

Stress Relief First Aid

Many of the techniques in this book are quick and effective.

*Breathing exercises don't have to take more than a minute, and five minutes is enough to meditate or do a short foot-to-head muscle relaxation. While you're reading this book, why not put an **Vin** the margin beside your favourite quick relaxers so you can find them when you need them fast?*



When everything's getting on top of you, give yourself a break. That old advice about taking a deep breath still holds good - count to 10 as you breathe out. If you're paralysed with anxiety, do a breathing exercise and clear your mind by concentrating on the feel of your breath. Start by blowing out hard to empty your lungs and let a deep breath in. If you feel faint, lie down with your feet higher than your head. If you feel like hitting someone, go for a walk instead.

Taking your mind off the problem can help - things are easier to cope with when you're not at the peak of stress. So read a light magazine feature or the stars (but only believe them if they're good). Make a cup of herbal tea and ring your best friend for some moral support. If you can't get the worry off your mind, put your brain to work recalling one of Shakespeare's sonnets, or counting backwards in threes from 100.

Meanwhile, here are some extra emergency tips.

Five seconds to spare

Just enough time for some encouraging affirmations - positive messages to the subconscious to boost your confidence.

Silently tell yourself 'I'm doing well' and 'I can easily cope with all of this'. Never mind if you don't believe it - say it as if you do. Repeat it a few times whenever you think of it. And if any mean inner voices start quibbling, imagine them coming from a radio and turn it off.

Ten seconds to spare

Stand straight and breathe in through your nose as you stretch your arms above your head, palms together.

As you start breathing out through your mouth, turn the palms out and slowly bring the arms down beside you, reaching out with the fingertips. As your arms come down, tell yourself 'I am perfectly calm'.

If people are around, just pinch the web between your thumb and first finger (don't do this if you're pregnant) and breathe deeply.

Twenty seconds to spare

With feet apart, breathe in deeply while you stand on your toes and clench all your muscles. Breathing out slowly while you sink to the floor, let everything relax.

Don't get extra stressed if you can't balance on your toes, just do all the rest.

Half a minute to spare

Scrunch your face into a wicked scowl, relax with your mouth hanging open, repeat this two or three times, then put on a smile even if you don't feel like it. Massage your scalp in little circles with the pads of your fingers. Relaxing the face and scalp keeps tension headaches at bay while the very movement of smiling sends calming signals to the brain.



One minute stress relief

Laughter is a great stress-reliever - scan the cartoons in the newspaper or phone a telephone jokeline. Keep a book by your favourite funny person for when you're feeling desperate, and reread the parts that made you laugh most.