

a patient's guide

Relaxation and breathing techniques

Patient Information Series PI 83



Mount Vernon
Cancer Centre

This publication has been produced by the Information team at the Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre. Contributors include professionals, patients and carers from Mount Vernon Cancer Centre who have expertise and experience in the topics covered by this publication. All our publications are reviewed and updated regularly. If you would like any details of the references used to write this information please contact the LJMC on 020 3826 2555.

Lynda Jackson 
Macmillan Centre

Relaxation and breathing techniques

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Introduction

This information is provided to help you manage your stress and anxiety. The Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre (LJMC) runs sessions in relaxation, breathing techniques and coping strategies to help you with the anxieties that can arise when having cancer treatment.

Many patients find it helpful to make time for themselves and practise calming exercises regularly. Stress itself can be a positive emotion that gets you motivated and forward thinking. However, when it becomes out of control for any reason, you may forget what it is like to feel calm and relaxed. This booklet also includes some ideas you may like to practise.

When and where are the relaxation sessions held?

Relaxation sessions are held in the LJMC on:

- Monday 10.00am – 11.15am
- Tuesday 11.00am – 12.15pm
- Wednesday 2.00pm – 3.15pm
- Thursday 2.30pm – 3.45pm

At your first session please arrive a few minutes early so that you can meet the relaxation therapist and briefly discuss your individual needs. The therapist will also explain the content of the relaxation sessions and how they may help you.

This is a bookable service and you need to make a booking in advance by calling the LJMC helpline on 020 3826 2555.

We try not to cancel relaxation sessions but from time to time this may occur due to reasons beyond our control. If you are making a special journey, please contact the LJMC helpline to check that the session is taking place.

What happens during the relaxation sessions?

You practise the relaxation techniques whilst sitting in a comfortable reclining chair. For additional comfort you may wish to bring your own small cushion for back or neck support. The groups are small, welcoming and informal. Gentle music is often played during part of each session.

No special clothing is required but do wear something comfortable. We advise wearing or bringing extra layers as the room will need to be well ventilated.

In these classes we will teach you relaxation skills and how they work. To relax your mind and body and release stress and tension we will share a variety of calming techniques including breathing, visualisation and concentration.

Regular practice will make this easy for you to manage at home. We will help you create our own relaxation plan to enhance calmness and better health.

COVID-19 precautions

Due to the exceptional circumstances:-

- we ask you to wear a face mask (unless you are exempt) at all times within the Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre
- group sizes may be quite small as we will be following the latest advice on social distancing.
- for the time being, the service is only be available for patients

Here are some techniques you might like to try...

Relaxation and stress management

1. Make yourself warm and comfortable, sitting or lying down.
2. Choose any part of your body you think needs relaxing, then tighten and release it, for example, lift your shoulders, squeeze and relax.
3. Place your hands on your lower rib cage, little fingers just above your navel.
4. Relax your hands and gently relax your face.
5. Try to breathe through your nose unless advised differently.
6. Feel your body moving gently under your hands as your quiet breathing calms you and releases any discomfort. Breathe softly in and out through your nose. This warms, filters and moistens your breath.
7. Quietly be aware of your breath.
8. As you breathe in, say to yourself: 'breathing in makes me calm'.
9. As you breathe out, say to yourself: 'breathing out brings me peace'.
10. Take time to breathe, relax and 'let go'.

Relaxation to calm the body

1. Lie down flat with a pillow under your head; knees can be bent. Gently place the palms of your hands on your lower rib cage.
2. Breathe steadily, feeling the movement of your body against your hands as you breathe.
3. Allow yourself to feel at ease and able to relax. Continue to breathe slowly and easily for as long as is comfortable.
4. In order to relax a part of your body, simply think about it and then say "Relax" softly in your mind. Continue and focus on peaceful thoughts. You may like to try this to help you sleep.

Breathing techniques

A key part of each session relates to breath awareness. You will be taught comfortable breathing techniques to help calm the mind and relax the body.

For example: sit quietly and breathe gently through the nostrils for five minutes, feeling the breath soft and easy just above your top lip.

Special techniques are given to help people who need a little more guidance, for example, patients with lung cancer or those having panic attacks, shortness of breath or deep anxiety. They can also be useful for people who are anxious about having scans, other tests or treatments.

Breathing techniques calm the nervous system and help you focus, settle your emotions and bring a sense of quiet and mindfulness.

Calming breath

Your brain usually controls your breathing without you thinking about it. If you become anxious, your breathing can become shallow, uneven and faster. Quiet breathing techniques can help to calm the body and mind. With practice, these techniques can help your breathing during anxious moments so you feel more relaxed.

1. Start by sitting quietly. Breathe in and out through your nose and be aware of your breath. Allow your breathing to slow down to be comfortable and steady.
2. As you settle, counting your breaths can be helpful. For example:
 - breathe in for a count of four
 - pause a moment
 - breathe out for a count of five
 - pause a moment
3. Continue as above, lengthening the count (if it feels comfortable) to slow down your breathing. Your breath should be gentle, not heavy, the out breath lasting a little longer. Try to practise for a few minutes regularly.

There are many times when this type of breathing can help, for example when you are afraid, feel anxious or cannot sleep.

Relaxing your face

1. Start by sitting quietly. Be aware of your face becoming softer and freer.
2. Focus on the space between your eyebrows.
3. As your face relaxes, be aware of your breath. Notice the sensations of breathing, the cool air coming in and the warm air going out of the nostrils. Feel your arms supported, hands relaxed and experience a quiet time.

Hairline back
and softer

Forehead
smooth
and soft

Back of
the neck
longer



Eyelids soft
and heavy

Cheeks
softer
inside
and out

Lips and
tongue
softer

What is visualisation?

Visualisation is a useful method which uses imagery to help relieve stress and anxiety. It can be changed to suit your own needs to help calm you.

A therapist can gently guide you through a quiet time where you visualise and focus the attention on remembering a pleasing memory, for example a walk on the beach, being in a lovely garden, or finding a nice space that you choose. It becomes a time to escape and to rest the body and mind.

You may like to add a visualisation

Imagine a special place or occasion that has a 'good feel' about it for you. Revisiting a place that feels nice, is calming. Bringing all your senses into play enhances the experience.

For example, imagine...

- a walk on the beach: feel the sun's warmth, see the colours
- a lovely garden: hear the sounds, smell the scents
- a family outing: remember the happy or peaceful feelings



You may like to vary your relaxation time by listening to a relaxation CD or your favourite music, or perhaps vary the time, eg, 20 to 30 minutes.

When you are ready to finish, deepen your breathing and become aware of your surroundings, before moving around.

Your response to relaxation brings its own rewards. Aim to feel calmer and incorporate this feeling into each day.

Where can I find out more information?

You can find out more about these sessions in the LJMC by talking to one of our relaxation therapists or any member of the drop-in team.

More information is also available on the following topics:

- Complementary therapies, including reflexology, reiki and aromatherapy massage)
- Ear acupuncture
- Coping with anxiety

If you would like any of this information please drop in to the LJMC or phone the helpline on 020 3826 2555.

Other help and support

The Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre (LJMC) offers information and support to patients and their families and is located next to Chemotherapy Suite by Gate 3. The staff at the LJMC work as part of the overall team caring for you.

People who have cancer often say that during their illness they experience a range of emotions. Many find it to be a stressful, anxious and confusing time. Please feel free to drop in before, during and after any of your visits to Mount Vernon Cancer Centre to find out more about the LJMC services that you may find helpful.

The volunteers and healthcare professionals at the LJMC provide help, support and information in a relaxed setting to help patients cope with cancer and its treatment.

LJMC services include a range of complementary therapies, counselling, relaxation sessions and financial advice. You can drop in without an appointment or call the LJMC helpline on 020 3826 2555. More information is on the back of this leaflet.

Questions or concerns about cancer and treatment? Struggling to cope? Need some support? Need to talk?

Drop in to the Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre
or call the support & information helpline

We will listen to your concerns, answer your questions
and guide you to further information
and services to help you

cancer treatment	practical support
side effects of treatment	headwear workshops
day-to-day living with cancer	exercise
benefits advice	diet and nutrition
counselling	health and wellbeing
someone to talk to	talking to family and friends
emotional support	Look Good Feel Better
complementary therapy	self-help courses
relaxation services	life after cancer

The Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre is situated between the
Cancer Centre and Gate 3 (White Hill)

Opening hours: Monday–Friday 9.30am–4.30pm

020 3826 2555

www.ljmc.org

Supporting people affected by cancer
from diagnosis, through treatment and beyond