

Self-Massage Techniques to Relax

Head and Face

Massage your head and face to reduce tension or anxiety.

1. Place one index finger on top of the other at the center of your hairline. Press and release that point and then move down the center of your forehead, pressing and releasing.
2. Move about one inch horizontally to the right of the centerline, and press and release from the hairline downward. Repeat this press and release one inch to the left of the centerline.
3. Place your thumbs or index fingers at the center of your forehead, and then move them in a line from the center to your temples. Repeat this massage technique across your eyebrows, the center horizontal line of the forehead, and your hairline.
4. Use your index fingers to make small circles on each temple.
5. Place all your fingers on your scalp, with your hands in the claw-like position. Make small circles, slowly covering the whole scalp, spending extra time on tight spots.
6. Use alternate index fingers to stroke the bridge of the nose from top to tip.
7. Use your thumbs or index fingers to gently stroke from the inner corner of each eye across the top of the cheekbones to your ears. Repeat the stroking motion until you reach the bottom of your cheekbones.
8. On the well-developed muscles of your jaw, use your fingers to make circles, spending extra time on sore or tight spots.

Self-Massage For Your Neck

1. With one hand, grasp the base of your neck and squeeze it. Continue squeezing and releasing the neck muscles as you move up your neck to your hairline. Repeat as many times as desired.
2. Exhale and let your head drop, stretching the back of your neck slowly with the help of one hand on the back of your head. Inhale and lift your head. Then exhale as you again help yourself stretch your neck to the right and then the left. (Stretch only to a comfortable stretch).
3. Place the pads of your thumbs just above your ears (palms flat on the sides of your head). Use your thumbs to press into that point; release. Move along your hairline, pressing and releasing, until your thumbs meet in the center back of your head.
4. Move your thumbs up a little to the ridge in the back of your head. Make little circles with your thumbs, using slow, comfortable pressure, and moving back to the starting hand position, as you follow the ridge and hairline.

5. Repeat the hairline massage with the thumbs two more times.

Self-Massage for Arms and Shoulders

To release neck and shoulder muscles:

Use your left hand to squeeze and release the right side of your neck at its base. Move your hand down your right shoulder and arm, squeezing and releasing as you go. Repeat several times on the right side and then several times using the right hand on the left side.

To massage your arms:

1. Warm up one arm by squeezing the muscles, moving up and down the arm. Next, briskly rub up and down the arm, from shoulder to wrist.
2. Place the warmed forearm on a counter or a high table, using a folded towel for padding. Place the elbow of the other arm on top of the forearm on the table, just below the elbow.
3. Press firmly but gently into the forearm and then release. Press and release points down a line on the forearm until you reach the wrist. Turn your forearm until you have massaged it completely, repeating the press and release three times down each line.
4. Go back to tender spots, and use your thumb to press each one for a few seconds.
5. Repeat these steps on the other arm.

Low Back and Buttocks Massage

1. Lie on the floor on your side with your knees bent. Place your hand as far up your spine as you can and use your thumb to massage the muscles along the sides of the spine, moving slowly down your spine to your tail bone.
2. Using your thumbs, knuckles or fist, apply pressure to the buttock muscles, starting at your lower back and moving to the thigh, pressing into each point for several seconds.
3. Place a tennis ball or a soft "practice" golf ball under one buttock (you can sit or lie down). If the ball is too hard cover it with a towel or do this technique on a bed or other soft surface. Roll your lower back and buttocks over the ball, pressing your body weight comfortably into the ball. Spend extra time on spots that feel tight. (If you feel a sudden, sharp pain, you may have rolled over the sciatic nerve. Avoid that spot.)

Foot Self-Massage

To do the following foot self-massage techniques, sit in a chair and place one foot over the other knee, or sit cross-legged on the floor with one foot in a forward position.

1. Take your foot in one hand and create motion in the ankle joint by moving the foot forward and back and side-to-side.

2. With one hand, hold your foot. Use the thumb of the other hand to press and slide down the sole from the base of the toes to the heel. Repeat until you've covered the entire sole.
3. Use your thumb or knuckles to press and massage more deeply into tender points. Hold particularly tight or achy spots for several seconds.
4. Use your fingers to squeeze each toe.
5. Use your whole hand to squeeze and release the entire foot from the heel to the toes. Repeat several times.
6. Repeat this sequence on your other foot.

Another option is to massage your feet with a tennis, golf or other small ball. Roll each foot over a ball for a minute or two, applying extra pressure on tight spots. You can also use a frozen water bottle or a rubber spike ball (dog toy).

Understanding Lymphedema

What Is Lymphedema?

The lymphatic system is part of the circulatory system. It is a network of tissues and organs made up of lymph vessels which are different from blood vessels. The lymphatic system carries fluid called "lymph" throughout your body. These vessels carry our bodies' waste products to the lymph nodes to be broken down and eliminated, and allow protein rich fluid to return to our circulation. These vessels become compromised when they are removed or damaged, causing fluid to accumulate which results in chronic swelling. If left untreated, it may result in a hardening of the protein rich fluid, better known as lymphedema. Lymphedema most often develops in arms or legs, but may be present in hands, feet, neck, face, abdomen or genitals.

Types of Lymphedema

Primary: Caused by malformations of the lymphatic system. These malformations may be present at birth or develop later in life. It is most common in the legs.

Secondary: Caused by damage to the lymphatic system including surgical procedures and/or removal of lymph nodes, traumatic injury, infection or severe chronic venous insufficiency.

What Should I Look For?

- Full, tired, heavy sensation in the body part
- Swelling with or without pain
- Hardening, thickening or discoloration of the skin
- Decreased range of motion

Risk Factors

- Being overweight or gaining weight especially during or after cancer treatment
- Removal of lymph nodes
- Radiation
- Infections

How Is Lymphedema Treated?

- Manual lymph drainage - Gentle, hands-on treatment stimulates movement of fluid in the tissues
- Compression bandaging and garments
- Meticulous skin and nail care
- Decongestive exercise

How Do I Decrease Risk of Developing or Worsening Existing Lymphedema?

- Avoid extreme hot and cold climates
- Avoid hot baths, showers, sauna and hot tubs
- Avoid manicures and pedicures at salons
- Avoid skin punctures, needle punctures, cuts and acupuncture to the swollen area
- Avoid pet scratches
- Avoid blood pressure cuffs on the affected limb
- Avoid tight clothes, rings or watches
- Avoid a high-fat or high-salt diet
- Avoid deep or Swedish massage to the affected limb

Recommended Survivorship Books

After you Ring the Bell... 10 Challenges for the Cancer Survivor by Anne Katz

Surviving After Cancer: Living the New Normal by Anne Katz

The American Cancer Society New Healthy Eating Cookbook by Jeanne Besser

The New York Times Picture Your Life After Cancer edited by Karen Barrow, forward by Tara Parker-Pope

After Cancer Care by Gerald M Lemole, MD, Pallav K Mehta, MD, Dwight L McKee, MD, Forward by Mehmet C. Oz, MD

Picking Up the Pieces: Moving Forward After Surviving Cancer by Sherri Magee, PhD and Kathy Scalzo, MSOD

American Cancer Society Complete Guide to Nutrition for Cancer Survivors: 2nd Edition by Barbara L. Grant, MS, RD, CSO, LD, Abby S Bloch, PhD, RD, Kathryn H. Hamilton, MA, RD, CSO, CDN, Cynthia A. Thompson, PhD, RD, CSO

What Helped Get Me Through: Cancer Survivors Share Wisdom and Hope Edited by Julie K. Silver, MD