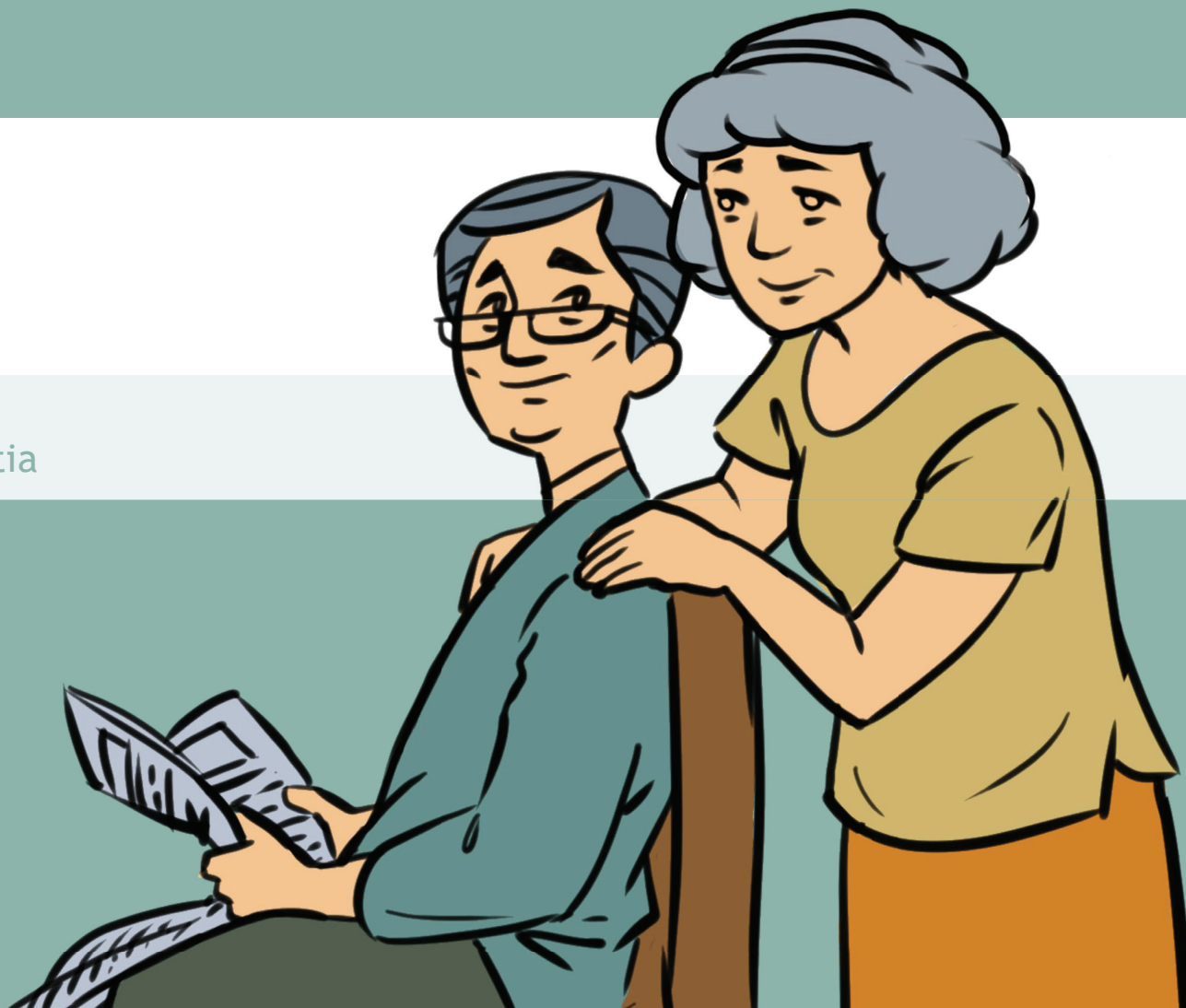


Australian version

iSupport For Dementia

Training and support manual
for carers of people with dementia



Unit 1. Reducing stress in everyday life

Why is this Unit important?

It is important to take care of yourself while caring for another person. This Unit will help you to keep providing care.

How will this Unit help me?

This Unit helps to reduce stress and renew your energy with exercises that do not take much time.

What will I learn?

1. The importance of relaxing.
2. Different ways to relax:
 - basic breathing;
 - mindful breathing;
 - neck movements;
 - number counting;
 - imagery;
 - total stretching;
 - muscle relaxation.
3. Relaxing at any time and any place.



1. The importance of relaxing

Let's look at an example

Diana: no time, no energy

Diana takes care of her husband Dan who has dementia. She feels increasingly tense.

A friend advises her to try to relax and not ask too much of herself. Diana tells her friend that she does not have the time or energy to relax. Her friend explains that there are ways to relax that do not take much time, and that relaxing might give Diana renewed energy that could help her get tasks done more easily.

Diana succeeds in relaxing

Diana decides to follow her friend's advice and tries the breathing exercise her friend showed her.

When Diana sees her friend again she says: "Thank you for the good advice. Although I still have a lot to do, I feel less tense." Diana decides to do the breathing exercise every time she is feeling tense.

Reminder



Relaxation:

- makes you feel less tense;
- might give you renewed energy;
- may make it easier to get tasks done; and
- does not have to take much time.

2. Different ways to relax

There are different ways you can relax. Try and see which one(s) suit you best.


Before you try an exercise ask yourself: “How tense am I feeling”? After the exercise, ask yourself again. This might help you understand whether this type of relaxation helps you feel less tense.

In this Unit you will find seven relaxation exercises. The first three exercises will take only a few minutes (i.e. 5 minutes max.). The other exercises will take a little longer (i.e. 10-15 minutes max.).

Use the scale below of 1-10 and tick what number describes how tense you are feeling now, 1 is very small amount of tension and 10 is very high amount of tension.



1. Relaxation activity - Basic breathing



Focusing on your breathing is relaxing. By doing a breathing exercise you could reduce tension.

This exercise will take: less than 5 minutes.

Caution: if you experience difficulty breathing, this exercise might not be the best option for you.

This is how you do it:

- When sitting down, sit up straight in your chair with your back against the back of your chair.
- When standing, stand up straight.
- Put both of your feet flat on the surface.
- Focus on your breathing.
- Keep breathing like you are used to.
- Try to feel how you breathe. Put your hand on your stomach to feel how you inhale and exhale.
- Exhale from your mouth and pull in your stomach as much as possible.
- Follow your breathing in this manner a couple of breaths and then stop the exercise.

2. Relaxation activity - Mindful breathing



This exercise will help you feel calm and reduces stress. You will breathe with your stomach according to a rhythm.

This exercise will take: 5 minutes.

This is how you do it:

- Sit straight in a chair and make sure your face and shoulders are relaxed.
- Bring your hands to your stomach and breathe into it.
- Breathe in for 4 counts and out for 8 counts, at a comfortable pace.
- Your stomach should expand with each inhale and contract with each exhale.
- Return to your normal breathing and spend one minute just observing yourself breathing and noticing how you feel.
- Practice listening to your own thoughts without negative judgement.
- If your mind wanders, refocus on breathing and meditation.

3. Relaxation activity - Neck movements



With this exercise you will feel less tension in your neck. It will also increase the blood flow to your brain.

This exercise will take: 5 minutes.

This is how you do it:

- Make sure to move slowly and with attention.
- Bend your neck forward and backward.
- Inhale while you lift your head up and back. Exhale while you drop your chin to your chest.
- Rotate your chin from side to side.
- Inhale when your chin is in the centre. Exhale when you look to the side.
- Drop your ear towards your shoulder.
- Inhale when you are in the centre. Exhale when you drop your ear to your shoulder.
- Repeat 5 times.

4. Relaxation activity - Number counting



You can relax by focusing on your breathing and counting back from 20 to 1.

This exercise will take: 5 minutes.

This is how you do it:

- Sit or lie down comfortably in a quiet place.
- Breathe slowly.
- With each breath, take at least 3 seconds to breathe in and 6 seconds to breathe out.
- Focus on your breathing and your lower stomach when you breathe until you feel calm and peaceful inside your heart and mind.
- Say the word 'relax' whenever you breathe out.
- Tell yourself that you will start counting down from 20 to 1.
- Tell yourself that you will double your level of relaxation for each and every count, and will be totally relaxed when you reach 1.
- Start counting down from 20 to 1 slowly. Say the word 'relax' whenever you count (that is, take a deep breath, say '20', breathe out slowly and say 'relax', take a deep breath, count '19', breathe out slowly and say 'relax', and so on).
- Now repeat this exercise but with your eyes closed.

5. Relaxation activity - Imagery



You can relax by imagining you are in a place or surrounded by people and things you like.

This exercise will take: 5 minutes.

Before completing this exercise, take a look at the helpful guidelines below.

- Only imagine places, people and things you like.
- Imagine what you can hear, feel, smell, and/or taste if you were in that place.
- Try to think of very specific details of the place, thing or person. For example, how does the surface of the thing feel and how does it smell?

Now try to relax while imagining that you are in a place or with the people or things that you like.

This is how you do it:

- Sit or lie down comfortably in a quiet place.
- Breathe slowly.
- With every breath, take at least three seconds to breathe in and at least six seconds to breathe out.
- Focus on your breathing and your lower stomach when you breathe until you feel peaceful inside.
- Imagine you are in a place or surrounded by things or people you like.
- Now do this exercise again but close your eyes.

6. Relaxation activity - Muscle relaxation



This exercise is particularly helpful when your muscles feel tense. This exercise will help you relax by tensing and relaxing your muscles.

This exercise will take: 10-15 minutes

Caution: if you have any injuries or any other physical limitations, this may not be the best exercise for you. Try one of the other exercises.

Below are some general instructions for you to keep in mind.

- When you are ready to begin, tighten the muscle group described. Make sure that you can feel the tension, but no pain. Keep the muscle tensed for approximately 5 seconds.
- Relax the muscles and keep it relaxed for approximately 10 seconds. It may be helpful to say 'relax' as you relax the muscle.
- When you have finished the muscle relaxation, remain seated for a few moments allowing yourself to become alert.

This is how you do it:

- **Right hand and forearm:** make a fist with your right hand. Hold for 5 seconds and then relax for 10 seconds. Don't forget to breathe. It might be helpful to inhale while tensing your muscles and exhale while relaxing your muscles. Do the same for your left hand and forearm.
- **Right upper arm:** bring your right forearm up to your shoulder to 'make a muscle'. Hold for 5 seconds and then relax for 10 seconds. Do the same for your left upper arm.
- **Forehead:** raise your eyebrows as high as they will go, as though you were surprised by something. Hold for 5 seconds and then relax for 10 seconds.
- **Eyes and cheeks:** squeeze your eyes closed. Hold for 5 seconds and then relax for 10 seconds.
- **Mouth and jaw:** open your mouth as wide as you can, as if you are yawning. Hold for 5 seconds and then relax for 10 seconds.

Please continue the exercise on the following page.

6. Relaxation activity - Muscle relaxation (continued)



- **Neck:** be careful as you tense these muscles. Face forward and then pull your head back slowly, as though you are looking up to the ceiling. Hold for 5 seconds and then relax for 10 seconds.
- **Shoulders:** tense the muscles in your shoulders as you bring them up towards your ears. Hold for 5 seconds and then relax for 10 seconds.
- **Shoulder blades/Back:** push your shoulder blades back, trying to almost touch them together, so that your chest is pushed forward. Hold for 5 seconds and then relax for 10 seconds.
- **Chest and stomach:** breathe in deeply, filling up your lungs and chest with air. Hold for 5 seconds and then relax for 10 seconds.
- **Hips and buttocks:** squeeze the muscles in your buttocks. Hold for 5 seconds and then relax for 10 seconds.
- **Right upper leg:** tighten your right thigh. Hold for 5 seconds and then relax for 10 seconds. Repeat for your left upper leg.
- **Right lower leg:** do this slowly and carefully to avoid cramps. Pull your toes towards you to stretch the calf muscle. Hold for 5 seconds and then relax for 10 seconds. Repeat for your left lower leg.
- **Right foot:** curl your toes downwards. Hold for 5 seconds and then relax for 10 seconds. Repeat for your left foot.

7. Relaxation activity - Total stretching



Stretching your muscles can help to decrease tension. Stretching exercises are very convenient since you can do them anywhere and anytime.

This exercise will take: 10 minutes.

This is how you do it:

- Stand up, or do this exercise in your chair.
- Take a deep breath, all the way down to the bottom of your stomach, and slowly let it out.
- As you exhale, feel the tension drain from your body.
- Take one more breath and hold it for a moment... and let it out slowly.
- With each breath you are becoming more and more relaxed.
- Now, gently reach your arms out to the sides as though you were trying to touch the walls.
- Relax your shoulders and stretch yourself a little.
- Gently reach your arms out in front of you.
- Feel the muscles in your back and shoulders loosen up.
- Stretch out in front a little further.
- And now reach up as high as you can.
- Push up your arms towards the sky, as if you were trying to reach the sun.
- Again, reach your arms out to the sides as though you were trying to touch the walls, as though you were trying to push them outwards.
- Reach out in front of you.
- Feel your muscles in your back and shoulders become looser and less tense.
- Reach towards the sky one more time.

Please continue the exercise on the following page.

7. Relaxation activity - Total stretching (continued)



- Reach as high as you can.
- Try to touch the sun.
- Lower your arms to your sides.
- Now, roll your shoulders back.
- Feel the tension drain from your body.
- Roll your shoulders back again. One more time roll your shoulders.
- Now roll them forward. Forward again. One more time forward.
- Now shrug your shoulders, lifting them up and then pushing them down. Shrug your shoulders again. Shrug them one more time.
- Now another deep and refreshing breath and exhale all of the tension in your body.
- Take one more breath...and exhale letting go of any remaining tension.



3. Relaxing at any time and any place

You can take some time to relax at any time of the day and in any place.

Let's look at an example

Diana: relaxing while waiting in line

Diana often feels tense when there is a long line in the store, as she is aware she still has many other things to do. She decides to do the breathing exercise while waiting in line.

Afterwards, she feels less tense.

You can also plan a specific time to relax, for example every day after lunch. You can choose what suits you best. If necessary, you can use a reminder to make sure that you do not forget to take some time to relax.

Keep in Mind



- You can take some time to relax anywhere and at any time of the day.
- Set a goal: try to do a relaxation exercise at least once a day.
- You can plan a specific time to relax every day (if necessary, use a reminder).
- You will benefit from having renewed energy and a better mood after doing the relaxation exercises.
- Even a brief exercise can make a difference!
- You will also be able to reduce feelings of tension and continue caring for your family member or acquaintance over the long term.

Was this helpful for you?

If not, there might be different reasons why relaxation was not helpful to you:

- Perhaps you could not focus on relaxing.
- Try again at another time!
- Maybe you like an exercise, but you need some more practice to really benefit from it. Try to do this exercise regularly.
- The exercise you chose may not have suited you. Try a different exercise!
- The exercise you chose was too short.
- Try this exercise again or do another one!

If the exercises are still not helping you after these tips, try to do an activity you enjoy. Have a look at **Unit 2. Making time for pleasant activities** in this module to find out which activities you may enjoy.



You finished this Unit, well done!