/covid-support-videos.htm>

Episode 1: Introduction.

Episode 2: Getting Started: Calming Your Mind and Body

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**Peterborough
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Pride in our adult and specialist mental health services

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Episode 1:

Introduction

FACE COVID

'FACE COVID' is a set of practical steps for responding effectively to the Corona crisis, using the principles of acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT). Here's a quick summary of the key steps, and in the pages that follow we'll explore them all in more depth:

F = Focus on what's in your control

A = Acknowledge your thoughts & feelings

C = Come back into your body

E = Engage in what you're doing

C = Committed action

O = Opening up

V = Values

I = Identify resources

D = Disinfect & distance

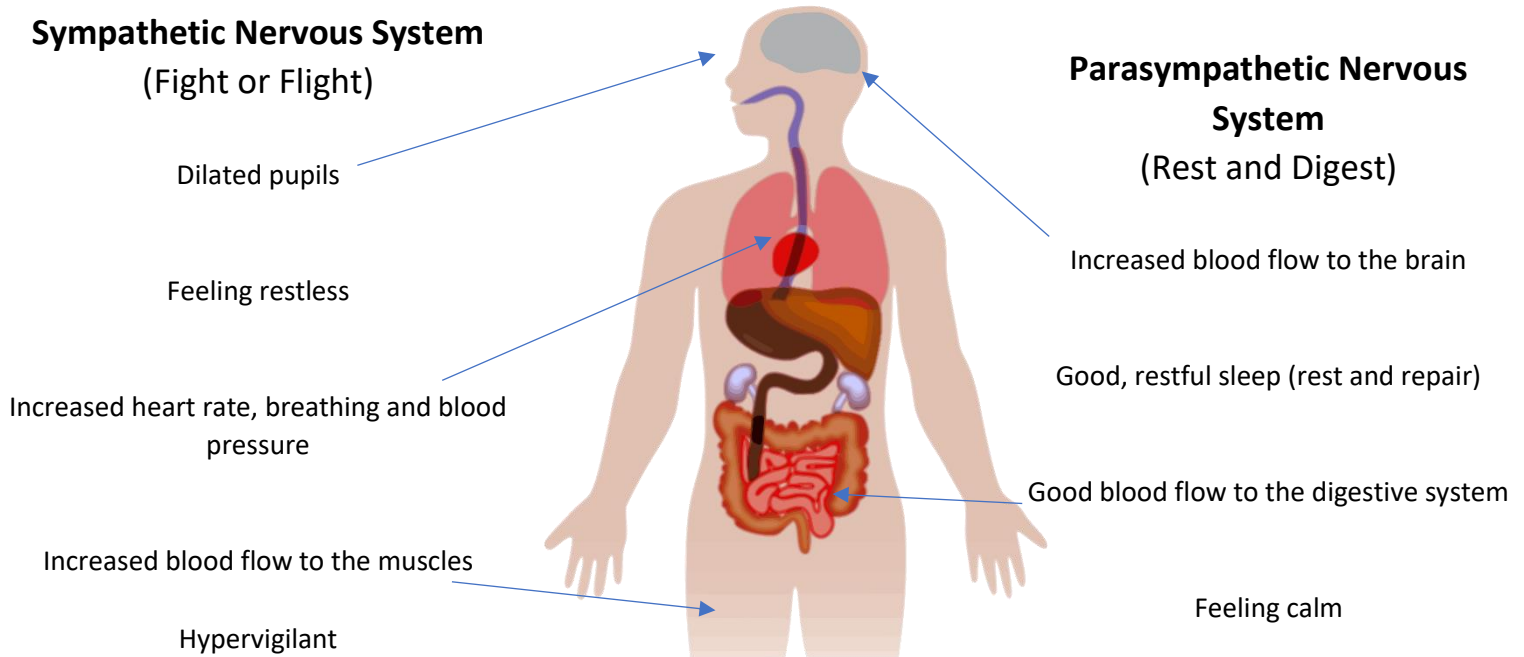
Episode 2:

Getting Started: Calming Your Mind and Body

“Calm Minds Think Differently”

Why it is important to stay calm!

There are two systems in our body – the sympathetic nervous system (you might know it as our fight or flight system) and the parasympathetic nervous system (we call it ‘rest and digest’ system). Because these systems inhibit each other, we can’t be in both at the same time – we are usually in either ‘fight or flight’ or ‘rest and digest’ mode.



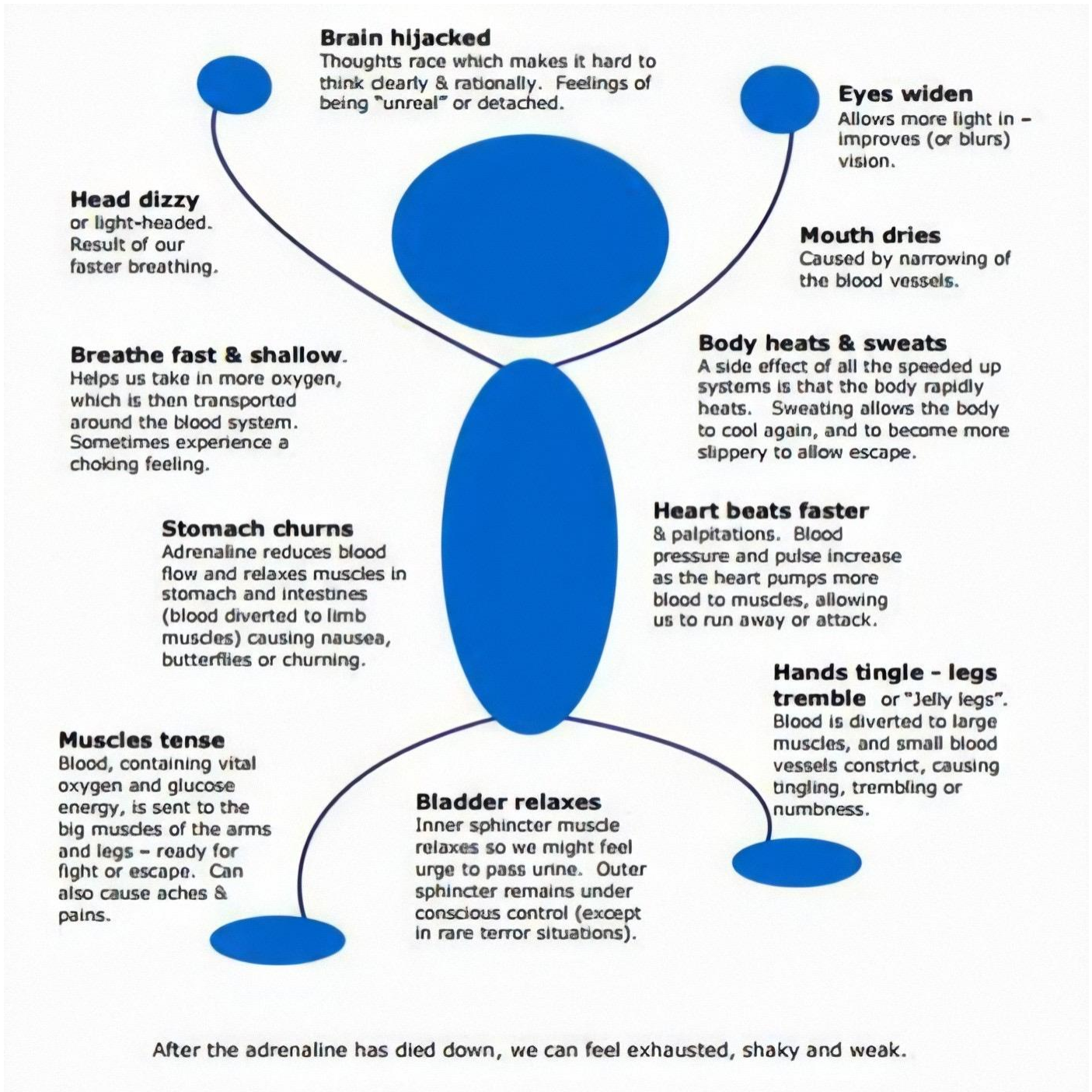
When we feel threatened by something, our fight or flight system is activated and prepares us for self-protection. Coronavirus is an example of a threat to our physical health, people we care about, and our own well-being. So, many of us will often be using our fight or flight system. It is this system that underlies feelings of fear and anxiety.

Sometimes our fight or flight system can be really useful, especially in the short term. For example, if you were crossing a busy street, or trying to avoid people who are coughing when using public transport, being in fight or flight mode can be really helpful; it will help you to quickly spot danger/threats and move quickly to safety if needed.

BUT, if we stay in fight or flight mode for too long, it can be tiring. When we spend a long time in fight or flight mode, all of our blood flow is going straight into our muscles, preparing us to respond; none of this blood flow is going into our digestive system, so we’re not absorbing the nutrients and calories we need from our food. When we’re in fight or flight mode for too long, it can become difficult to sleep, which effects our body’s ability to repair and recover. Blood flow to the brain also reduces and so we can start to feel a bit scatty and forgetful, finding it hard to rationalize our emotions. Over time this **lowers our immune system** and can reduce **mental resilience**.

SO, during this pandemic, managing anxiety is extremely important so that we can get into the ‘rest and digest’ mode more often, allowing us to stay healthy and well throughout this period of uncertainty.

Physiological Symptoms of Anxiety





3-Step Mindful Breathing Space

This breathing exercise can take as little or as much time as you like; 1-2 minutes, or half an hour, depending on how much time you have or want to dedicate, and how much you need to center yourself. You can do this exercise at any time, like when you're waiting for the kettle to boil, when brushing your teeth, or showering, etc.

BUT REMEMBER – this exercise can be very helpful in responding to difficult emotions or worries. Usually, when we feel strong negative emotions, we often try to solve them or get rid of them. By completing a 3-minute

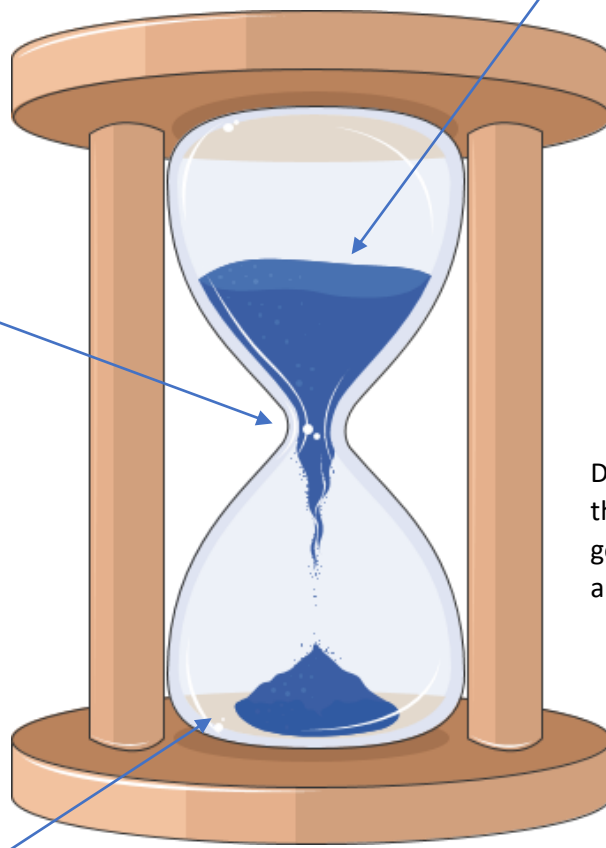
breathing space exercise during these times of strong emotion, we enable ourselves to slow down and stay calm, remain present and aware. It is when we are within this space of feeling calm and aware that we can best make rational and helpful decisions.

We often use an hourglass metaphor to explain this exercise. The sand represents your attention. It starts broadly at the top and collects into one place. The sand then begins to narrow as much as it possibly can, before broadening and settling in a different way.

Step 1: Notice what is going on:

- Notice your environment and what is going on (lighting, sounds, smells, temperature)
- Notice your body and what is going on (tension, temperature, sensations, needs)
- Notice your mind. *What is consuming your attention? What are your thoughts? What emotions are you feeling in this moment?*

Don't try to change any of these things. Don't judge any of these as good or bad. Just accept them as they are and be present with them.



Step 2: Focus on your breath:

Turn your attention inwards and focus on your breathing as much as you can. Notice all the places in your body where you can feel your breath (mouth, nose, throat, and chest).

Choose just one and focus all your attention on this area and the sensation of breathing.

Step 3: Expand your attention and let it settle:

Broaden your focus and direct your attention outward again. Again, notice your mind, your mind and your environment. Don't judge and don't give in to your urges to problem-solve or change things.

Try to pay attention to the entire experience of being you, right here, right now, in the present moment. *What does that feel like? What matters most?*

Breathing Exercises

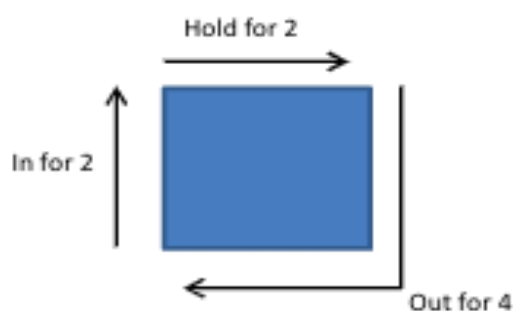
Technique

Set aside some time when you will not be disturbed to practice your breathing technique.

Try to find a quiet and comfortable room which is a good temperature. This exercise can be done either sitting in a chair or lying down. If sitting, try not to slouch, and if lying down, be careful not to fall asleep!

1. Start by noticing your breathing. Is it fast or slow? Deep or shallow? We often find that we automatically take shallow breaths, particularly during the day when we are not thinking about it, or when we are anxious. Tune into how you are breathing in this moment.
3. Place one hand on the side of your chest and one on the upper part of your stomach, at the bottom of your rib cage. Breathe in slowly through your nose. As you inhale, notice which hand is moving. Is it both of them or just one?
4. This time, as you inhale, try to breathe into the hand on your stomach. With practice, aim to have most of the movement in the hand on your stomach, pushing it out away from you, and with little or no movement in the hand on your chest. This can feel very unnatural at first, but it is a good indicator that you are doing deep, abdominal breathing.
5. Practice. Practicing this technique when you are calm will make it easier for you to use it when you are anxious. One way of practicing this technique is to lie on your back with a couple of books on your upper stomach. As you breathe in, try to raise the books slowly and with control, and then as you breathe out, allow them to fall again.

Counting



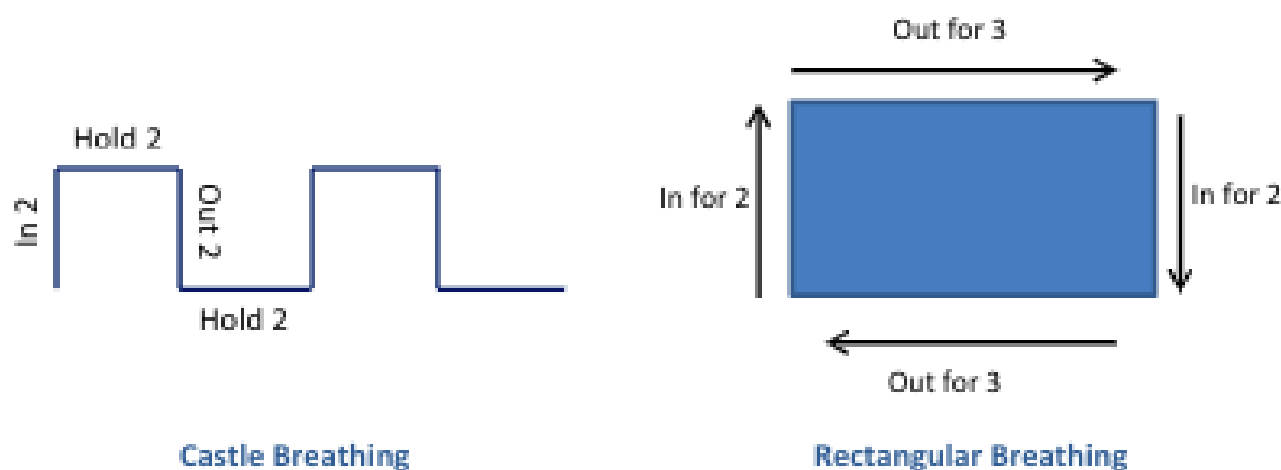
Otherwise known as box breathing or rectangular breathing, this involves tracing the outline of a shape to help you count your breath, keeping it regular and under control.

For example, see the 2 by 2 box to the left. If you find that your breathing is becoming out of control, breathe in for the count of 2, hold

your breath for 2, and then exhale for 4. Try tracing the shape of a box with your fingertip while you do this to help you keep the rhythm going, or grab a pen and draw it as you count.

Once, you've got the idea, try the castle breathing and box breathing below - you might find that these rhythms work better for you. Whichever one you pick, you might find that as you

start to find your rhythm and relax, you can begin to slow your counting down, or count to a higher number, e.g., in for 3, hold for 3, out for 6. Remember, it is a good idea to try these out when you are not feeling anxious, to see which one is most helpful.



Colour Breathing

We can also use colour to help us relax and feel calm. Different colours can promote different emotions and this can be helpful in various situations. Have a go at working through the script below. The first few times you work through this yourself, it might feel a bit clunky as you get used to the process, but soon you will be able to do it from memory or with fewer prompts. Some prefer a friend to talk them through it the first few times, while others record themselves saying the step-by-step script on their phone and listen to their recording each time.

1. Pick a colour – a colour that you find calming.
2. Make yourself comfortable. Close your eyes and bring your attention to your breathing.
3. Whenever any thoughts, images, sounds or sensations come to mind, just notice them, and then gently bring your attention back to your breathing, and your colour.
4. Imagine that you have a balloon in your stomach - notice how the balloon inflates as you breathe in, and deflates as you breathe out. Notice the sensations in your abdomen.
5. Now visualise your colour, perhaps in the form of light or mist. See it in front of you, over you, surrounding you, enveloping you. As you breathe, become aware of breathing in your colour, into your nose, your throat, your chest and abdomen. Now imagine that

colour spreading out within you, into every part of your body and notice the effects it has.

6. Notice the sensations in your body, notice how the colour is affecting how you feel as you allow it to gently flow and infuse your body and mind. Continue to notice the colour and the sensations that it brings. Anytime that your attention wanders, simply notice that it has wandered and then gently bring your focus back to your colour.
7. Whenever you're ready, start to bring your attention back to the here and now, where you are. Open your eyes and look around, noticing what you see and what you hear. Take a couple of breaths and notice the pleasing sensations that accompany this relaxing coloured breathing.

Relaxation Techniques

Grounding exercises

Grounding is a term for bringing ourselves back into the present when we start to feel emotionally overwhelmed and out of control. Anxiety can often make us feel like this, and it often goes with thoughts like 'I can't cope with this anymore' and 'I don't know what to do'. It also often goes hand in hand with tearfulness, breathing very quickly, or starting to feel nauseous. If you find yourself feeling like this it can be really scary, so make sure you know what your most effective grounding strategies are early on and then write it on a post-it note to remind you if you start to get overwhelmed. Below are some ideas of things that other people find work for them:

- **A strong smell** like smelling salts, or essential oils. The part of the brain related to smell is really close to the part of the brain associated with fear and emotional memories. If we are imagining bad things that could happen in the future, or remembering something upsetting that has already happened, a strong smell that wouldn't be present in those imagined/remembered situations can help bring us back into the present. If you're in self-isolation you might use spices that you already have in the cupboard, or ask a friend or neighbour if they could pick you up a bottle of essential oils and drop them through your letterbox!
- **A strong taste**- by the same logic taste can help us to 'snap out of memories or imagined situations that are upsetting. Sour sweets or a hot chili sauce can work.
- **A tactile object**- having a stress ball to squeeze, beads on a string that you can move up or down, a bouncy ball to throw and catch, a soft blanket to stroke, or any other tactile object that you can interact with to keep you focussed on the present can help. It can be particularly helpful if the object is associated with positive memories, i.e. a shell from a beach where you went on holiday, or a gift from a friend.
- **A photograph**- sometimes it can be helpful to ground ourselves by remembering what we have in the present. During self-isolation you might not get to see all of your favourite people, but remembering that they're there and they still love you is important. Keep a photo of the people you can't be with right now to focus in on if you start to feel overwhelmed, and once you've got your breathing in order and are feeling a bit better, why not pick up the phone to them or give them a video call?

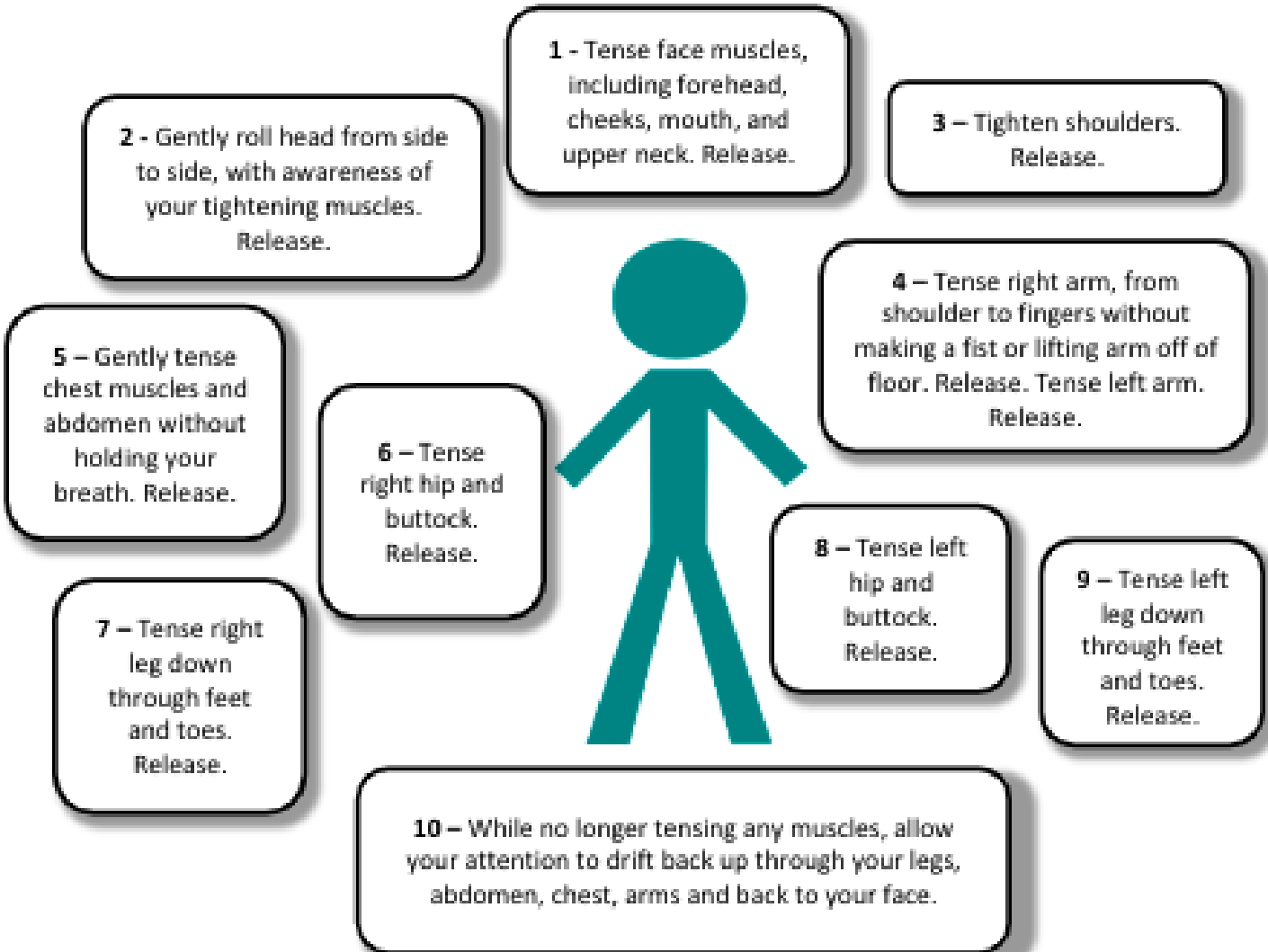


Progressive Muscle Relaxation

When we become anxious or feel under threat, we can tense our muscles without realising, and this can lead to uncomfortable sensations such as headache, stiff neck, painful shoulders, tight chest and difficulty breathing. With practice, this exercise will help you become better at noticing when your muscles are tense, and help you build the skills to relax them on-demand. This works by progressively tensing and relaxing muscle groups throughout your entire body in order to relax your mind and body.

If you have any pain or discomfort with any of the muscle groups it is okay to leave that step out. Throughout the exercise you could also visualise the muscles tensing and a wave of relaxation flowing over them as you release that tension. If you begin to notice your mind wandering, bring your attention back to the muscle group you are working on.

1. Start by finding a comfortable position either sitting or laying down somewhere you will not be interrupted.
2. Take a deep breath into your abdomen, hold for a few moments, and exhale slowly, feeling the tension in your body beginning to flow away with your breath. Continue to keep your breathing deep and calm throughout the exercise.
3. Now begin the steps in the image below. For each step:
 - a. Tense and hold for 5 seconds.
 - b. Then release, and pause for about 10 seconds before moving on.



Imagine a Safe Place

By spending time on building your 'safe place' into a vivid, realistic experience in your mind's eye, you can use it to relax by imagining being there when you are anxious. The more you practice, and the more you involve your senses, the easier it will become for you to immerse yourself in your safe place when in distress.

If you notice any negative links or images entering your safe place, find a different place to build on. Try to avoid your home or bed, and if you are struggling to think of anywhere, then create a new safe place from scratch in your imagination.

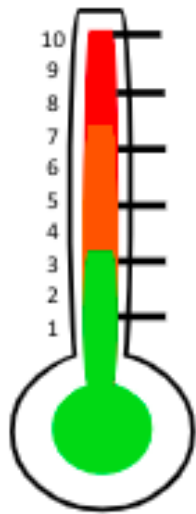


1. Get comfortable in a quiet place where you won't be interrupted. Focus on your breathing, close your eyes, and let any tension in your body go with every exhale.
2. Imagine a place where you can feel calm, peaceful and safe. Perhaps it is somewhere you have been, dreamed about, seen a picture of, or just imagined.
3. Look around – notice the colours, shapes, how the light falls... what else do you notice?
4. Notice the sounds around you, or perhaps the silence. Sounds far away and those nearer to you - those that are more noticeable and those that are more subtle.
5. Think about any smells you notice there.
6. Focus on any skin sensations, the earth beneath you or whatever is supporting you in that place, the temperature, any movement of air, and anything else you can touch.

7. Notice the pleasant physical sensations in your body whilst you enjoy this place.
8. While you're in your peaceful and safe place, you might choose to give it a name, whether one word or a phrase that you can use to bring that image back anytime you need to.
9. You can choose to linger there a while just enjoying the peacefulness. You can leave whenever you want to, just by opening your eyes and being aware of where you are now, and bringing yourself back to alertness in the 'here-and-now'.

Try to explore your safe place when you are feeling calm to build up this sensory detail, ready for when you feel anxious. One way of remembering to work through your senses is to associate each sense with a digit on your hand: touch, sight, sound, smell and taste. Also, in the future, if you find yourself in a pleasant place where you feel calm and safe, take a few moments to be present and absorb the experiences. Notice each sense, and build up a robust account of your current experience, ready to recall the memory in the future as a safe place.

Feeling Calm Diary



Date and Time	Comments: What was the situation? What did you do? How long for?	Relaxation Level		Reactions: What did you notice in your mind? What did you notice in your body? How did you feel? What could you do differently next time?
		Before	After	

Useful Links

Episode 2: Getting started – Calming the Mind and Body

(These links are included in the YouTube video but can't be clicked on during the video)

- Video explaining anxiety - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rpolpKTWrp4>
- Mindful Breathing video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SEfs5TJZ6Nk&t=14s>
- Colour Breathing - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3sINfs3JHLA>
- Box Breathing - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FJzKtH_9I
- Imagine a safe place - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G1bxxiiXc48>



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