



# Action for Carers Carer's Relaxation Guide



Relaxation exercises and techniques

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**Caring is very stressful and can often result in a carer experiencing anxiety and low mood.**

We are here to support you to keep yourself as well as you can.

Relaxation is a really important activity to help with wellbeing. Ideally it's done on a daily basis but finding time to do this as a carer is a challenge.

This booklet is a collection of all the exercises and techniques which we have used and found helpful during our Saturday morning online relaxation sessions.

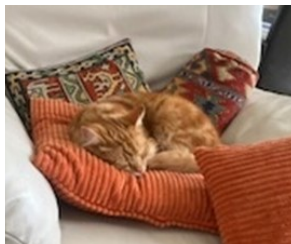
These exercises are simple and short. They can be practised in five or so minutes, so please, as a carer find time to look after *you*.



*Rachel Brennan*

**Adult Carer Support Manager,  
Action for Carers Surrey**

### How to do these exercises and activities



**How and where you are positioned when doing these exercises is important.**

When you are doing any of these techniques and during online sessions always ensure you are in a comfortable position – lying on a bed or sitting on a chair supporting you, feet firmly on the floor and arms being supported in your lap.

When you first try breathing exercises, the effects will be subtle, but it will become more powerful the more you practice.

Most experts recommend doing breathing exercises at least twice a day.

### Wellbeing sessions

We run regular online wellbeing sessions. Please join us!



#### Relaxation

**Third Saturday of the month, 10-10.45am.**

Start your weekend with some easy relaxation exercises which you can then use daily to manage stress.



#### Mindfulness

**Weekly daytime sessions Tuesdays, 4-4.45pm.**

**PLUS monthly evening sessions, 7-7.45pm  
on second Monday of the month.**

Take some time for yourself and join our mindfulness sessions where we'll practice techniques to promote wellbeing and reduce stress.



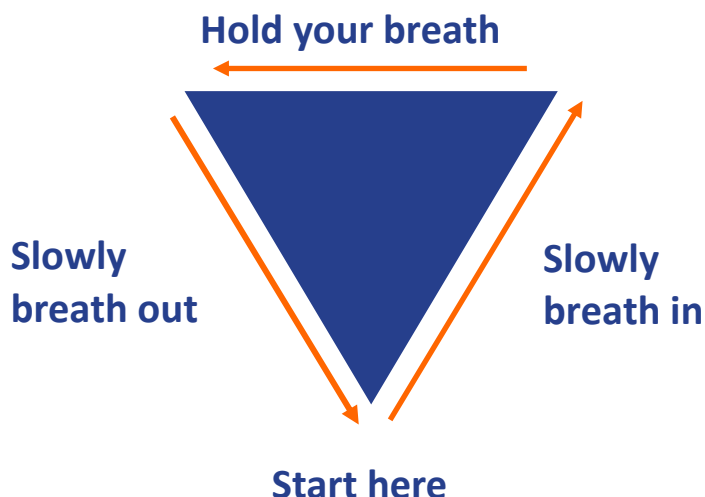
#### Yoga

**Weekly, Mondays, 10.30-11.30am.**

Start the week with a positive, fun yoga session to look after yourself in both body and mind.

*Look out for details of these sessions, and others (both online and face to face), in our Hubs and in our newsletter and emails. Events are also all listed on our website: [www.actionforcarers.org.uk/events/](http://www.actionforcarers.org.uk/events/)*

### Upside down triangle



**Imagine an upside down triangle in front of you.**

Start at the point at the bottom and breathe in slowly as you move up one side of the triangle.

Hold your breath as you go along the top and then slowly breath out as you come back down the side to the point at the bottom.

As you slowly exhale, consciously release any tension, particularly in your shoulders or arms, allowing yourself to feel a sense of relief and relaxation. If you find your breathing pace uncomfortable, adjust the size of your triangle to suit you.

Repeat as many times as you need.



### Box breathing

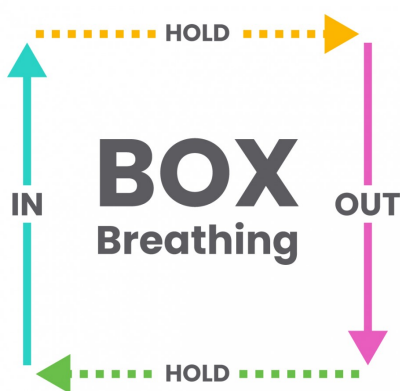
This breathing exercise is called box breathing because you visualize a box with four equal sides in order to perform the exercise.

You can use this before, during, or after stressful or anxiety-provoking experiences.

You can also use anything around you which is square (windows, door frame etc) to help you focus if you need.

You can also count if that helps you.

- **Step one:** breathe in through your nose while counting to four.
- **Step two:** hold your breath while counting to four.
- **Step three:** breath out while counting to four.
- **Step four:** hold your breath while counting to four.





### Humming or bumblebee breathing

Humming breathing, sometimes called Bhramari pranayama or bumblebee breathing, is a slow paced breathing technique that is accompanied with a humming bee sound when you are exhaling.

This type of breathing can relieve stress, agitation, and anger as well as calm your mind and body before you go to sleep.

- **Step one:** breathe in and out through your nose, relaxing your face and jaw.
- **Step two:** place your index fingers on the cartilage of your ears, blocking out any noise or sounds.
- **Step three:** take a deep breath in through your nose and exhale through your nose and at the same time as breathing out make a humming or buzzing sound, keeping your ears blocked.
- **Step four:** Repeat this for at least six cycles of breathing.



### 4-7-8 breathing

The 4-7-8 breathing exercise can help quickly manage any anxiety and stress.

It's done by breathing in for four seconds, holding that breath for a count of seven, and then exhaling for eight seconds while making a whooshing sound by placing the tongue behind the front teeth



- **Step one:** inhale quietly through your nose while mentally counting to four.
- **Step two:** hold your breath while mentally counting to seven.
- **Step three:** exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound while mentally counting to eight. This is one cycle.
- **Step four:** inhale again and repeat the cycle three more times for a total of four cycles.

## Breathing techniques

The goal of Mindful breathing is a calm, non-judging awareness, allowing thoughts and feelings to come and go without getting caught up in them.

*“If you let cloudy water settle, it will become clear. If you let your upset mind settle, your course will also become clear.”*

– Buddha’s Little Instruction Book

### Mindful breathing process

Bring your attention to your normal breathing. Notice any physical sensations as each breath comes in and goes out. Let your breath just be, don’t try to change it in any way. Notice its own rhythm and pace. Be aware of your abdomen rising with the in-breath and falling with the out-breath.

Thoughts will come into your mind, and that’s ok, because that’s what our human mind does. Simply notice the thoughts, then gently bring your attention back to your breathing.

You don’t have to follow those thoughts or feelings, don’t judge yourself for having them. It’s ok for the thoughts to be there. Just notice the thoughts and let them drift on by, gently bringing your attention back to your breathing.

Whenever you notice your attention has drifted off and is becoming caught up in thoughts and feelings, every time gently bring your attention back to your breathing.

It’s ok and natural for thoughts to enter into your awareness and for your attention to follow them. No matter how many times this happens, just gently keep bringing your attention back to your breathing.

### Leaves on a stream

Sit quietly, close your eyes if that feels comfortable, and gently bring your attention to your breathing, then start to notice the thoughts and feelings that come into your mind.



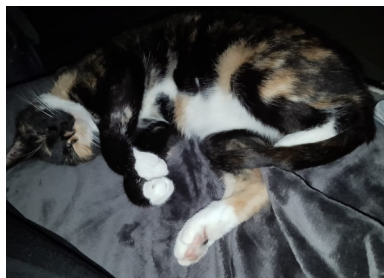
Imagine yourself sitting by a stream. There are leaves floating on the water, passing you and floating away. As you notice each thought or feeling imagine placing it on a leaf as it floats down the stream. Put each thought or feeling on a leaf and watch it float away.

There is no need to look for thoughts, just let them come, and as they do place them on to a leaf.

Your attention will wander and that's ok as it is what our mind does. As soon as you notice your mind wandering, gently bring your attention back to the thoughts, placing them on to leaves.

After a few minutes, bring your attention back to your breathing for a moment, then open your eyes.





### The Five Finger Exercise

This takes less than 10 minutes, it is very effective for relaxation and for grounding.

You can use your own ideas for situations to link to each finger.

- **Touch your thumb to your index finger.**  
As you do, go back to a time when your body felt healthy fatigue, when you had just engaged in a physical activity – perhaps played tennis, jogged or had a warm bath.
- **Touch your thumb to your middle finger.**  
As you do, go back to a time when you had a loving experience – maybe a warm embrace, or an intimate conversation.
- **Touch your thumb to your ring finger.**  
As you do, think of the nicest compliment you have ever received. Allow yourself to really appreciate it and accept it.
- **Touch your thumb to your little finger.**  
As you do, return to the most beautiful place you have ever been. Dwell there for a while...

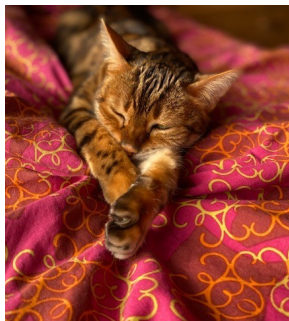




### Five Finger Breathing

- Sit or stand comfortably with your back straight
- Place one hand out in front of you, palm open
- Using the pointer finger of your opposite hand start at the base of your thumb and trace upwards as you breathe in
- Pause at the top of your finger
- Breathe out as you follow the inside of your thumb
- Repeat with the rest of your fingers





### Body scan

Begin by taking a moment to allow your body to settle into a comfortable position. Close your eyes if this feels comfortable. Let your shoulders soften and drop.

Take a full breath in and a long breath out.

Begin by bringing your attention to your body.

Notice the feeling of the weight of your body on the chair, or the floor, wherever you are. As you breathe notice how your chest and abdomen expand to allow the air to enter your lungs. What sensations are you aware of?

As you exhale, slowly breathe out any tension and notice the sense of relaxing more deeply.

Now bring your attention to the top of your head, noticing any sensations in your scalp, down the back of your head and your face.

Now notice your jaw, if you're holding any tension in your jaw let go and let your face be soft and heavy. Relax the muscles around your eyes and your mouth. Breathing in and breathing out slowly.

Now notice your neck and your throat. Let them be soft – let go of any tension.

Notice your shoulders and arms, notice any sensations as you allow any tension to move from your shoulders, down to your upper arms, the elbow, to your forearms, wrists, hands, and out through your fingers. Let your arms be limp and heavy.

Breathing in and breathing out slowly.



## Body scan (continued)

Notice what the fabric of your clothing feels like against your skin. Breathe in and breathe out.

Now bring your attention to your chest and abdomen, feeling the movement in your chest as you breathe. Let go of any tension. Breathing in and breathing out slowly.

Bring your attention to your stomach, noticing if your stomach is tense or tight and just letting it soften.

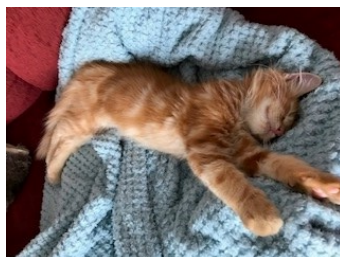
Take your attention to your upper and lower back noticing if you're holding any tension there. Breathe in and breathe out letting go of any tension.

Now continue traveling down to your legs, your thighs, your knees, calf, and shin, your ankles, and finally bringing your attention to your feet. Notice the sensations of your feet against the floor ground, any tension and letting it go as you breathe out.

And as you continue breathing in and breathing out, notice the whole of your body from the top of your head all the way down to your toes. If you find any tension, just breathe it out and relax more deeply.

Focus your attention on the sense of your whole body for a few more breaths.

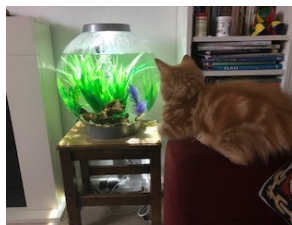
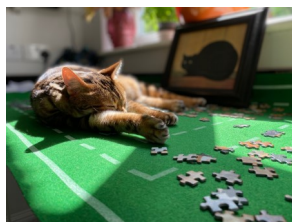
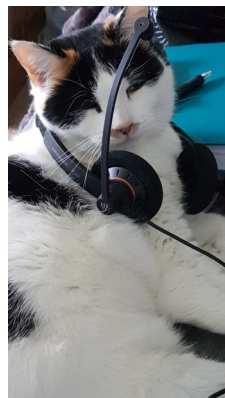
As you take your last few breaths, remain aware of your body as best as you can as you finish with a full deep breath in and a long deep breath out.



## Relaxing activities

### Relaxation suggestions

- ☐ Sit with nature
- ☐ Read a book
- ☐ Have a massage
- ☐ Watch the sunset or sunrise
- ☐ Draw or paint
- ☐ Try Aromatherapy
- ☐ Doodle or do zentangles
- ☐ Watch the colours change on a coloured night light
- ☐ Exercise by walking in a beautiful space
- ☐ Choose a mindful place where you can simply be
- ☐ Listen to music or play an instrument
- ☐ Do a jigsaw
- ☐ Laugh at a joke
- ☐ Watch your favourite film or cartoon
- ☐ Practice Yoga or Tai Chi
- ☐ Go for a swim
- ☐ Stroke your pet
- ☐ Sing or dance or both
- ☐ Write down your worries

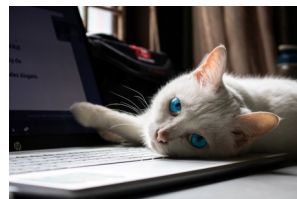


Tick the ones which suit you and add some more that appeal to you...



## Useful relaxation apps and websites

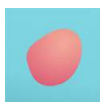
These are a selection of apps that carers have found helpful. Take a look and see what might work for you.



**Buddhifi** has guided meditations, for use in different situations including for stress and difficult emotions, work breaks, going to sleep, waking up and more.



**Clearfear** is a free app from mental health charity Stem4, helping young people to manage anxiety, panic and fears through a series of goal-setting mini-courses.



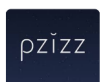
Create music to capture your mood and express how you feel with the **Cove app**. Instead of words, create music to reflect emotions like joy, sadness, calm and anger. You can store your music in a personal journal or sent tunes to someone and let the music do the talking



**iBreathe** is a simple yet powerful app to guide you through deep breathing exercises and breathwork, whether you are struggling with stress, anxiety, insomnia, or are trying to meditate and relax.



**MindShift** app is to help teens and young adults cope with anxiety, changing how people think about anxiety – rather than trying to avoid it, making an important shift and facing it.



**Pzizz** helps you quickly calm your mind, fall asleep fast, stay asleep, and wake up refreshed. It uses 'dreamscapes' to help you sleep better at night or take power naps during the day. This is a free NHS app.



**Triple A** – This touch visualizer app is really relaxing.



**What's Up?** is a fantastic free app utilising some of the best CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) and ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy) methods to help you cope with depression, anxiety, anger, stress and more.

## Techniques that work for me

Which exercise, technique or activity?	When is best to use it?	What can I say to myself to help me use this more often?

***We cannot change the way we are made.***

***We are perfect just the way we are.***

***We may not be able to change an unfavourable environment but we can learn to modify our reactions to it.***

***Through relaxation we can learn to cope with the stressors of modern life.***

# Action for Carers Surrey

**We provide information, advice and support for carers of *all* ages, right across Surrey.**

Our support includes benefits advice, advocacy, guidance on moving and handling, workshops, events, support groups, drop-in Hubs throughout Surrey, resources and more – giving carers a little time out and helping them feel less stressed, and more in control.

We have specialist support for young carers, a support team working in Surrey's hospitals, and also provide training and support for professionals working with carers.

**Find out more at [www.actionforcarers.org.uk](http://www.actionforcarers.org.uk)**

## Action for Carers Surrey

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