

5-4-3-2-1 Relaxation Technique (Betty Erickson)

- Sit or lie in a comfortable position and begin to notice what you can see, hear, and feel.
- Say to yourself gently:
“I can see....(name any object in your field of vision)”
and repeat for 5 different objects, for example:

“ I can see a lamp”

“I can see a book”

“I can see a door”

If you do this exercise in complete darkness and you cannot see anything, you can use imaginary pictures of everyday objects or things in the room where you are that are familiar. Just visualize them in your mind's eye, ideally choosing neutral images that don't have strong emotions associated with them, whether positive or negative.

- Then say to yourself:
“I can hear....(name any sound you can hear)”and repeat for 5 different sounds, for example:

“I can hear traffic outside”

“I can hear someone talking”

“I can hear the ticking of the clock”

If it is difficult to hear 5 different sounds, you can say to yourself, for example, “ I still hear the traffic outside”

- Then say to yourself:
“I can feel,,,(name any feeling or sensation you experience)”
and repeat for 5 different sensations, for example:

“I can feel my watch on my wrist”

“I can feel my foot in my shoe”

“I can feel the pillow under my head”

“I can feel my hand in my lap”

- Repeat the sequence, this time naming only 4 things you can SEE, 4 things you can HEAR, 4 things you can FEEL (the pictures/sounds/sensations can be the same as the last time, or different—it doesn't matter)
- Repeat, naming 3 things you can SEE, 3 things you can HEAR, 3 things you can FEEL

- Repeat, naming 2 things you can SEE, 2 things you can HEAR, 2 things you can FEEL
- Repeat, naming 1 thing you can SEE, 1 thing you can HEAR, 1 thing you can FEEL

By now, if you are not asleep yet, you should feel more relaxed and with less 'chatter' in your mind. If needed, you can repeat the procedure more than once,

This technique can be used for insomnia as well as general relaxation in stressful situations.

When you are doing this exercise and can't remember if you are on feel, see, or hear or if you are on 4 or 3, it doesn't matter. What is important is just to stick to the facts...only the facts.

This mindfulness exercise is, in my opinion, brilliant in that it keeps your mind busy with mundane things that do not trigger any anxiety and, consequently, gives a signal to the body that it can relax. As with all exercises, though, it needs practice. If the first couple of times you don't feel relaxed as you would want, please keep practicing.