

# WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU CAN'T STUDY ANYMORE



(BUT HAVE TO)

**How to take a deep breath**

**Use your 5 senses  
to calm down in 5 minutes**

**Healing hand positions**

By Jessica Cooper  
Wellness Education Centre  
[wec.uwo.ca](http://wec.uwo.ca)

# Stressed? Just take a deep breath!

## ... But how?

When You're Distracted

### **Sama Vritti or "Equal Breathing"**

**How it's done:** Inhale for 4 counts, exhale for 4 counts. Try to do it entirely through the nose to add a natural resistance. This is called pranayama. Once you've got that down, try to work your way up to longer counts - the pros can get up to 8.

**When it works best:** Anytime. Any place. But it's especially useful right before bed, maybe the night before an exam. This exercise forces the mind to focus on one task.

If something from your day is distracting you from studying, try this and just be present in the moment.

# When You're Exhausted

## Nadi Shodhana or "Alternate Nostril Breathing"

**How it's done:** Start in a comfortable meditative position. Hold your right thumb over the right nostril and inhale deeply through the left nostril. At the peak of inhalation, switch sides: Release the right nostril, and close off the left nostril with your ring finger. Then exhale through the right nostril. Continue this pattern with alternating sides.

**When it works best:** Crunch time. When you need to wake up and focus, make this your go-to. This exercise helps calm, balance, and unite the right and left sides of the brain. Don't try this one before bed - some say it's like a cup of coffee.

# When You're Anxious

## Abdominal Breathing Technique

**How it works:** Place one hand on your chest and the other on your belly, and take a deep breath in through the nose. Make sure your diaphragm (not chest) inflates with enough air to create a stretch in the lungs. The goal is 6-10 slow breaths per minute for 10 minutes each day. You'll see immediate reductions in heart rate and blood pressure. Stick with it for 6 to 8 weeks and those benefits might stick around even longer.

**When it works best:** Before an exam or any stressful event. If you usually function in a stressed state, you might be surprised how hard it is to control your breathing for longer periods of time. Don't give up - you're on your way to reaping the benefits of managing stress productively.

# When You're Tense

## Progressive Relaxation

**How it's done:** To get rid of tension from head to toe, close your eyes and focus on tensing and relaxing each muscle group for two to three seconds each. Start with your toes and feet, then move up to the knees, thighs, glutes, chest, arms, hands, neck, jaw, forehead and eyes. It's important to maintain deep, slow breaths throughout. If you're having trouble staying on track, inhale through your nose and hold for a count of five while the muscles tense. Then breathe out through the mouth on release.

**When it works best:** At home, at a desk, or even on the road. But remember in any of these exercises, dizziness is NEVER the goal. If holding your breath ever feels uncomfortable, tone it down to just a few seconds.

# When You're Just Having the Worst Day

## Kapalabhati or "Skull Shining Breath"

**How it's done:** Ready to brighten up your day from the inside out? This one begins with a long, slow inhale, followed by a quick, powerful exhale generated from the lower belly. Once comfortable with the contraction, up the pace to one inhale-exhale (all through the nose) every 1 to 2 seconds, for a total of 10 breaths.

**When it works best:** When it's time to wake up or start looking on the bright side. It's pretty abdominal-intensive but it will warm up the body, shake off stale energy, and wake up the brain. If alternate nostril breathing is like coffee, consider this a shot of espresso. This is for more advanced levels.

# Use Your 5 Senses to Calm Down in 5 Minutes

## Sight

- Close your eyes and picture your favourite place to be
- Find a nearby window or step outside for a few minutes
- Watch a funny video (seriously - try it!)

## Smell

- If you're at home, light your favourite candle
- Get some fresh air
- Keep your favourite scented hand lotion or sanitizer with you and put it on

## **Taste**

- Aim for a healthy crunchy snack like trail mix or veggies and dip
- Have a hot cup of coffee or tea
- Drink some ice cold water or juice
- Savour a square of dark chocolate
- Chew a stick of gum: mint for a cleansing feeling or fruity for a pick-me-up

## **Touch and Movement**

- Wrap up in a warm blanket
- Put on your favourite comfortable clothes
- Snuggle any nearby pets
- Roll your head side to side, let it hang in the centre, repeat!
- Give yourself a hand or neck massage
- Take a short walk

## **Sound**

- Put on your favourite song and put your head down, or if it makes you feel like dancing, dance!
- Go outside and listen to passing cars, birds, etc.
- Talk to the friend who just knows how to listen



# Healing Hand Positions

1

This helps calm the nervous system and is good for reducing anxiety. Curl your fingers around your thumbs of each hand to form two fists. Palms down towards thighs. Hold this hand position for 5-10 breaths.

This helps calm your mind and reduce distractions. Gently touch the tip of your thumb to the tip of your index finger. Lay your hands on your thighs if you're sitting, or by your sides if you're laying down. Hold this for 5-10 deep breaths.

2

3

By Jessica Cooper  
Wellness Education Centre  
wec.uwo.ca

This helps direct the breath into the entire body. Gently press together the tips of all fingers, keeping them slightly curled, and place the hands in front of your body. Hold for 5-10 breaths.

# Other Tips

- Write down your to-do list (it feels way longer when it's rushing around your head)
- Pick 3 realistic goals from your list to complete today
- Set a finish time for the day that allows adequate sleep (aim for 8 hrs)

# Resources

- Learning Skills: [sdc.uwo.ca/learning](https://sdc.uwo.ca/learning)
- Writing Support Centre: [sdc.uwo.ca/writing](https://sdc.uwo.ca/writing)
- Student Development Centre: [sdc.uwo.ca](https://sdc.uwo.ca)
- Good 2 Talk Helpline: 1-866-925-5454
- Psychological Services: [sdc.uwo.ca/psych](https://sdc.uwo.ca/psych)