



## Breathing and relaxation exercises

Feeling stressed and anxious? Pick one of the following exercises and take a few minutes to focus on relaxing. Breathing fully and relaxing your body can help to relax your muscles and activate your parasympathetic nervous system, which helps reduce symptoms of stress and anxiety.

- Breathe in while counting to four, breathe out counting to four, and repeat. See you if you can slow down your counting to lengthen your breaths.
- Focus on breathing right to the bottom of your lungs. Often when we're stressed or anxious, we only use the top part of our lungs, not their full capacity. Place your hand over your stomach and gently push against it as you inflate your whole lungs, then exhale the breath all the way out, and repeat.
- Try to visualise your breath as it passes in and out of your body. What colour and texture might it be? Does your breath in look different to your breath out? Focus on that visual image as you breathe, imagining how your breath travels through your body.
- Working your way from your head to your toes, clench the muscles in each part of your body while breathing in and counting to four, and release them while breathing out and counting to four. We often don't notice how much tension we're holding in places like jaws, shoulders and hips and this is a great way to locate and release that tension.
- Visualise a place where you feel totally safe and happy, maybe a place in nature like the beach, forest or meadow. Imagine what you might see, hear, smell, feel and taste in that place, and spend a few minutes there just breathing and enjoying this peaceful space.
- Try focusing all your attention on what you can hear around you, starting with what you can hear your body doing, then what you can hear in the room around you, then what you can hear outside. Every time you lose focus, gently bring your attention back to what you can hear.