

Stress management for people with epilepsy

Information for patients

This leaflet contains information and advice on how to use mindfulness and relaxation techniques to complement your medical treatment for epilepsy. If you have any other questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to speak to the healthcare professionals caring for you.

More and more people with epilepsy or seizures are taking the decision to respond to stress in new ways. This follows research studies that show people with epilepsy who reduce their stress levels improve their overall sense of wellbeing and can sometimes improve their seizure control.

Mindfulness Meditation and Progressive Muscle Relaxation have been recommended as ways of managing stress by the International League Against Epilepsy (ILAE) and are NHS recommended treatments. They are designed to complement, but do not replace, medical treatment for epilepsy.

Whichever technique you choose, find the one that works for you - there is no one 'right way' of doing it. For example, if you are not able to concentrate on a particular technique for long, it can be helpful to pause the exercise and come back to it when you are ready.

Mindfulness Meditation and Progressive Muscular Relaxation can be used by everyone - including family members and carers. They can be used whether you are having seizures or not and may be useful before and after undergoing surgery for seizures.

Mindfulness Meditation

What is mindfulness? If in doubt = breathe out....

Mindfulness involves slowing down to take notice of what you are doing and sensing in a relaxed and easy way. It typically uses breathing exercises to find a steady personal rhythm to support how you are thinking and feeling.

Mindfulness Meditation is included in the recommendations of the International League Against Epilepsy (ILAE). a study by Tang (2015) showed people with epilepsy who practice mindfulness report a better quality of life and some have a reduction in seizures.

How does it work?

Start by focusing on your breathing. This slows you down and shifts your attention from the stress in your mind to thinking and sensing more calmly, with a calmer breathing rhythm.

It aims to help you:

- feel calmer and less stressed
- feel more able to choose how to respond to your thoughts and feelings, rather than getting caught up with them
- be kinder towards yourself

Mindfulness is like exercise – you have to push yourself a little bit and practice it, to see the benefits. If you use it every day, or even more than once per day, you are more likely to see results.

Trying it:

There are many different exercises. We recommend you start with 'Mindfulness Meditation' by Professor Williams and Dr Penman, available on SoundCloud. It takes eight minutes to complete.

To try it, scan the QR Code to the right:

Some people find they are not particularly calm when they first start the exercise. It usually works better with practice. If you didn't finish the exercise, you can pause and come back to it when you are ready.

Do not worry if you feel mindfulness is not for you. We also recommend Progressive Muscle Relaxation as an alternative.



If you try this exercise, we'd like to know what you think. To feedback, please scan the QR Code to the left. It will take one minute and we won't ask for your name.

Progressive Muscular Relaxation (PMR)

What is Progressive Muscular Relaxation? Calm body = Calm mind

One way to feel calmer is to relax your body, starting with your muscles. Progressive Muscular Relaxation (PMR) teaches you to recognise when you are getting tense and how to relax when you do. Studies have shown that PMR can be beneficial for patients with epilepsy (Talo et al, 2023) and may help reduce seizures (Haut et al, 2018).

How can it help me?

It aims to help you:

- feel calmer and less stressed
- be more connected to your body's signs that you are stressed
- release physical tension

While the cause of your stress may not go away, it may help you reduce tension and feel more in control. People who have difficulty sleeping due to stress report that practicing PMR at night helps them fall asleep. If you have any physical injuries or conditions that may cause muscle pain, do not tense the muscles affected.

Trying it:

We recommend the NHS 'Progressive Muscle Relaxation - Every Mind Matters' exercise, available on YouTube. It lasts for nine minutes.

To try it, scan the QR Code to the right:



To let us know how you found this, you can feedback by scanning the QR Code to the left. As previously, it takes one minute and we won't ask for your name.

Where to get more help for people experiencing stress:

Mind: The Mental Health Charity <https://www.mind.org.uk/> provides help, information and support relating to mental health problems, including stress. Telephone: 0300 123 3393 Email: info@mind.org.uk www.mind.org.uk.

For some people who may be overwhelmed by stress, the Samaritans help people in immediate crisis (<https://www.samaritans.org/>). They can be called any time, day or night on: 116123. Email: jo@samaritans.org.

You can also get help from your GP, or in an emergency call 111 or 999.

PALS

Our local Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) offers support, information and assistance to NHS patients, relatives and visitors. They can also provide help and advice if you have a concern or complaint that staff have not been able to resolve for you. They can also pass on praise or thanks to our teams.

PALS at King's College Hospital, Denmark Hill, London SE5 9RS

Tel: 020 3299 3601 Email: kch-tr.palsdh@nhs.net

PALS at Princess Royal University Hospital, Farnborough Common, Orpington, Kent BR6 8ND

Tel: 01689 863252 Email: kch-tr.palspruh@nhs.net

If you would like the information in this leaflet in a different language or format, please contact our Communications and Interpreting telephone line on 020 3299 4826 or email kch-tr.accessibility@nhs.net