



## Return to Calm – Self-Regulating Tips for Mind-Body Health

Creating space for relaxation doesn't have to take up a lot of your time. Just stepping away from something stressful for a few minutes or taking time away from your normal routines and thoughts can give you enough space to feel calmer.

Below are some techniques to activate your parasympathetic nervous system or “relaxation response” to induce a sense of grounding and calm in moments of stress.

### 1) Focus on your breathing:

- Learning to breathe more deeply can help you feel a lot calmer. It takes just a few minutes and can be done anywhere.
- Breathe in gently through your nose with slow, steady breaths to sanitize and warm the air.
- Breathe out slowly and steadily through your nose, or through your mouth with gently pursed lips, releasing tension as you exhale.
- Try to keep your shoulders down and relaxed.
- Place your hand on your stomach—it should rise with your inhale and fall with your exhale.
- Count as you breathe. Try to work out what is comfortable for you and gradually breathe out at a count longer than your inhale E.g. Breathe in for a count of 4, hold briefly, then breathe out for a count of 7-8.

### 2) Figure 8's:

- Using the pads of your fingers, apply gentle pressure to your temples in a figure 8 pattern.
- Practice the gentle breathwork as you continue to make figure 8's.
- This method can also be applied to your jaw area to help you relax your jaw muscles.

### 3) Eyebrow/forehead smoother:

- Place the pads of your middle and ring finger on the bridge of your nose and apply light pressure while you breathe in and out a few times.
- Next, slide your fingertips up and over your eyebrows, moving outward to your temples.
- Repeat this motion, slowly moving upward a bit more each time to cover and smooth your forehead area.

#### **4) Inchworm for the scalp:**

- Starting at your hairline, gently apply pressure with the pads of all fingers, then release.
- Move along your scalp, continuing to apply and then release pressure inch by inch to relax peripheral nerves.
- Similarly, you can apply fingertip pressure in small circular movements all over the scalp.
- Massage is great for the scalp and hair because it increases blood flow, bringing oxygen and nutrients to the area.

#### **Inchworm for the hands:**

- Hold the base of a finger between the thumb and pointer finger of your alternate hand, applying pressure.
- Gradually slide your thumb and forefinger from the base of the finger to the fingertip.
- Repeat with each finger.
- Hand massage helps increase circulation of oxygen and nutrients to your extremities and provides self-soothing touch that induces positive hormones.

#### **5) Butterfly hug:**

- Cross your right hand to your left shoulder/arm and your left hand to your right shoulder/arm.
- Apply gentle pressure by stroking down from shoulder to elbow or offer your arm muscles a gentle squeeze from shoulder to elbow.
- Alternating taps left-right-left-right on your shoulders can also be very grounding and relaxing for the brain.

#### **6) Active relaxation:**

- Gentle exercise, such as a few minutes of walking at your own pace, can help you feel relaxed.
- If you have restricted mobility, try seated exercises.

#### **7) Spend time in nature:**

- Spending time outside or in an indoor green space can be healing for your physical and mental health.
- Take a moment to notice any trees, flowers, plants or animals around you. This kind of mindful observation can lower blood pressure and have calming benefits.

#### **8) Get creative:**

- Getting in touch with your creative side, whether it is through visual art, writing, musical expression, etc., can help you feel calmer and more relaxed.
- Try not to focus on the finished product; instead focus on enjoying the process.

**9) Visualization:**

- Close your eyes and picture yourself somewhere peaceful and serene. Even if you can't physically get away, your imagination can transport you to a place where you feel at ease.
- You might choose a memory of somewhere you've been, or a place you imagine in your mind's eye. Think about the details of this place. What does it look like? What kinds of colours and shapes can you see? Can you hear any sounds? Is it warm or cool?
- Let your mind drift and your body relax.

**10) Listen to music:**

- Music can relax you, connect you to your emotions and distract you from worrying thoughts.
- Listen to your favourite songs or explore a new style of music.
- Dance, hum and sing along or just close your eyes and enjoy the relaxation response.
- Really listen to the music. Can you pick out different instruments? Can you hear a drum beat or a certain rhythm? Focus on the music, and let other thoughts fade away.

**11) Take a tech break:**

- Is technology stressing you out? Taking a break, even a short one, can help reduce the strain on your eyes, body and mind.
- Try turning your phone off or to silent for an hour, if you can.
- Step away from the TV, computer screens and social networks. Use that time to instead do something relaxing, rejuvenating and kind for yourself.

Practicing these exercises can increase your capacity for resilience and emotional regulation and they are useful stress reduction tools to support your pre- and post-natal journey.

When times are challenging, it may also be beneficial to seek support from your social network and medical professionals, such as your Family Health Team.

***INHALE . . . EXHALE . . . REPEAT.***