



What? Me Worry!?!

Module 10

Relaxation

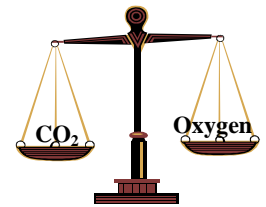
Introduction	2
Breathing	2
Calming Technique	3
Muscle Tension	5
Progressive Muscle Relaxation	5
Additional Points	8
Worksheet: Monitoring Your Relaxation	9
Module Summary	10

Introduction

As previously discussed, you will remember that worrying often comes with some unpleasant physical sensations, particularly, feeling uptight, tense, and unable to relax. When we worry, changes in our breathing and the tension of our muscles bring on these bodily sensations, and contribute to our experience of nervousness and anxiety. This module will target the physical arousal and bodily sensations you experience when you worry. You will be taught relaxation strategies that will reduce these sensations and help you feel calmer and more relaxed. Feeling calmer and more relaxed physically will help to decrease your worrying, make you better able to cope with worry, and reduce the nervous and anxious feelings that result from your worrying. The particular relaxation techniques you will learn in this module focus on both your breathing and on muscle relaxation.

Breathing

We all need to breathe oxygen to survive. The lungs take in oxygen, which is used by the body, and produces carbon dioxide (CO₂), which we breathe out. In order for the body to run efficiently, there needs to be a balance between oxygen and carbon dioxide. This balance is maintained through how fast and how deeply we breathe. Breathe in too much and the balance tips so that there's increased oxygen. Breathe in too little and there's increased levels of carbon dioxide.



When you are anxious, nervous or worried, an increase in the rate and depth of your breathing often occurs. That is, we 'overbreathe', and take in more oxygen than the body needs. This upsets the balance between oxygen and CO₂. When our breathing rate increases, a number of other physical changes occur in the body to make up for the imbalance. These changes cause the unpleasant physical sensations we experience when anxious.

Most of the body's mechanisms, including breathing, are automatically controlled, but we can also actively control our breathing. For example, we can hold our breath when swimming, or speed up our breathing when blowing up a balloon. Stress and our general mood (such as worrying) also affect our breathing. By learning how to maintain a calm and relaxed rate of breathing, it is possible to stop many of the unpleasant physical symptoms we experience when feeling nervous and worried.

Your Rate Of Breathing

To gain control of your breathing, it is important to know more about your rate of breathing. The rate of breathing when feeling calm and relaxed is around 10 to 14 breaths per minute. How does this compare to your rate of breathing generally and when you are worrying? (Count how many breaths per minute you take).

My rate of breathing generally is _____

My rate of breathing when worried is _____

Your Depth Of Breathing

To gain control of your breathing, it is also important to know more about your depth of breathing. Generally, when you breathe you either use (1) 'chest-breathing' or, (2) 'stomach-breathing'.

Chest breathing:

If you are troubled by nerves, worries, and anxiety in your life, chances are you're a 'chest-breather'. Chest breathing is shallow and often irregular and rapid. Anxious people may experience breath-holding, hyperventilation, or shortness of breath when breathing in this manner.

Stomach Breathing:

The second type of breathing is usually used by people with little anxiety in their life, or those who are coping better with anxiety. Stomach breathing (abdominal/ diaphragmatic breathing) is used by newborn babies and sleeping adults. Breath is drawn into the lungs and exhaled as the diaphragm becomes smaller and expands. Breathing is even and not limited. The breathing system is better able to do its job of producing energy from oxygen and removing carbon dioxide.

Do you breathe with your chest or your stomach?

Place the hand you write with on your stomach between your lower ribs and belly button (navel). Put the other hand on your breastbone, just below the collarbones. Take a deep breath and notice:

“Which hand moves the most? The hand on your chest or the hand on your stomach?”

“Did you breathe in through your mouth or nose?”

I breathe through: my mouth my nose

I am a: chest-breather stomach-breather

If you breathed through your nose, your stomach probably expanded first, with little upper chest movement. This is the type of breathing that is most helpful for your body. On the other hand, if you breathed in through your mouth, your upper chest probably raised first with little or no movement under the hand located on your stomach. This would indicate an unhelpful breathing style and might be contributing to the anxiety you may experience.

Calming Technique

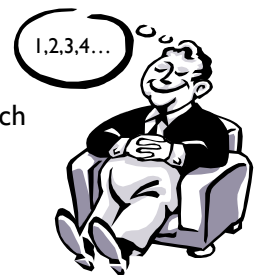
Gaining control over your breathing rate and depth is an important skill to develop. This calming technique will help you to (1) decrease some of the physical sensations you experience when you worry, and (2) facilitate general relaxation through your breathing.

** Note: if you have breathing problems related to a physical illness, you should consult your doctor before doing breathing exercises if you have any concerns about the effects.*

Breathing Pattern

When you do the exercise, try to find a comfortable chair and eliminate any potential interruptions. Sit comfortably, without crossing your legs. How you breathe is important, so consider the following:

- Relax your shoulders and upper chest
- With jaw relaxed, draw air slowly in through your nose.
- Breathe in by relaxing and expanding your waist so your stomach puffs up. Check that you are using stomach/diaphragm breathing by placing one hand on your stomach and the other hand on your chest
- Do not take in deep breaths, just stick to your own natural depth of breath that is smooth and easy
- Breath out through your mouth, and let the air ‘fall’ out of your chest as the elastic recoil of your lower chest and diaphragm breathes air out effortlessly
- If you find it hard to keep breathing low and slow, place a book on your stomach. This will help focus your effort.



Breathing Timing

Once you're confident about your breathing pattern, it's important to concentrate on how many breaths per minute you are taking.

- Aim for a 4-in, 2-hold, 6-out cycle. Breathe in for 4 seconds, hold for 2 seconds, then breathe out for 6 seconds
- If you have been breathing rapidly for some time, and this timing is difficult to start with, you might try a 3-in, 1-hold, 4-out cycle. Start with what you can most comfortably slow down to, and then work your way up to the 4-in, 2-hold, 6-out cycle
- When counting, you can add the word 'hundred' after each number so it roughly equals one second (i.e., one-hundred, two-hundred, etc).

Remember to focus on the *evenness* of your breathing pattern. Breathing out usually takes slightly longer than breathing in, with a relaxed pause at the end of the exhalation. As you do the breathing exercise, try to keep count in your head – not only will it help to keep your breathing on track, it's also an important meditative aspect of the calming technique. What you might find if you stop counting is that your mind wanders, and it might wander right back to some worrisome thoughts! If it does start to wander, just allow yourself the thought and then return to the counting.

Breathing Practice

With practice, this new breathing pattern will eventually become second nature and a good habit. At first, if you've been using the mouth/upper chest breathing habit, you might find the nose/stomach breathing technique somewhat unnatural. It usually takes quite a bit of practice to train your stomach muscles to be accustomed to this kind of breathing. It is important not to be hard on yourself if you fall back into unhelpful breathing habits. It is far better to concentrate on both the next breath and getting it correct.

Calming Technique

1. **Ensure that you are sitting on a comfortable chair**
2. **Take a breath in for 4 seconds (through your nose if possible)**
3. **Hold the breath for 2 seconds**
4. **Release the breath taking 6 seconds (through your mouth if possible).**

Muscle Tension

Learning to change your breathing habits can help to reduce general levels of anxiety. In addition, muscle relaxation can be particularly helpful for people who worry, as worrying is commonly associated with muscle tension. This type of relaxation can help to interrupt the development of anxiety and tension by providing you with the skills to respond differently to muscle tension.

Think about what happens when you worry. Do you “tense up”? Sometimes the change may be so subtle that you don’t even notice it happening. Perhaps you clench your teeth slightly so your jaw ends up feeling tight, or maybe your shoulders become tense, resulting in a feeling of tightness in your neck and shoulders. Muscle tension can also be associated with backaches, muscle spasms and tension headaches, and it can also leave some people feeling exhausted. Different people respond to worry with muscle tension in different parts of the body and to different extents.

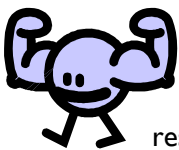
Muscle Tension Scan

Consider your own body for a moment. You may have noticed that in the past certain parts of your body felt tense, especially after worrying or being nervous. Where do you often feel tension and “tightness” in your body?

- | | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Forehead | <input type="checkbox"/> Shoulders | <input type="checkbox"/> Lower legs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mouth and/or jaw | <input type="checkbox"/> Arms | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Neck | <input type="checkbox"/> Back | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chest | <input type="checkbox"/> Upper legs | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

The places you notice tension the most may be those you will want to focus particular attention on when doing your muscle relaxation.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation



One particular method of reducing muscle tension is through a technique called **Progressive Muscle Relaxation**. During progressive muscle relaxation, you tense particular muscles and then relax them or let go of the tension. Many people find this process of tensing and relaxing their muscles helpful in reducing muscle tension that has resulted from prolonged periods of worry.

There are a few important steps involved in learning progressive muscle relaxation.

- Differentiating between muscle groups. For those of us who don’t think about our muscles very often, when we try to tense up our hand and forearm, we may end up tensing our whole arm. Learning this technique involves learning to tense and relax specific parts of our body
- Learning how to tense different muscle groups and what that tension feels like
- Allowing yourself to relax and let go of the tension
- Practise, practise, practise and more practise.

The following section describes progressive muscle relaxation. This includes the general procedure, a full description of how to tense particular muscle groups, and the order in which to tense and relax them. You will see that this is quite a lengthy technique, as it involves working through each group of muscles in the body in a systematic way. Once you are familiar with the technique, you could shorten the exercise, and focus on tensing and relaxing only those areas of the body that you sense a build up of tension.

**Note: If you have any injuries, such as sporting injuries, or have a history of physical problems that may cause muscle pain, you should consult your doctor before attempting any muscle relaxation exercises. Talk to your doctor if you have any concerns or queries about how these exercises may affect you.*

General Procedure

1. Choose quiet surroundings and make yourself comfortable.
2. Use the calming technique to help you let go of the stress, worry, and anxiety that may have existed in your day so far. Do this for 3 to 5 breaths.

Calming Technique:

- Breathe in for 4 seconds (through your nose)
 - Hold for 2 seconds
 - Breathe out for 6 seconds
- (If you are still getting used to changing your breathing, use a 3-in, 1-hold, and 4-out cycle).

3. When you are ready to begin, tense the muscle group described:
 - Make sure you can feel the tension, but not so much that you feel a great deal of pain
 - It is more important to focus on what the tension feels like and how the tension builds up, rather than trying to overstrain the muscle
 - Keep the muscle tensed for approximately 5 seconds.
4. Relax the muscles:
 - Relax the muscle and keep it relaxed for approximately 10 seconds
 - It may be helpful to say something like “Relax” as you relax the muscle
 - Focus on the difference between how the muscle feels when it is relaxed compared to when it is tense.
5. You can tense and relax each muscle group twice before moving on to the next muscle group.

When you have finished the relaxation procedure, remain seated for a few moments allowing yourself to become alert. Continue your breathing exercises using the calming technique, and get up slowly.

Relaxation Sequence

1. **Right hand and forearm.** Make a fist with your right hand. Focus on the tension in your hand and your arm (below the elbow) and hold the tension for 5 seconds. Relax your hand and arm, releasing the tension for about 10 seconds. Notice the difference between the tension and the relaxation.
2. **Right upper arm.** Bring your right forearm up to your shoulder. The closer you bring your hand to your shoulder, the more tense your upper arm will become. Focus on the muscles in between your elbow and your shoulder - try not to tense your forearm or your hand too much. Hold the tension for 5 seconds, then release for 10 seconds.
3. **Left hand and forearm.** Repeat as for the right hand and forearm.
4. **Left upper arm.** Repeat as for the right upper arm.

5. **Forehead.** Focus on your face now, raising your eyebrows as high as they will go, as though you were surprised by something. Feel the tightness in the muscles above your eyes. When you release the tension of the muscles around your forehead, focus on them becoming smooth and relaxed.
6. **Eyes and cheeks.** Squeeze your eyes tight shut. Focus on the tension around your eyes and your cheeks. Notice how the tension is released as you relax those muscles.
7. **Mouth and jaw.** Open your mouth as wide as you can, as some people do when they have a big yawn. Feel all the muscles in the hinge of your jaw tightening, and notice the tension around your mouth. When you relax your mouth and jaw you can leave your lips slightly apart and just let your jaw hang freely.
8. **Neck.** !!! Be careful as you tense these muscles. Focus on the muscles in your neck by facing forward and then pulling your head back slowly, as though you are looking up to the ceiling. Feel the tension in the muscles in the back of your neck, as this is often an area that becomes tense. Relax these muscles by bringing your head back down to a loose, resting position, noticing how the tension is released.
9. **Shoulders.** Tense the muscles in your shoulders as you bring your shoulders up towards your ears. Focus on the tightness in your shoulders. Hold it for 5 seconds, and then let go of the tension by dropping your shoulders right down to a relaxed position. It is very common for people to keep tension in their shoulders, so notice the comparison between tensed and relaxed.
10. **Shoulder blades/Back.** Push your shoulder blades back, trying to almost touch them together, so that your chest is pushed forward. Hold the tension in the muscles, feeling the tightness in your upper back and in your shoulder blades. Release the tension by dropping your shoulders into a resting, relaxed posture, feeling the tension fade away.
11. **Chest and stomach.** Breathe in deeply, filling up your lungs and chest with air. Feel the tension in your chest and stomach muscles. Hold it for 5 seconds, and as you slowly breathe out, feel the muscles relaxing.
12. **Hips and buttocks.** Squeeze your buttock muscles, noticing the tension in your buttocks and hips. Try not to tense up your legs, just focus on tightening up the buttock and hip muscles. Relax the muscles, and feel them loosen up.
13. **Right upper leg.** Tighten your right thigh, concentrating on the tension in that area. You may get some tension in your hip and in your calf muscle, but try to focus most of the tension in your thigh muscle. Release the tension and feel the muscle relax.
14. **Right lower leg.** !!! Do this slowly and carefully to avoid cramps. Pull your toes towards you to feel the tightness in your calf muscle. Hold it, then relax it and notice all the tension fade away from the muscle.
15. **Right foot.** Curl your toes downwards to feel the tension in your right foot. Hold the tension and then relax your toes, bringing them into their normal resting position.
16. **Left upper leg.** Repeat as for the right upper leg.
17. **Left lower leg.** Repeat as for the right lower leg.
18. **Left foot.** Repeat as for the right foot.

Additional Points

Here are some additional points to consider when doing relaxation...

Calming & Muscle Relaxation

It is important not to treat the calming technique for breathing and the muscle relaxation technique for muscle tension as separate relaxation exercises. These two techniques can be used in combination. For example, you can start by focusing on the calming technique, then move your focus to muscle relaxation, and finish by re-focusing on the calming technique again. In addition, when doing the calming technique you can scan the muscles in your body for signs of tension during the 4 count inhalation, and focus on releasing this tension during your 6 count exhalation.

Practise, Practise, Practise

The most important thing of all to remember is that relaxation through controlling your breathing and releasing muscle tension is a **skill**. To develop any skill, and become good at that skill, you need to **practise**. Try to practise the relaxation techniques as often as you can. When you start, practise in safe situations such as in the lounge room at home...rather than at times you are worried. Once you've mastered the technique you can try to use it to reduce feelings of nervousness, worry, and anxiety. It's a bit like sports practice – you want to master your skills before you get to the finals. For now, become as well-practised as you can.

Once you have practised these skills a lot and are good at them, remember that the calming technique and your shorter version of progressive muscle relaxation are 'portable' relaxation techniques. This means you will be able to use them in any situation when you start to worry, because no one will know you are using them.

Some people experience some unusual physical sensations when they first try these relaxation techniques. This is a normal part of becoming more attuned to your body. Keep practising the techniques, and you will find that these sensations no longer bother you after a while.

Over the page is a worksheet for monitoring your relaxation. This will help you keep track of your relaxation, help remind you to regularly practise your relaxation, and will be the written proof that you are constantly improving this new and valuable skill for dealing with your worrying.



Monitoring Your Relaxation

As explained, it's important to practise relaxation to achieve the best results, as this is a new skill you're learning. It is useful to monitor your own progress by keeping a relaxation diary that records the when, where, and how of your practice.

The following table is an example of a recording method that might be useful. Record the date and time you practise your relaxation, any comments about your relaxation experience, and rate your level of relaxation following the activity.

When rating your relaxation level:

- 10** represents the most *tense* or *anxious* you have ever been
- 0** represents the most *relaxed* or *calm* you have ever been

Date & Time	Comments/Reactions	Relaxation Level 0-10

Comments/Reactions:

- What type of relaxation did you do (calming technique, progressive muscle relaxation, or both)?
- What was your breathing like?
- What parts of your body relaxed easily?
- What sensations were you aware of in your body?
- Was your mind relaxed?
- What was your worrying like when doing the relaxation?

Module Summary

- When you worry, you feel uptight and tense, and are unable to relax. These physical sensations can be unpleasant. Relaxation will help to reduce these physical sensations you experience when you worry. This will improve your ability to cope with your worries and reduce your general anxiety and nervousness
- The **calming technique** is one type of relaxation exercise. This technique focuses on controlling the rate and depth of your breathing to reduce physical tension and bring on a general feeling of relaxation
- The calming technique involves:
 - Ensuring you are sitting comfortably in a chair
 - Taking a breath in (through your nose if possible) for **4** seconds
 - Holding that breath for **2** seconds
 - Releasing that breath (through your mouth if possible) for **6** seconds
- **Progressive muscle relaxation** is another type of relaxation exercise that focuses on releasing muscle tension. Having tight, tense, and stiff muscles in certain areas of the body is common in people who worry
- The progressive muscle relaxation technique involves:
 - Systematically working through each muscle group in the body.
 - Tensing a muscle group for 5 seconds.
 - Relaxing that muscle group for 10 seconds.
 - Noticing the difference in feeling between tension and relaxation.
 - Repeating this process.
 - Moving on to the next muscle group.
- Remember, relaxation is a skill, and to be good at any skill requires persistent **practice**.



Coming up next ...

In the next module we will discuss how you can maintain the gains you have made, and how to enhance your well-being.

About The Modules

CONTRIBUTORS

Dr Lisa Saulsman (MPsych¹; PhD²)

Centre for Clinical Interventions

Paula Nathan (MPsych¹)

Director, Centre for Clinical Interventions

Adjunct Senior Lecturer, School of Psychiatry and Clinical Neuroscience, The University of Western Australia

¹Masters of Psychology (Clinical Psychology)

²Doctor of Philosophy (Clinical Psychology)

³Doctor of Psychology (Clinical)

Dr Louella Lim (DPsych³)

Centre for Clinical Interventions

Dr Helen Correia (MApp Psych¹; PhD²)

Centre for Clinical Interventions

Some of the materials in the modules of this information package were taken from:

Nathan, P., Smith, L., Rees, C., Correia, H., Juniper, U., Kingsep, P., & Lim, L. (2004). *Mood Management Course: A Cognitive Behavioural Group Treatment Programme for Anxiety Disorders and Depression* (2nd ed.). Perth, Western Australia: Centre for Clinical Interventions.

BACKGROUND

The concepts and strategies in the modules have been developed from evidence based psychological practice, primarily Cognitive-Behaviour Therapy (CBT). CBT for generalised anxiety is a type of psychotherapy that is based on the theory that generalised anxiety and worry is a result of problematic cognitions (thoughts) and behaviours. There is strong scientific evidence to support that cognitions and behaviours can play an important role in generalised anxiety, and that targeting cognitions and behaviours in therapy can help many people to overcome generalised anxiety. Examples of this evidence are reported in:

Barlow, D.H., Raffa, S.D., Cohen, E.M. (2002) Psychosocial treatments for panic disorders, phobias, and generalized anxiety disorder. In P.E. Nathan & J.M. Gorman (Eds.), *A Guide to Treatments that Work* (2nd ed., pp. 301-335). New York: Oxford University Press.

Gould, R.A., Safren, S.A., O'Neill Washington, D., & Otto, M.W. (2004). A meta-analytic review of cognitive-behavioural treatments. In R.G. Heimberg, C.L. Turk & D.S. Mennin (Eds.), *Generalized Anxiety Disorder: Advances in Research and Practice* (pp. 248-264). New York: Guilford Press.

REFERENCES

These are some of the professional references used to create the modules in this information package.

Barlow, D.H. (2002). *Anxiety and Its Disorders: The Nature and Treatment of Anxiety and Panic* (2nd ed.). London: Guilford Press.

Heimberg, R.G., Turk, C.L., & Mennin, D.S. (2004). *Generalized Anxiety Disorder: Advances in Research and Practice*. New York: Guilford Press.

Wells, A. (1997). *Cognitive Therapy of Anxiety Disorders: A Practice Manual and Conceptual Guide*. Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

Wells, A. (2008). *Metacognitive Therapy for Anxiety and Depression*. New York: Guilford Press.

“WHAT? ME WORRY!?!”

This module forms part of:

Saulsman, L., Nathan, P., Lim, L., & Correia, H. (2005). *What? Me Worry!?! Mastering Your Worries*. Perth, Western Australia: Centre for Clinical Interventions.

We would like to thank Mandy Nathan for the suggestion of a "worry puss" for the theme character of this Information Package