SCRIPTS for BREATHING, VISUALIZATION & RELAXATION EXERCISES

I. CALMING BREATH EXERCISE

(The Calming Breath Exercise was adapted from the ancient discipline of yoga. It is a very efficient technique for achieving a deep state of relaxation quickly. This particular recording should be turned off once the script is read so that you can spend as much time as you might need to achieve the desired effect.)

"Breathing from your abdomen, inhale slowly to a count of five (count slowly “one...two...three...four...five” as you inhale).

Pause and hold your breath to a count of five.

Exhale slowly, through your nose or mouth, to a count of five (or more if it takes you longer). Be sure to exhale fully.

When you've exhaled completely, take two breaths in your normal rhythm, then repeat steps 1 through 3 in the cycle above.

Keep up the exercise for at least three to five minutes. This should involve going through AT LEAST ten cycles of in-five, hold-five, out-five. Remember to take two normal breaths between each cycle. If you start to feel light-headed while practicing this exercise, stop for thirty seconds and then start again.

Throughout the exercise, keep your breathing smooth and regular, without gulping in breaths or breathing out suddenly.

Each time you exhale, you may wish to say “relax,” “calm,” “let go,” or any other relaxing word or phrase silently to yourself. Allow your whole body to let go as you do this."

The Calming Breath exercise can be a potent technique for halting the momentum of a panic reaction when the first signs of anxiety come on. It is also useful in reducing symptoms of hyperventilation.

II. PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

1. To begin, take several deep abdominal breaths (as many as is comfortable for you) exhaling slowly each time. As you exhale, imagine that tension throughout your body begins to flow away.

2. Clench your fists; hold for 7-10 seconds and then release for 15-20 seconds. Use these same time intervals for all other muscle groups. When you tighten a particular muscle group, do so vigorously, without straining. When you release the muscle group, do so abruptly and pay attention to the sudden feeling of heaviness or limpness you feel upon relaxing.

3. Tighten your biceps by drawing both forearms up toward your shoulders and "making a muscle." Hold...and then relax.

4. Tighten your triceps-the muscles on the undersides of your upper arms-by extending your arms out straight and locking your elbows. Hold...and then relax.

5. Tense the muscles in your forehead by raising your eyebrows as far as you can. Hold...and then relax. Imagine your forehead muscles becoming smooth and limp as they relax.

6. Tense the muscles around your eyes by clenching your eyelids tightly shut. Hold...and then relax. Imagine sensations of deep relaxation spreading all around the area of your eyes.

7. Tighten your jaws by opening your mouth so widely that you stretch the muscles around the hinges of your jaw. Hold...and then relax. Let your lips part and allow your jaw to hang loose.

8. Tighten the muscles in the back of your neck by pulling your head way back, as if you were going to touch your head to your back. Focus only on tensing the muscles in your neck. Hold...and then relax. Since this area is often especially tight, it's good to do this tense-relax cycle twice.

9. Take a few deep breaths and tune in to the weight of your head sinking into whatever surface it is resting on.

10. Tighten your shoulders by raising them up as if you were going to touch your ears. Hold...and then relax.

11. Tighten the muscles around your shoulder blades by pushing your shoulder blades back as if you were going to touch them together. Hold...and then relax. Since this area is also often especially tense, you might repeat this tense-relax sequence again.

12. Tighten the muscles of your chest by taking in a deep breath. Hold...and slowly release. Imagine any excess tension in your chest flowing away with the exhalation.

13. Tighten your stomach muscles by pulling your stomach in. Hold...and then release. Imagine a wave of relaxation spreading through your abdomen.

14. Tighten your lower back by arching it up. (You can omit this exercise if you have lower back pain). Hold...and then relax.

15. Tighten your buttocks by pulling them together. Hold...and then relax.

16. Squeeze the muscles in your thighs by pressing your upper legs together. Hold...and then relax. Feel your thigh muscles smoothing out and relaxing completely.

17. Tighten your calf muscles by pulling your toes toward you. Hold...and then relax.

18. Tighten your feet by curling your toes downward. Hold...and then relax.

19. Mentally scan your body for any residual tension. If a particular area remains tense, repeat one or two tense-relax cycles for that group of muscles.

20. Now imagine a wave of relaxation slowly spreading throughout your body, starting at your head and gradually penetrating every muscle group all the way down to your toes.
III. GUIDED RELAXATION-Crystal Joifrita

This is a guided relaxation sequence devoted to calming the mind and body. We will focus on your breath and relaxing your muscles. To begin, get into a comfortable position and begin breathing through your nose. Lie on your back with arms at your sides, bending the knees if this is comfortable, or get into a position that feels comfortable to you. Let your body sink into the floor and notice your body relaxing into the place you have chosen.

Focus on your breathing as you inhale and exhale through your nose. Notice your stomach moving up and down with your breathing. Relax the muscles in your face and neck. Relax your forehead and release your tongue from the roof of your mouth. Try to release the stressors from your day and let those thoughts ease out of your mind as you begin to focus on relaxation. Relax your cheeks and jaw. Notice the tension fading away from your face and neck.

Relax your shoulders and back. Feel the weight of your back pressing into the floor. Continue to focus on your breathing and relax your muscles more with each breath. If you have trouble focusing on your breath, you can imagine the air you inhale is one color, the air you exhale is another. Relax your shoulders, your arms, and your hands. Unclench your fist and fingers.

Relax your stomach and lower back, noticing the rise and fall as you inhale and exhale. Imagine a wave flowing down your legs releasing the tension stored in your hips, legs and feet. Pay attention to each part of your body as you continue to release the tension from your muscles.

Focus on your breathing and let your day melt away. If you want, you can place your hands on your belly to feel the rise and fall of your breath.

If you feel a place in your body where tension has returned, turn your focus to that part of your body and release that tension. If thoughts pop into your mind, let your breath carry them away. Notice how your body and mind feel as you relax let your worries melt away.

As you start to bring more awareness to your body, begin to move your fingers and toes. Move your feet from side to side. If you are lying on your back, you can roll to your side as you begin to bring energy back to your body. When you are ready, slowly open your eyes and continue to focus on your breathing, taking slow and deep breaths. Stretch to bring movement back into your muscles and be mindful of how your body feels at this point and take this with you throughout the day.

IV. GUIDED BREATHING EXERCISE

"Take a few moments to relax as much as you can totally on your own. Settle back as comfortably as you can. Close your eyes and, if you are sitting up, let your head come forward until it is resting comfortably. Begin by sitting with your arms comfortably at your side, hands in your lap. Let yourself relax to the very best of your ability. Begin to feel that comfortable heaviness that accompanies relaxation. At this time, breathe easily … freely in and freely out. Try and assume a passive, detached attitude. Concentrate on what is happening and the sensations you feel. When your mind wanders, just gently bring it back to the present.

Now, slowly touch your chin to your chest and then bring it back up
Slowly bend your head back to gently stretch the back of your neck and then bring it back up
Slowly bend your head over to your right shoulder and back up Slowly bend your head over to your left shoulder and back
Slowly rotate your head to the right and back Slowly rotate your head to the left and back
Tighten your shoulders by raising them up as if you were going to touch your ears -- hold -- release
Push your shoulder blades back as if you were going to touch them together -- hold -- release

Next are some gentle breathing exercises. Continue to relax as you practice your breathing. Remember to breathe from as low as possible…with your abdominal muscles. Let the motion of breathing be like filling up a glass with water. The glass fills from the bottom to the top. This is how air should fill your lungs…from the bottom to the top. Don’t force your breathing; it’s not a contest to see how much air you can take in. Just do it in a relaxed, peaceful manner.

Breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose. Hold the breath for a bit, filling your lungs up with as much air as you can, not forgetting to fill from the bottom up… and then slowly release the air through your mouth. The key is to breathe slowly and deeply by using your diaphragm to draw air in and out naturally and effortlessly. Feel the comfortable heaviness that accompanies relaxation and deep, cleansing breathing. Continue breathing deeply and slowly as you focus on the following breathing visualization.

As you breathe, imagine that colored air is flowing into your lungs. Choose any color you like, from a single color to a rainbow. With each breath, the air fills your body from the tips of your toes to the top of your head. Continue inhaling the colored air until it occupies every part of you, bones and muscles included. Once you have completely filled yourself with the colored air, I am going to ask that you begin letting go of the colored air with each exhalation. Allow a small amount of the warm, colored air to leave your body with each breath you exhale. The level of the air (much like the water in a glass as it is emptied) will begin to drop. It will descend progressively lower, from your head down to your feet.

As you continue to exhale the colored air, watch the level go lower and lower, farther and farther down your body. As the last of the colored air leaves your body, the level will drop down to your toes and disappear. Stay quiet for just a moment. Then notice how relaxed and comfortable you feel."
V. MOUNTAINS

“Imagine with me that it is a beautiful spring, sunny day – the warm sun shines down on you – making you feel comfortable. And we are going on a path up a mountain. Imagine the path now, gradually ascending this gentle slope. Perhaps you can let yourself really feel that you’re going higher and higher, into the mountain of peace.

Look around you now. Yes, just pause there for a moment, and notice a soft breeze blowing on your skin and on your hair. You are quite high up the mountain and you have a wonderful view below, and across – you can see for miles and miles around. Here and there you may come across a rabbit or a few mountain sheep or goats. They live peacefully up here; you continue your journey up the mountain.

As you go higher, the mountain becomes a little steeper and in places the path narrows. Coarse bushes border your path in places, and mountain flowers peep out to greet you. You can see another mountain, which looks so close that you almost feel you could walk over to it; but in reality, you know it’s far too far away.

As you climb higher and higher, ascending up the mountain, you eventually reach a plateau where you stop to rest. Just pause there, rest a while, relax, and take in the beautiful view.

Looking down the mountain you can see how far you’ve come. You’ve come a very long way, up a mountain path that was, at times, difficult, at other times easy, but you continued. And you can continue now until you reach your summit. I am going to be silent for a few moments to allow for you to reach your summit. Go closer now towards your goal.”

VI. RELAXATION/visualization conclusion script

At the conclusion of these meditation and visualization exercises, you may wish to bring yourself back to an alert state of mind with a formal conclusion script. I have recorded the following conclusion script at the end of the Progressive Muscle Relaxation exercise and the Guided Breathing Exercise.

“Now, in a moment you can begin to come back to an alert, wakeful state of mind. Pay attention as I count from one up to five. When I get up to five, you can open your eyes and feel awake, alert, and refreshed. Remember that you CAN create these positive, relaxed and centered feelings on your own during your daily activities.

One—gradually beginning to come back up to an alert, wakeful state.
Two—more and more awake.
Three—perhaps you might move your hands and feet as you become even more alert.
Four—almost back to a fully alert state.
And Five—opening your eyes now, finding yourself fully awake, alert, and refreshed.”

After finishing with your visualization, get up and walk around a bit until you feel fully alert and grounded. Allow at least ten minutes to pass before driving a car or engaging in any other activity that requires complex coordination.

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