



Initial Self-Help Measures

Illustration: Cornelia Biegler, www.corneliabiegler.de

A collection of simple exercises that can be practised repeatedly to stimulate the vagus nerve—the body's natural calming system—and help reduce tension and promote relaxation.



Breathing Exercises:

Breathe in for a count of 4 and breathe out for a count of 6 to 8.

Take a slow, deep breath in through your nose. Hold your breath for a count of 4, then exhale slowly and completely through your mouth. Wait for another count of 4 before breathing in again.

Breathe in for a count of 4, hold your breath for a count of 7, and exhale for a count of 8. (The well-known 4–7–8 breathing technique.)

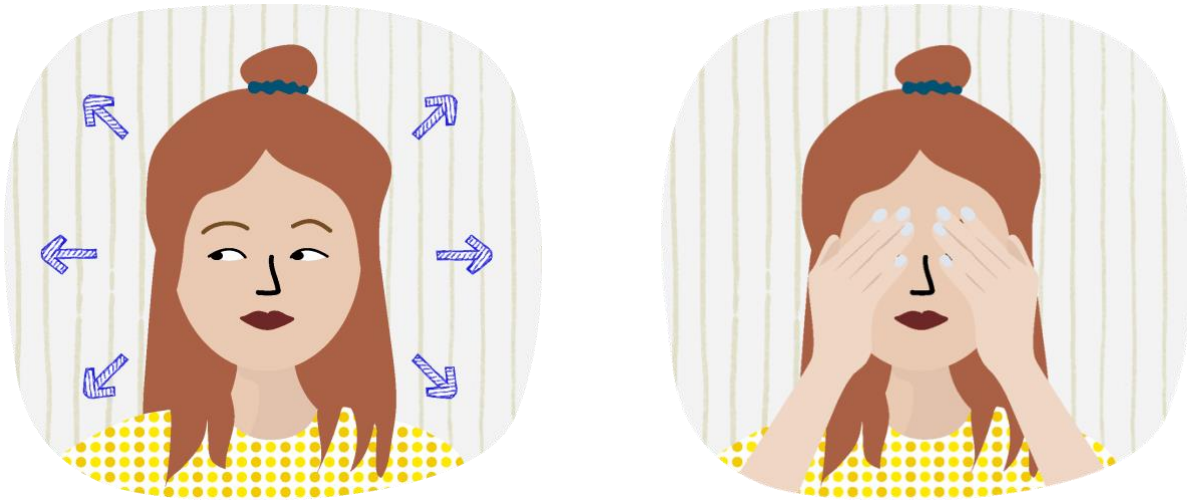
Visualisation breathing: As you breathe in, imagine drawing all negative thoughts, feelings, or tension out of your body, as if using a vacuum cleaner. As you breathe out, imagine releasing everything negative. With your next inhalation, breathe in positive energy, light, and healing. As you exhale, imagine these spreading throughout your body.

Take a deep breath in through your mouth and exhale through gently closed lips, allowing your lips to vibrate, flutter, or hum. Optional: As you breathe in, stretch your arms out wide. As you breathe out, slowly bring them together in front of your body.

As you breathe in, raise your shoulders. As you breathe out, let them drop and relax.

Inhale a calming scent, such as rose or lavender essential oil.

While breathing slowly and steadily, count backwards from 90. (Helpful during moments of anger or panic.)



Body Exercises (Grounding):

Eye exercises ("eye yoga"): Keep your head still and move your eyes 5 times in each direction: up and down, left and right, diagonally (bottom left to top right and bottom right to top left), clockwise and counter-clockwise. Then alternate your focus between an object in the distance and one nearby. Finally, rub your palms together and gently place them over your closed eyes.

Gently tap your collarbone with a loose fist while keeping your mouth slightly open and your jaw relaxed. Then place your hand over your heart.

Wrap one hand around the thumb of your other hand, or gently tuck your thumb into the fist of your other hand. Try both sides.

Shift your weight onto your right side, then bring your left foot alongside it. Shift your weight onto your left side, then bring your right foot alongside it. Instead of simply stepping your foot in, you can also stamp your foot and make the rocking movement more vigorous.

Shake out your right arm, left arm, right leg, left leg, your head, your upper body, and finally your whole body.

Yawn, move your tongue in a circle between your teeth and cheeks (or along the inside of your lips), and slowly roll your eyes in both directions.

Take a cold shower while continuing to breathe slowly and deeply, or try gargling with water.

Tilt your head or ear towards one shoulder while looking with your eyes towards the opposite corner of your eyes. Hold the position until you feel the urge to yawn. If necessary, adjust your eye position slightly until the yawn comes. Repeat on both sides.

Start with small hops, then gradually make them bigger. If you like, use a trampoline and/or add gentle punching movements with your hands.

Lean your back against a wall, a tree, or another person, and breathe slowly and calmly.

Enjoy a full-body stretch in bed—stretch, wriggle, and roll around—or stretch your whole body while standing.



Massage Techniques:

Relax your lower jaw and gently massage your jaw muscles in small circular motions, then stroke downwards towards your neck.

Gently massage the philtrum—the groove between your upper lip and your nose—in small circular motions.

Gently massage your scalp, face, and the right side of your neck (using massage oil if desired).

Massage your scalp, either with your fingertips or with a scalp massager (head scratcher).

Massage your outer ears and earlobes using three fingers.

Rest your hands on the bare skin over your abdomen or solar plexus. After a while, gently massage the area in circular motions (using massage oil if desired) while breathing slowly and deeply.

Give yourself a hug, then slowly stroke your crossed hands down from your shoulders along your upper arms.

Massage your feet and toes.

Lie on your back with your knees bent and gently rock from side to side, allowing the movement to massage your lower back and sacrum.

Lie on your side with your knees slightly bent so that your spine remains straight. Gently massage your sacrum with one hand.

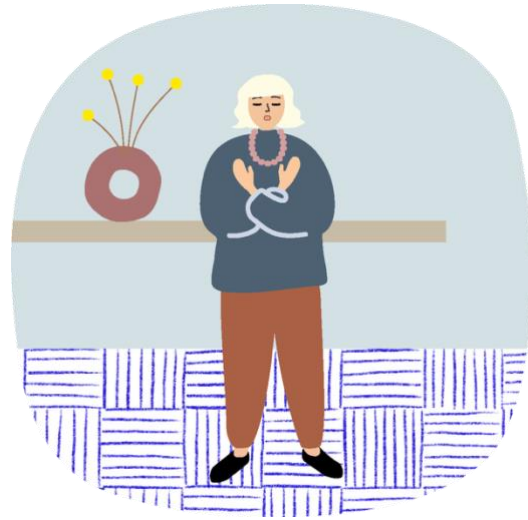
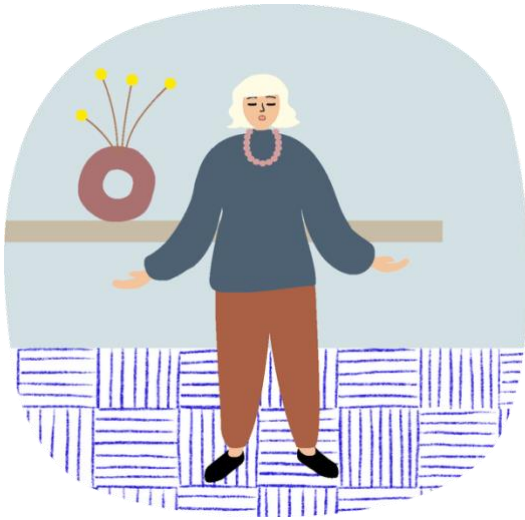
While sitting, gently massage the base of your skull, or relax the area by lying on two soft juggling balls placed inside a sock.



Visualisation Exercises:

Visualise a pleasant encounter, a memorable experience in nature, a safe place, or a favourite holiday destination. Reinforce this calming image by gently tapping your shoulders with your arms crossed over your chest (the Butterfly Hug).

Imagine a mental container where you can safely store worrying or negative thoughts. Reinforce this image by gently tapping your shoulders with your arms crossed over your chest (the Butterfly Hug). Whenever distressing or negative thoughts arise, imagine placing them inside this container and securely closing it.



Affirmations:

Alternately use your right and left arm to throw away anything that is troubling you over your shoulder. As you do so, silently say to yourself, "I don't need to carry this anymore." or "I'm leaving this behind."

Alternately open and close your hands while silently repeating, "I can handle this."

Stand comfortably and say aloud:

"I claim my space." (*Stretch your arms out to the sides.*)

"I receive what I need and welcome it into my life." (*Turn your palms upwards, then raise your arms in a gentle quarter circle and bring your hands to your chest.*)

Chant the sound "Wu" in as low a tone as feels comfortable while silently saying to yourself, "I am giving myself the gift of deep relaxation."

Repeat positive affirmations aloud, for example:

"I am calm."

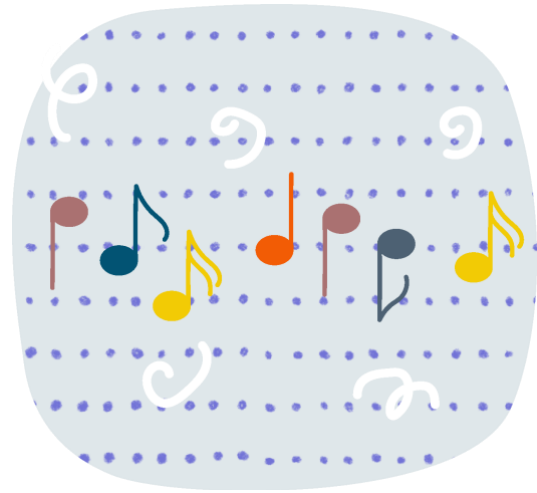
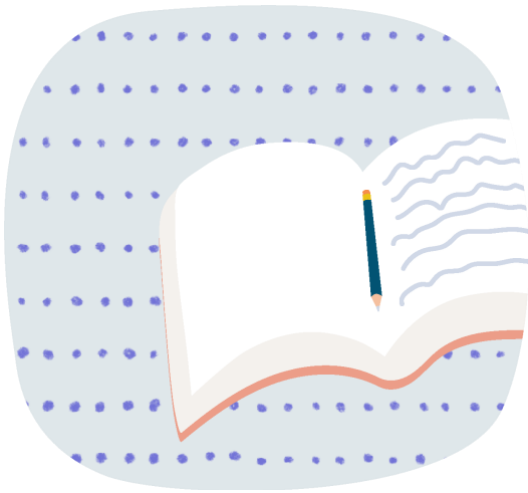
"Every day I am becoming healthier."

Sit comfortably on the floor or on a meditation cushion and say aloud:

"I thank the universal web for guidance and energy." (*Stretch your arms and hands upwards.*)

"I thank the earth for supporting, sustaining, and nourishing me." (*Place your palms on the floor beside you.*)

"I thank my body for allowing me to learn, grow, and experience life." (*Cross your hands over your chest.*)



Additional Tips & Suggestions:

Make sure you get enough magnesium, zinc, B vitamins, and omega-3 fatty acids.

When going to sleep, try lying on your right side.

Keep a gratitude journal. For example: "Today I am grateful for the sunshine, for everything I have accomplished today, and for my child's laughter."

Express your thoughts and feelings through writing or drawing. Let them flow without judging them. Everything is welcome.

Laugh, hum, dance, or sing—even if you don't feel like it.

Make a list of things you enjoy or that help you feel good, arranged by how much time they take. Try to include at least one item from your list every day.