

Seizure prevention and anxiety management techniques

This handout contains instructions for some simple techniques that you may find helpful for warding off threatened seizures, dealing with anxiety, panic, tension or hyperventilation (these are all symptoms of hyper-arousal) or for times when you may start to feel tired, floppy, slowed down, floaty or begin to slip out of awareness (also known as hypo-arousal). The table below lists the techniques and the situations where each one might be useful.

<u>Technique</u>	<u>Useful for</u>	<u>Tick if this is helpful for you</u>
1. Hand on heart or belly	Calming, seizure prevention from hyper-arousal	
2. Sensory grounding	Seizure prevention, calming, hypo-arousal	
3. 5 minute time-out	Calming, persistent worrying or other negative thoughts	
4. Big sigh	Letting go of tension and anxiety, hyperventilation or holding breath	
5. Abdominal breathing	Letting go of tension and anxiety, hyperventilation or holding breath	
6. Orienting round the room	Seizure prevention, calming, hyper- or hypo-arousal	
7. Shoulder rolls	Physical tension in upper body	
8. Standing and moving	Hypo-arousal, slumping, tension	

For all the techniques, take your time, pause often, and keep your attention focused on your present moment experiences. Take notice of any changes in your body sensations, breathing, tension, feelings of anxiety or calm, any changes in your emotions. Do this in a spirit of curiosity, just noticing what happens without judging or consciously trying to change anything. Different techniques seem to work for different people and the idea is to try to find out which ones are helpful for you.

1. Hand on heart or belly technique

Turn your attention inwards and notice what is happening inside you right now – any areas of tension, what's happening to your breathing, your heart, whether you are feeling warm or cool, whether your hands are dry or clammy. Just notice for now and don't try to change anything. Then try this technique to see if it seems helpful for you.

- Take your right hand and place it on your chest in the area of your heart. Pause and notice from the inside how it feels to have your hand there.
- Now experiment a little with the position of your hand to make sure you've got it just right. Pause and notice how that feels.
- Now you may want to experiment a bit with the pressure, making it a little lighter or heavier until you're sure you've got that just right too.
- Now focus all your attention on the sensation of your hand just there in the right place with the right pressure.
- Notice if your hand feels warm or cool on your chest.
- Notice how the sensation changes just a little as your chest rises and falls with your breathing.
- Notice whether you can feel your heart beating or not. Sometimes we are aware of this and sometimes we are not.
- Notice whether it feels nice and comforting or in any way uncomfortable or unpleasant.
- Now think about how that felt, and notice what's happening inside you now.

The same technique can also work with your hand on your belly just above your navel, or even with your right hand on your chest and your left hand on your belly. Experiment and see which works best for you.

2. Sensory grounding procedure for dealing with threatened seizures, panic attacks and 'funny turns'

It is a good idea to practice this regularly when you are feeling OK so that when you really need it you will remember exactly what to do. Then whenever you start to notice a seizure warning or if you start to feel panicky use it straight away.

Say the following aloud:

- Right now I am feeling _____. (*Insert the name of the current emotion, e.g. fear, angry, numb*)
- And I am sensing in my body _____ (*name at least 3 bodily sensations you are feeling right now e.g. sweaty hands, headache, tight chest, thumping heart*)
- At the same time, I can feel this (*really concentrate hard on feeling something rough or textured with your hands*) with my hands, and the ground under my feet (*put your feet flat on the ground and feel it solid under your feet*).
- I can see _____ (*describe in detail some of the things you can see where you are now*).
- I can hear _____ (*describe any sounds you can hear*)
- I am here in _____ (*name the place where you are*)

If you have seizures that come on too quickly to do the whole procedure, the most important part of this is to quickly feel something rough or textured with your hands.

Adapted from Babette Rothschild, 'The Body Remembers'

3. Time out on the spot

This is another good technique to use in situations where you might feel stressed or anxious. You can use it anywhere or any time and no-one else needs to know that you are doing it. Just take a few minutes out of the stressful situation to go to the relaxing place in your mind. This is what you do:

- Think about a place you have been where you felt happy and relaxed. It might be somewhere you have been on holiday or a special place from your childhood or in your home. It should be somewhere you have felt calm and at peace.
- Imagine yourself in that place.
- Take your time to picture it clearly and think about everything you can see there in as much as much detail as possible – the scenery, buildings, furniture or objects, the people who would be there.
- Then think about what you can hear there – it might be the sound of waves, running water or breeze in the trees if it is an outdoor place, or voices or music.
- Imagine what you might be able to smell there, for example seaweed, wet leaves, the smell of food cooking etc.
- Think about any sensations you might feel, e.g. the sun on your skin, a breeze, the chill of crisp winter's day, snuggling under a warm blanket.
- Now turn your attention inwards and notice how it feels inside as you take yourself to this special place.

Now when you are in a situation where you feel stressed or anxious, imagine opening a door which takes you to this place. In your mind picture yourself stepping into this place, soak up the atmosphere and let the relaxation wash over you. Stay there for as long as you need – it may just be a few moments or you could chill out there for 15 minutes or more. When you return to whatever you were doing, imagine stepping back through the door into your everyday life but bringing some of that special feeling back with you.

4. Big sighs

It is not unusual for people to find that their breathing changes before a seizure or if they feel panicky. Some people hold their breath at these times; others feel as if they are struggling to breathe or start to hyperventilate, which can make you feel dizzy and sick and increase the feelings of panic. This is a simple technique to get your breathing back into a normal rhythm.

- Let out a really long, slow sigh.
- If you want to, you can make a little “Aah....” sound as you do it.
- As you breathe out with the sigh imagine that you are letting go of all the stress and tension in your body and mind.
- At the end of the sigh, pause, and then just let the in-breath happen all on its own.
- Do this 2 or 3 times, then let your breathing return to its own natural rhythm and see how you feel.

5. Abdominal breathing

This is another useful breathing technique to deal with panic and hyperventilation to help get your breathing back into its normal rhythm.

- Sit comfortably with one hand on your belly around the navel.
- **Slowly** breathe in through your nose and as you do so notice your belly expand beneath your hand.
- Pause for a count of three.
- **Slowly** breathe out through your nose and as you do so think "Relax...."
- Rest for a moment.
- Then repeat for about 20 breaths or until you feel back in control.

6. Orienting around the room

This is a technique to help bring you back to normal if you get a seizure warning, or if you are feeling agitated, panicky, your heart is thumping or you are starting to feel strange, floaty, sick or losing contact with your surroundings. Take your attention away from what is going on inside you and do the following exercise.

- Sit up tall and lengthen your spine and neck.
- Turn your head round to the left and focus your attention on what you can see. Observe everything you can see in detail, really notice it and describe to yourself what you can see, so that you have to really think about it. If there is a picture describe to in your mind what you can see in the picture. If there is a clock, what colour is it and what time does it say? If there is a sign on the wall, what does it say? etc.
- Then very gradually turn your head a little to the right and see what you can see now. Observe that also in detail as above. Really connect with what you can see around you.
- Gradually keep turning your head and observing until you have scanned the whole room or scene in front of you and your head has turned round to the right.

7. Shoulder rolls

When people are stressed or anxious they often carry a lot of tension in their upper body. They may find that their shoulders are often hunched up, their head pulled down and their neck compressed. This can cause pain and discomfort in the upper back and shoulders and can even cause headaches. This is a good technique to use if you realise that this applies to you.

- First without changing anything, turn your attention to your body and notice how you are sitting or standing right now. Notice any areas of pain, tension or discomfort, and how you are feeling in general physically and emotionally.
- Now slowly sit or stand up straighter and lengthen your spine as if you are being gently pulled up by the top of your head. Pause and notice how you feel now, being aware of any differences physically or emotionally just from that change of posture.
- Now gently roll your right shoulder about three times each in one direction and then in the other.
- Now do the same with your left shoulder.
- Now roll both shoulders about 3 times one after the other.
- Now hunch both shoulders up as high as you can, hold that position for a moment then let them relax and drop.
- Adjust your posture and lengthen your spine again and notice how you are feeling now both physically and emotionally.

8. Standing and moving

This can be helpful if you are feeling a bit tired, floppy and floaty (hypo-arousal), if you tend to be a bit slumped or if there is a lot of tension in your body. It can really 'wake you up', loosen you up and reconnect you with your body in a fun way.

- Stand up and plant your feet solidly on the ground about shoulder width apart.
- Stand up tall and lengthen your spine as described in the previous technique.
- Experiment with placing your feet a little closer or further apart to see what feels best.
- Now experiment with shifting your weight from one foot to the other, or from your heels to toes and back again and see how this feels.
- Now experiment with different forms of movement. You could swing your arms in different directions, rotate your hips, bounce a little from the knees, have a little dance.
- Keep your body relaxed and really enjoy the sensation of movement.
- Doing this technique while playing some of your favourite music can make it more enjoyable.

