

# Nova Scotia Relaxation Techniques & Resources Guide

## Quick Reference Relaxation Techniques

### 1. STOP Stress Reduction Technique

#### Recommended by Nova Scotia Health

When you feel anxious or overwhelmed:

- **S - STOP** what you're doing
- **T - TAKE** a deep breath
- **O - OBSERVE** what's happening in your mind and body
- **P - PROCEED** mindfully with whatever action you need in this moment

*Practice this technique anywhere, anytime - it takes just 30 seconds.*

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## Core Relaxation Techniques

### 2. Deep Breathing Exercise

#### Basic 4-7-8 Breathing:

1. Sit comfortably with your back straight
2. Inhale through your nose for 4 counts
3. Hold your breath for 7 counts
4. Exhale through your mouth for 8 counts
5. Repeat 3-4 cycles

#### Box Breathing (Alternative):

- Inhale for 4 counts
- Hold for 4 counts
- Exhale for 4 counts
- Hold empty for 4 counts

### 3. Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)

#### Step-by-Step Instructions:

1. **Get comfortable** - Sit or lie down in a quiet space

2. **Start with your feet** - Tense your toes and feet for 5 seconds, then release
3. **Move up your body** systematically:
  - Calves and shins (tense 5 sec, release)
  - Thighs and glutes (tense 5 sec, release)
  - Abdomen and chest (tense 5 sec, release)
  - Hands and arms (make fists, tense 5 sec, release)
  - Shoulders and neck (shrug up, tense 5 sec, release)
  - Face muscles (scrunch face, tense 5 sec, release)
4. **Full body scan** - Notice the difference between tension and relaxation
5. **Complete relaxation** - Take 3 deep breaths and enjoy the calm

*Total time: 10-15 minutes*

## 4. Mindfulness Meditation (5-Minute Version)

### Basic Mindfulness Practice:

1. Sit comfortably with eyes closed or softly focused
2. Focus on your natural breathing
3. When your mind wanders (and it will), gently return attention to your breath
4. Notice thoughts without judgment - just observe and let go
5. End by taking three deep breaths

### Mindful Body Scan (10-Minute Version):

1. Lie down comfortably
2. Start at the top of your head
3. Slowly move your attention down through each part of your body
4. Notice sensations without trying to change anything
5. If you find tension, breathe into that area

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## Nova Scotia-Specific Resources

### Free Online Programs

#### Mindwell U

- **What:** Free 5-minute daily mindfulness program

- **Access:** Available across all of Nova Scotia
- **Device:** Any smartphone, tablet, or computer
- **Cost:** Completely free
- **Focus:** Basic mindfulness skills for stress reduction

## Tranquility Program

- **What:** Free internet-based Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (iCBT)
- **Eligibility:** Nova Scotians 16+ with mild to moderate anxiety/depression
- **Duration:** 12 weeks with 9-12 modules (30 minutes each)
- **Support:** One-on-one virtual coaching available
- **Access:** Sign up immediately online - no referral needed

## Local Organizations

### Breathe Mindfulness Centre (Halifax)

- **Services:** Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy, self-compassion training
- **Founded:** 2015 - one of the first accredited centers in Atlantic Canada
- **Specialties:** Evidence-based therapeutic groups, trauma-informed approaches
- **Contact:** Available for individual and group sessions

### Anxiety & Trauma Clinic of Nova Scotia

- **Location:** Halifax, serving all of Nova Scotia
- **Phone:** 902-412-1557
- **Services:** Anxiety counseling, trauma counseling, relaxation apps recommendations
- **Specialty:** Generalized anxiety disorder, social anxiety, PTSD

## Emergency Support

- **NS Mental Health Crisis Line:** 902-429-8167 or 1-888-429-8167 (toll-free, 24/7)
  - **Emergency:** 9-1-1
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## Guided Audio Resources

### Recommended by Nova Scotia Health Community Health Teams:

### For Guided Imagery & Relaxation:

- University of Illinois McKinley Health Center (free online)
- Progressive muscle relaxation audio guides
- Deep breathing exercise recordings

#### **For Mindfulness:**

- Dr. Kristen Neff's self-compassion guided practices
  - Chris Germer's mindful self-compassion meditations
  - McGill University Student Wellness Hub audio clips
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## **Daily Practice Recommendations**

### **Morning Routine (5 minutes)**

1. **Mindful awakening:** 2 minutes of deep breathing before getting up
2. **Intention setting:** Choose one relaxation technique to use during the day
3. **Mindwell U:** Complete daily 5-minute module

### **During Stressful Moments**

- **STOP technique:** Use immediately when stress arises
- **4-7-8 breathing:** Quick reset in 1-2 minutes
- **Mini body scan:** 30-second tension check and release

### **Evening Wind-Down (10-15 minutes)**

1. **Progressive muscle relaxation:** Full body sequence
  2. **Mindful reflection:** Notice what relaxation techniques helped today
  3. **Gratitude practice:** Identify 3 things you're grateful for
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## **Building Your Relaxation Toolkit**

### **Week 1: Foundation**

- Master the STOP technique
- Practice basic deep breathing daily
- Sign up for Mindwell U

### **Week 2: Expansion**

- Add progressive muscle relaxation
- Try 5-minute mindfulness meditation
- Identify your preferred techniques

### **Week 3: Integration**

- Use techniques during actual stress
- Consider Tranquility program if needed
- Connect with local resources if desired

### **Week 4: Maintenance**

- Establish daily practice routine
  - Share techniques with family/friends
  - Plan ongoing learning and practice
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## **When to Seek Additional Support**

### **Consider professional help if:**

- Relaxation techniques aren't providing relief after consistent practice
- Anxiety interferes with work, relationships, or daily activities
- You have thoughts of self-harm
- Physical symptoms accompany anxiety (chest pain, severe headaches)

### **Nova Scotia Options:**

- Family doctor or nurse practitioner
  - Tranquility program coaching support
  - Local mental health services through Nova Scotia Health
  - Private counselors specializing in anxiety (like Breathe Mindfulness Centre)
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## **Evidence Base**

These techniques are supported by research showing effectiveness for:

- Reducing cortisol (stress hormone) levels
- Lowering blood pressure and heart rate
- Improving sleep quality

- Decreasing symptoms of anxiety and depression
- Enhancing overall sense of well-being

**Remember:** Consistency is key. Even 5 minutes daily is more beneficial than occasional longer sessions.

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*This guide is compiled from resources recommended by Nova Scotia Health, evidence-based practices, and local Nova Scotia mental health organizations.*