

RELAXATION

after brain injury



Brain injury can shift the way the brain communicates, often leading to feeling overwhelmed or that things are out of your control. It can also be difficult to stay in the present instead of reviewing the past or having concern over the future. Over time, this stress could contribute to health, mental health, or substance use challenges. Relaxation and developing positive coping skills as a habit can help to combat the significant changes after a brain injury. Finding 1-2 strategies and using them repeatedly during times of stress and relaxation can lead to long-term change.

Keep your mind active

connect

- reading or listening (books, magazine, audiobooks, podcasts)
- watching videos or movies
- listening to, dancing to, or playing music
- talking (support group or trusted person)

reflect

- create and recite positive words of encouragement
- adding to self-love or care (massage, pampering, "me-time")
- giving back (writing, volunteering, donating)
- meditation, breathing, & visualization

create

- writing (ex. journaling, creative writing, contributing to a blog or newsletter)
- creating something new (woodworking, artwork, cooking, scrapbooking, jewelry, crafting, etc.)

enjoy

- exercise (walking, running, lifting weights, stretching, yoga, sports, etc.)
- play games, work on puzzles, or making time for your hobby
- visiting local spots (parks, museums, etc.)

Practice mindfulness

active

Having attention to the present while doing an activity. Some examples might be:

- while eating, savor and slowly take each bite appreciating the aroma, texture, flavor of food, and the swallowing process.
- while walking, be aware of your breath, balance, posture, and stepping with attention to what you see, hear, and feel.

focus

Being aware of the present in every aspect. Some examples:

- attention to breath - feel the air entering through your nose, filling your lungs, and expanding into your lower abdomen. Then, you follow the breath out of the body along that same pathway.
- attention to senses - what you hear, feel, see, smell, and taste in your environment.

grateful

Acknowledging to help redirect negative thoughts into positive concepts. Some examples:

- identify or write at least 3-5 things you are grateful for (certain people, life, the weather, your situation).
- tell the people in your life what they mean to you.
- thank, compliment, or reach out to someone.

Try breathing & relaxation exercises

4:7:8 BREATHING

1. Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound.
2. Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a mental count of four (4).
3. Hold your breath for a count of seven (7).
4. Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound to a count of eight (8).
5. This is one breath. Now inhale again and repeat the cycle three more times for a total of four breaths.

MUSCLE RELAXATION

1. Lie comfortably on the floor/in bed.
2. Take a few deep breaths to relax.
3. Breathe in. Tense the muscles of your feet.
4. Breathe out. Release the tension in your feet.
5. Breathe in. Tense your calf muscles.
6. Breathe out. Release the tension in your calves.
7. Work your way up your body. Tense each muscle group (your legs, then belly/core, then fingers and so on with your arms, shoulders, neck, and face).

BODY SCAN

1. Pay attention to each part of the body for a period of time, from the face and head, over the shoulders, down the arms, and torso, through the pelvis and into the legs and feet.
2. Identify areas of tension and with each breath out, use your breath to expel or release the tension outside of your physical body.
3. Visualize the stress outside your body as a cloud. Continue breathing imagining the cloud moving further away.

BELLY BREATHING

1. Sit or lie flat in a comfortable position.
2. Put one hand on your belly just below your ribs and the other hand on your chest.
3. Take a deep breath in through your nose, and let your belly push your hand out without moving your chest.
4. Breathe out through pursed lips as if you were whistling. Feel the hand on your belly go in, and use it to push all the air out.
5. Take your time with this breathing 3 to 10 times.



APPS & RESOURCES

- Headspace
- Calm
- Stop, Breathe, Think
- Smiling Mind
- BrainLine.org
- Breathe2Relax
- Breathe+
- Sanvello
- GoodTherapy.com Blog
- LoveYourBrain Foundation
- traumacenter.org
- VeryWell Health
- Mighty.com
- www.mindful.org