



# Ways to Manage Your Feelings and Thoughts

Some days are really stressful. Stress can cause you to have feelings of anxiety, anger or panic. And it may lead to negative thoughts that you need to manage.

Your health care team members want to support you as you cope. There are many ways to deal with negative feelings. Some ideas are shared here.

## Distract yourself

Do something different. Some examples are:

- Exercise or go for a walk, even indoors.
- Take a shower, bath or nap.
- Watch a TV show that is funny or calming.
- Listen to soothing music.
- Pray.
- Count to 10 or 50.
- Draw, color or paint.
- Read or write in a journal.
- Play a computer or video game.
- Play solitaire or a card game with someone else.

Do something for or with someone else. Some examples are:

- Check-in with other people. Ask if they want to go for a walk or play a game (cards or other games).
- Write a letter to someone who is special to you. Focus on their life and interests, not on you.

## Be mindful

To be *mindful* means to focus — intentionally and with purpose — on what's going on with you right now. When you are mindful, you are present in the moment. You accept whatever is happening. *It is what it is*. You don't judge or label things *as good or bad*.

One of the nice things about being mindful is that you can do it anytime, anywhere. For example, if you go for a walk, focus on what you are seeing, hearing and smelling. Is the floor smooth or rough? What sounds do you hear? When you eat, think about each bite's different flavors and textures. What does the food smell like?

## Calm yourself

Some examples are listed here.

- **Practice slow breathing.** Inhale slowly through your nose then breathe out just as slowly through your lips. When you breathe out, make a small “O” with your lips, as though you are blowing out a candle.
- **Put a warm or cool cloth on your forehead or the back of your neck.** These parts of the body often help a person relax fairly quickly.
- **Make a list of everything you are grateful for.** The list can include small things, like finding matching socks today, and bigger things, like having good health and people who love and support you.
- **Meditate.** During meditation, you focus on the present — trying not to focus on random thoughts that slip in. Meditation can help with concentration, relaxation, inner peace, stress reduction, and fatigue. It may also help relieve anxiety, depression, pain, and insomnia.
- **Pray.** Think about the people or situations you know that need prayer. Take time now to pray about them in detail.
- **Focus on your senses.** What do you enjoy looking at or smelling? For example, if you like reading decorating or landscaping magazines, try to find one now. If you know that some smells make you happy or calm, try to find that scent now. Does a certain taste remind you of something happy? Do you enjoy listening to the sound of water or nature sounds? Ask a health care team member to help you find the sound that comforts you.
- **Practice guided imagery.** Imagine a relaxing place — somewhere you feel safe, happy and comfortable. Use all of your senses to notice every detail about this great place. What do you see, hear and smell? If you’d eat something here, what would it taste like? What do you feel with your hands and under your bare feet? What do you do when you are here? You can use this tool any time, alone or with other relaxation tools.

## Practice muscle relaxation

Practicing muscle relaxation helps your body learn what muscles feel like when they are tight — and when they are totally relaxed. When you know those two feelings, you should be able to find the stressed areas of your body and help yourself relax quickly — whenever you need to.

If you practice muscle relaxation once in a while, over time you may be able to *avoid* getting stress-related tight muscles.

### *How this works*

Lie flat and start at your toes or your head, whichever you prefer. Move up or down your body “in order.” If you start at your head and face, next do the neck and shoulders together, etc. As you tighten each muscle group, try to keep the rest of your body relaxed.

- Work on only one set of muscles at a time.
- Tighten all of the muscles in that group. See list below.

- Hold the muscles tight for several seconds. How does that feel — good or bad?
- Release the tightness in those muscles. Stop to think about how your body feels. Do those muscles feel better when they relax after being tight? Do they feel warm?
- Move on to the next muscle group.

### *Your muscle groups*

Do each of these parts of the body.

- **Head & face:** Clench your jaw. Scrunch your eyes and your forehead.
- **Neck & shoulders:** Lift your shoulders toward your ears and tighten your neck as you do it.
- **Chest, stomach & back:** Do all of these areas together. Hold your breath and try to pull your belly button down to your spine.
- **Arms & hands:** Make fists and tighten every muscle in your arms.
- **Thighs & calves:** Tighten the muscles behind your lower legs (the calves) and your upper legs (the thighs).
- **Feet:** Curl the toes downward, as though you're trying to grab something with your toes.

### **What works for you?**

What ideas have you tried in the past that work well for you? Write them here.

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#### **Get help when you need it**

**You are an active member of your health care team.**

If you, alone, are not able to manage your feelings or thoughts, ask one of your health care providers for help.

Sometimes, talking to a health care provider helps a lot. In addition to the ideas here, the staff may have more ideas to help you.

*This material is for your education and information only. This content does not replace medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. New medical research may change this information. If you have questions about a medical condition, always talk with your health care provider.*