

Time for you: ways to relax



At Pilgrims Hospices we recognise that physical illness can affect your mental and emotional wellbeing, which can in turn affect how you feel physically. This leaflet has been written to give you some insight into different techniques and therapies that can help you to reduce some of the stress and anxiety that you may be experiencing.

Although this leaflet has been written with patients in mind, the techniques can be equally beneficial to carers.

Plan something pleasurable

When you are faced with a life limiting illness, you may feel low in mood, tired or physically uncomfortable. This can have an impact on the activities and interests you used to enjoy. You may find that you have stopped doing those things that you once found pleasurable, and this in turn can affect your emotional and mental wellbeing.

Making time to do something pleasurable can help to relax you, to recharge and restore. Plan to do something nice for yourself on a regular basis; once a day or once a week. It doesn't have to be anything big, but simply having a relaxing bath, ordering your favourite take-away, watching a DVD, buying your favourite magazine, or buying yourself some flowers or chocolates.

How to relax

Making time to relax is a good antidote to stress and can both recharge and restore. Below are some techniques that may help you. Don't worry if you find it difficult at first; keep practising and they will become easier.

Breathing technique

Make sure you are sitting or lying comfortably and focus your attention on your breathing. Relax your shoulders and place one hand on your upper chest and the other hand on your abdomen, just below the ribcage.

Take a continuous, slow and deep breath through your nose for the count of three: counting in your mind one and two and three and. Then breathing out through your mouth for the count of six. This way of counting will help to pace your breathing.

Notice your abdomen expanding as you breath in and flatten as you breath out. Don't worry if you find it too difficult to breath through either your nose or mouth; do what feels comfortable to you. It may also help to imagine drawing a circle as you breath: half a circle as you breath in and half a circle as you breath out.

Spend at least three minutes practising this breathing technique.



Muscle relaxation exercise

Sit or lie in a comfortable position; making sure you are as relaxed as possible and that your breathing is slow and steady. You may want to close your eyes. As you go through the different parts of the body, concentrate on the muscles in that area. Make sure you only go as far as is comfortable and don't force anything.

Forehead: pull your eyebrows together, and then slowly let your forehead smooth out.

Eyes: screw your eyes up tight, and then gradually let them smooth out.

Jaw: clench your back teeth together, and then gradually release; feeling your jaw get heavy.

Neck: first, pull your chin forward, and then let go. Now pull your head back, and then let go.

Make sure your breathing is still slow and steady.

Shoulders: pull your shoulders up towards your ears, and then gradually release them.

Hands and arms: clench your fists and tense your arms, and then slowly let go.

Tummy: pull in your tummy tight, and then gradually release.

Thighs: push your heels down hard against the floor or back of the chair, feeling your thighs tighten, and then slowly release.

Calves: point your toes, and then gradually release.

Repeat this as many times as you wish, or simply go back to the areas that you feel are still tense.

Visualisation for relaxation

Creating your sanctuary provides a safe and tranquil place that you can take yourself whenever you are feeling anxious or under stress.

Make sure you are in a comfortable position, letting go of any tension in your body and close your eyes. You may want to prepare by doing one of the exercises above.

When you are ready, imagine that you are somewhere beautiful, peaceful and comfortable. It may be somewhere you already know or a place that you have created; such as a meadow, a forest, a garden, on a mountain, by the sea, lake or river, or even indoors by a warming fire.

Spend some time exploring your chosen place. What can you see, hear and smell? How does it feel to touch the surrounding environment?

You may want to make this special place more homelike by building a house or shelter there; by surrounding it in a protective light; or doing a ritual to make it yours.

Spend as long as you wish in your sanctuary and when you are ready come back to the room and open your eyes. It may help to focus on an object in the room such as a clock for a moment, and shake out your arms and legs, so that you feel fully back in the room.

Return to your sanctuary whenever you need to be somewhere calming and free from tension. Don't worry if you find that your special place changes or that you want to make changes to it; that's ok, just enjoy it. As long as you remember to make sure that it holds the important qualities of peace, calm and tranquillity.

Complementary Therapy

Pilgrims Hospices employ qualified Complementary Therapists who provide specialist therapy for our patients.

Complementary Therapies are used to help alleviate stress and anxiety and to promote relaxation.

Massage

Massage is a touch therapy, which involves flowing movements with regulated pressure applied to the skin and underlying tissue.

Massage is used to release muscular tension and pain, relax the body and give a sense of wellbeing. Various techniques are used to apply pressure to the skin, the flowing movements promote circulation and relieve the tension.

Aromatherapy

Aromatherapy is the use of essential oils which have been extracted from different plants, (trees, roots fruit, flowers etc.) then blended with a carrier oil and massaged into the body. Inhalation of the oil vapours is another method of using essential oils, this is achieved with the aid of room burners, baths or vaporisers. The aromas from the oils can stimulate our sense of mood or memory, which may aid relaxation in a stressful period.



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Reflexology

Reflexology involves applying pressure to the feet or hands. Certain areas on the feet or hands relate to particular parts of the body, so that the whole body can be treated via these reflex points. The pressure used by the Therapist is firm but not heavy. The body has different zones or channels, the reflexologist works with these energy areas to rebalance the body.

Who can I ask?

If you are interested in further information or support with any of the techniques mentioned in this leaflet, please contact the Counselling Service at:

Ashford 01233 504114

Canterbury 01227 812611

Thanet 01843 233925

The Counsellors can also put you in contact with the qualified Complementary Therapists at Pilgrims Hospices.