



# What You Should Know About Relaxation Techniques for Hot Flashes

**M**any relaxation-based interventions can also target hot flashes. These include breathing training programs like paced respiration that are useful alternatives for women who cannot or do not want to take hormone therapy.

## Can relaxation really help my hot flashes?

Mind/body relaxation techniques to help relieve both stress and the severity and frequency of hot flashes work well for many women. In particular, paced respiration has been shown to help decrease hot flashes. Word repetition and meditation have also helped peri- and postmenopausal women relax and work through hot flashes.

**1. Paced respiration.** Paced respiration is slow, controlled, deep, rhythmic breathing that is sustained for a specified period of time. Many peri- and postmenopausal women have found this technique effective when practiced conscientiously.

- Sit in a straight-back chair with both feet on the floor.
- Rest hands on the abdomen.
- Slowly count to four while inhaling through the nose and feel the abdomen rise.
- Hold that breath for a second.
- Then, slowly count to four while exhaling through the mouth—let the abdomen slowly fall.
- Repeat this exercise for 15 minutes twice a day at the beginning of a hot flash.

**2. Word repetition.** A second technique is repeating a word, sound, phrase, or muscle movement:

- Pick a focus word or short phrase that you are comfortable with.
- Sit quietly in a comfortable position and close your eyes.
- Relax your muscles, starting with your feet and moving to your calves, thighs, abdomen, shoulders, head, and neck.
- Breathe slowly and naturally, saying your focus word, sound, or phrase silently to yourself as you exhale.
- If other thoughts come to mind, just return to your repetition.
- Continue for 10 to 20 minutes once or twice a day.

**3. Meditation.** Another mindful technique is simple meditation.

- Sit in a comfortable position, either in a chair or on the floor, with proper posture (straight back and neck).



- Take a couple of deep, cleansing breaths.
- Close your eyes and breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth.
- Focus on each breath—slowly breathing in and out. (Again, if your mind wanders, bring your attention back to that breath.)
- Start with 5 to 10 minutes of meditation and work up to 15 to 20 minutes or more daily.

## How often should I perform these relaxation techniques?

Perform some form of paced respiration or other relaxation technique every day—try to make it part of your regular schedule. You can do it anytime. To start out, schedule the technique first thing in the morning before breakfast or at the end of your workday. Once you've learned a technique that works for you, you can go to it when a hot flash starts to take your mind off the discomfort. Try it out.

## Where can I learn more?

For more information on relaxation techniques, visit the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine's website at <http://nccam.nih.gov/health/stress/relaxation.htm>.