

Nurturing My Mental & Emotional Health

Created by: The National Institute on Drug Abuse

Activity

Your mind and emotions affect your overall health. Unmanaged stress can increase the risk that a person may attempt to deal with stressors—including mental health issues and trauma—by using drugs and other substances. Today, we're going to do an activity that can help you nurture your own mental health. Since every person is unique, the activities that help you relax or feel better may be different than the ones that may help your friends or family members.

On a scale of 1 to 10, how stressed are you now? With 1 indicating barely any stress and 10 indicating super stressed. Circle your response on the scale below.



The 4-7-8 breath. This breathing exercise involves breathing in for a count of 4, holding the breath for a count of 7, and exhaling for a count of 8. You can adjust the speed of each breath based on how fast you count. When a person does this for the first time, they should do it seated or lying down and only for a few breaths, as it can make some people feel a bit giddy or light-headed.

Source: **U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.**

It's OK to feel "not OK." It can be hard to handle difficult circumstances. That's why it's really important to take care of your emotional and mental health, and to practice healthy ways to cope. Hopefully by the end of this activity, when asked about your stress level, it might go down at least one number.

Select an activity from the list below, and practice doing it for the next 10 minutes. You may even want to try something you haven't tried before to see if it's relaxing and something you might enjoy. Ideas for activities may include...

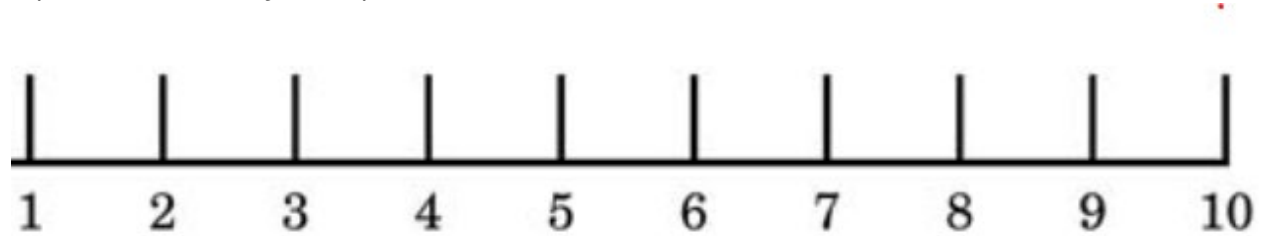
- Draw a picture of a favorite place or memory.
- Close your eyes and focus on your breathing. You can use a free app, like this one, **Breathe2Relax.**
- Read or listen to a **mindfulness passage (example).**
- Write about what's on your mind.
- Write down 10 things you feel grateful for.
- Practice **guided imagery.**
- Exercise (either aerobic, like dancing along with music videos, or stretching, like yoga).
- Listen to music that helps you relax.

Write down how you felt before the activity and how you feel now. For example, tight in my chest/open and easier to breathe.

It's important to find activities that support your mental health. If what you tried today didn't help you feel less stressed, consider trying another option from the list. It may take a few tries to find what works best for you. What works for your family members or friends might not work for you.

Did you notice that the options listed included different kinds of things: physical activity and movement, reading, drawing, writing? That's because it's important to know that taking care of your mental and emotional health might mean taking a nap or running a mile. It might include writing down your feelings or listening to music. Knowing what you can do to support and manage your mental and emotional health is half the work! Plus, bringing yourself back to a state of calm may help you in other areas of health and life.

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Did you learn something about what could help you feel less stressed—or what doesn't help?