

SELF-REGULATION AND CALMING TECHNIQUES

These techniques can be used to help calm your nervous system. The more you practice calming the Vagus Nerve (the body's relaxation regulator), the more automatic self-regulation will become. When you get good at regulation, you get good at being present and mindful. These techniques can help you work through trauma, stress, intense emotions, panic, anxiety, grief, depression, difficulty focusing, and dissociating by lowering cortisol, the stress hormone.

Breathwork is a key to pump the breaks on survival mode by consciously breathing in a rhythm or pattern. Be sure to get the exhale longer than the inhale to remove the carbon dioxide from your blood. Too much oxygen (gasping from breath, rapid, shallow breathing) can cause increased anxiety symptoms like tingling, heart racing, faint headed, dizzy. Slow down and breath deep to activate your parasympathetic nervous system and interrupt fear cycles.

Your nervous system is connected to your emotional responses. Sometimes talking is not enough and you need to show your body that you are safe. You can empower yourself through your body by beginning to practice these strategies 10 minutes a day and/or as needed. *As a sign that it is working, you might have a random sigh/exhale, yawn, a swallow, deeper breath, or felt ease in the body.*

Practice these breathing exercises and other calming strategies:

1. 4-4-4-4 Box Breathing (10 rounds)

Inhale 4 seconds
Hold 4 seconds
Exhale 4 seconds
Hold 4 seconds

2. 4-7-8 Breathing (10-30 rounds)

Inhale 4 seconds
Hold 7 seconds
Exhale 8 seconds (like blowing through a straw)
Shoulders should drop and feel inner calm

3. Deep Sigh

Make it audible;
This is your body's natural way to release tension and reset your nervous system;
Repeat.
Opt: add two sharp inhales through nose, then deep sigh

4. 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 Grounding Technique

5 things you can see
4 things you can touch
3 things you can hear
2 things you can smell
1 way you are anchored to the earth or
1 thing you're grateful for

5. Cold Exposure

Suck ice cube;
Hold ice cube in hands as long as you can tolerate;
Put ice on chest/heart, wrists, or nape of the neck;
Put face in bowl of ice water and hum into water 4 rounds/30 secs; or
Cold shower—put on cold the last 20+ seconds of shower

6. Sing, hum, gargle salt water

Anytime through the day to stimulate the Vagus Nerve;
Hum through gargling to activate Vagus Nerve through vocal chords

7. Neck rotations

Turn head left and notice tension;
Turn head right and notice tension;
Turn head left and look right until you feel a sigh or yawn (could take up to 3 mins);
Turn head right and look left until you feel a sigh or yawn (could take up to 3 mins);
Check range of motion on both sides—it should increase

8. Self-Touch

Ear massage—put fingers in hollow of top of ear; move in circular motions for 1-2 mins;
Stimulate vagus nerve by loosening skin around your ears (gentle, slow tugging out of ears)
Neck massage—gently use circular motions to massage up and down the neck;
Stimulate vagus nerve by lightly pinching/massaging sternocleidomastoid muscle in neck;
Arm squeeze—firmly squeeze opposite arms and forearms in distinct spots working slowly down the arms starting right above the elbow

9. Butterfly Tapping

Cross arms across chest and rest hands near shoulders where comfortable;
Breathe in through nose and out through mouth;
Slowly tap left, right, left, right...for 1-2 mins until feeling calmer;
Say positive affirmations throughout like “I’m safe...I’m resilient...I’m present,” etc...

10. Trapezium Twist

Hold opposite elbow and twist to open up lower back;
5 seconds at low, medium, and high levels each;
Breathe throughout

11. Havening

Cross your arms and rub from shoulders to elbows, deep breathing;
Move from elbows to wrists, deep breathing;
Close eyes if you want and do as long as you want to feel grounded

12. Legs up

Put legs up on a wall for 15-20 mins;
Might feel tingling;
Use anytime, but especially good for recovery after exercise;
Listen to Bible or guided breath work exercise

13. Body Scan Mindfulness

Close eyes, find a comfortable position;
Focus on breath a few minutes;
Start at top of head and slowly work down through body;
Feel sensations like tightness and tension;
Breath through it from head, shoulders, down your body slowly scanning for awareness;
It's really regulating to check in with body

14. Cradling

With nice soft touch, put one hand on back of neck and other on forehead;
Inhaling and exhaling feeling temperature of hands and apply light pressure;
Feel you're present and safe;
Some get emotional with this activity because they're not held and loved often;
Sit for a few minutes and feel deeply loved throughout; feel like a child again;

15. Meditation

Pick any truth and focus on it while you deep breath;
Continue for 1-3 minutes focusing on breath and Word

16. Rocking

Sit down, cross legged;
Hold body around shoulder neck and waste;
Rock side to side or front to back;
30-60+ seconds to enjoy the relaxation;
Simulates feelings of being young and held;
May make some emotional and/or soothing

