



melmed center

CHILL OUT!

When we feel stressed or under pressure, our body does things to help protect us. Some of us make our muscles tight as a suit of armor (like what happens if someone is going to hit you in the stomach). Some of us breathe really fast or hold our breath a lot. Others of us get funny feelings in our stomachs and feel like we have to go to the bathroom a lot.

These things are our bodies' way of helping us to get ready to either fight or run away from the danger, even though the danger may only be that we are afraid to do poorly on a test, or upset someone. Our bodies don't really care what is stressing us; they only want to protect us. The trouble is that if our muscles are tight for a long time they start to hurt, like a headache. If we breathe fast for too long, we can get dizzy and feel sick. If our stomach is upset, we can get a stomach ache or have diarrhea.

You can help yourself to chill out by doing a couple of simple things: Change your breathing and loosen your muscles! We suggest you practice these skills daily for 1 month. Turn this page over to see how easy it is to CHILL OUT!

See Over→

Control your breathing

- Take a slow, deep breath in through your nose.
- Breathe all the way in and when you can't get any more air into your lungs, breathe out gently through your mouth, as if you are blowing to cool off hot soup. Feel your body let go of any stress or tension.
- Try counting as you breathe in and out (Count to four as you breathe in, and then count to four as you breathe out).
- Be sure to try to fill your lungs completely as you breathe in, and to empty your lungs completely as you breathe out.
- Repeat this breathing technique ten times and watch how you feel better with each breath. Even doing it one time helps!

Control your body

- Tense all the muscles in your face. Squeeze your eyes tight, clench your jaw, and frown, all at the same time. Hold this for three seconds (count to yourself one potato, two potato, three potato)
- Now relax those muscles and notice the difference in how the muscles feel. If you pay attention to how your muscles feel, you will learn when you need to relax them. Do this tensing and relaxing of your face three times.
- Now tense your chest, fists, arms and stomach. Hold for three seconds and then relax. Again notice the difference in how those parts feel. Do this exercise three times.
- Finally, tense your behind, thighs, and feet (try to push your feet down into the floor), hold for three seconds, and relax. Notice the difference and repeat the exercise three times.

Control your mind

- After you do your deep breathing and relaxing of your muscles, it's time to relax your mind.
- Think of a nice and calm place you have been, maybe a beach or a forest, a field of flowers, or even your room!
- Let your mind imagine that you are there now. Try to see what that place looks like. Try to hear what that place sounds like. Try to smell what smells there might be. Imagine that you are really there right now.
- As you let your mind drift off to that nice place, tell yourself, "I can control my body and my mind. I can calm myself down whenever I get upset." Say this over and over to yourself.

Practice these skills

- Some of the above skills might work better for you than others. Talk to your parents about which you like best. Change them in any way you might like.
- Try to do all three exercises at least once a day. Find a good time when you don't have other things to do (when you go to bed is a good time).
- After you have practiced the skills many times, try to use them in other places, like on the bus or in the car. Practice them in school. No one needs to know what you are doing if you don't want to tell them, but lots of kids might want to learn how to do it for themselves (maybe you could teach them!).
- It takes a while to be good at these things. Just like learning to ride a bicycle with no hands takes practice, so do these "Chill Out" exercises. Work at them and you will soon become an expert!