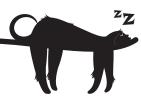# Relaxation techniques

How to switch your mind off and relax once you're in bed

Make yourself comfortable in your bed. Lie on your back and just let your body go as floppy as possible, rest your arms by your side. Concentrate on your breathing. Take a deep breath in, hold it for a slow count of three and release it slowly. Take in another deep breath, count to four and release it slowly. Take in one more deep breath and hold to the count of five, then release slowly.

Start to breathe normally and as you do so clench your fists as you breathe in and out and then release your hands and feel the muscles in your fingers relax. Next, tense all the muscles in your arms, from the shoulders down, hold that for one breath in and out and then release. Then tense and hold the muscles across your chest, hold that for one breath in and out and then release. After, tense and hold the muscles in your hips, buttocks and legs, hold that for one breath in and out and then release. Lastly, clench your toes and feet, hold for one breath in and out then release. As you relax each set of muscles, you're letting go of the tension and stress. Your breathing should now be nice and slow and your body more relaxed.

Finally, think about a place where you usually feel happy and at ease – it might be a favourite place for a holiday, or your granny's sofa watching TV, it might be a place that you make up in your own imagination. If you make it up make it somewhere that's just exactly how you would like it to be – somewhere that feels peaceful – a beach, a dark green forest or a fluffy cloud in the sky. Make the picture as clear as you can in your mind and just let your body relax even more. If you want to you can start saying to yourself, without moving your mouth or tongue, the word 'calm' on each outward breath.

The more you practice this routine, the quicker your body will get used to it and associate it with relaxation and sleep. Counting sheep, or anything for that matter, in your head will work too. Make the picture as vivid as possible and don't worry if you lose count, just pick it up at whatever number and keep going. Another technique is to count backwards from 300.