



# Resources Pocket Book

Exercises to Regulate Tension  
for Therapy Sessions and Everyday Life



**TRAUMA  
AMBULANZ**  
Seelische Gesundheit

Lukasstraße 3, 01069 Dresden

Tel: 0351 41726750

Fax: 0351 41726755

E-mail: [traumaambulanz@uniklinikum-dresden.de](mailto:traumaambulanz@uniklinikum-dresden.de)

[www.psychosomatik-ukd.de/traumaambulanz](http://www.psychosomatik-ukd.de/traumaambulanz)

*"Thoughts are like birds that fly around you and sit down onto you, you cannot prevent this. What you can influence is, however, whether you let those "thought-birds" build their nest there or not."*

*by a patient, referencing  
Martin Luther and an old Chinese proverb*

# Table of Contents

---

|                                 |    |
|---------------------------------|----|
| Small Breathing Exercise .....  | 4  |
| 4 – 3 – 2 – 1 – Exercise .....  | 5  |
| Five-Color-Exercise .....       | 6  |
| Animal-Series-Exercise.....     | 7  |
| Counting Backwards .....        | 8  |
| Mindful Walking .....           | 9  |
| Light-Stream-Exercise.....      | 10 |
| Protective Circle of Light..... | 11 |
| Mindful Ball-Throwing.....      | 12 |
| My Own Exercise .....           | 13 |

# Small Breathing Exercise

---

Sit down in a comfortable and upright position, for example on a chair with a backrest. Put your feet on the ground next to each other and your hands on your legs, palms facing upwards.

Now close your eyes gently, inhale deeply through the nose and exhale through the mouth. While breathing in, notice how first the abdomen and then the chest rises. In your mind slowly count to four:

1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4

*[alternatively: 1 -- 2]*

Then, stop breathing for a moment (think: 'Stop')

Now exhale. Let the air flow through your open mouth and slowly count to six in your mind. Let the breath stream, first from the abdomen and later from the chest.

1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 -- 5 -- 6

*[alternatively: 1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4]*

Stay relaxed and loose. Since the mouth is slightly open the jaw can hang a bit lower. Repeat this exercise five times, if possible with an open window or while being outside.

Inhale: 1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4

*[alternatively: 1 -- 2]*

Small pause ('Stop')

Exhale: 1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 -- 5 -- 6 *[alternatively: 1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4]*

Breathe calmly at the pace most comfortable for you. Make sure you exhale longer than you inhale.

# 4 – 3 – 2 – 1 – Exercise

---

Find a relaxing position for your body and settle your eyes on a point where they can focus. Keep your eyes open.

Note that you can allow yourself every bodily movement that find necessary for your well-being, like moving your legs or yawning.

Now tell yourself out loudly or just in your head what your senses perceive.

4 things I see – 4 things I hear – 4 things I feel.

*Example: I see a book shelf, the telephone, a teacup, and the glass of the window. I hear a door, the clock's ticking, a car on the street and the rustling of the leaves. I feel the backrest in my back, my arms lying on my legs, my feet in my shoes and the warmth of the room.*

Continue with new impressions:

3 things I see – 3 things I hear – 3 things I feel.

2 things I see – 2 things I hear – 2 things I feel.

1 thing I see – 1 thing I hear – 1 thing I feel.

There is no need to worry if you cannot find enough items every turn. At the end of the exercise just slowly count backwards from "4" to "1". At "4" start moving your legs and feet again. At "3" also move the arms and hands again. At "2" stretch your whole body and head and, again, take deep breaths. Finally, at "1", open your eyes and feel refreshed and focused.

# Five-Color-Exercise

---

This exercise asks you to direct your attention towards your immediate environment.

Take a look around and name **five** things you see that are **blue** in color.

*Example: Five blue things in this room are a cup, the painting on the wall, the pen on the table, the water bottle's label, and my sweatshirt.*

Now, name **four** things that are **green**.

Then, **three** things that are **red**.

**Two** things which are **yellow**

and **one** of a **white** color.

At the end of this exercise look around the room again and try to really experience and appreciate how colorful the different objects in your vicinity are.

# Animal-Series-Exercise

---

The Animal-Series-Exercise aims to distract you from current distress using innocuous thoughts. These exercises are also called 'Brain Acrobatics'

First, think of an animal. Then, try to find another animal whose name starts with the last letter of the animal before it. Then repeat.

*Example:*

*Dog*

*Goose*

*Elephant*

*Tiger*

*and so forth*

Of course, you can also string along something other than animals. Things that work fine are, for example, cities or names.

Should the distraction prove insufficient, these 'Brain Acrobatics' can very well be combined with actual physical exercise, like climbing stairs or bending knees. Combining them is tried and tested for resolving great tension.

# Counting Backwards

---

This exercise also falls in the 'Brain Acrobatics' category. It is suited very well for people who have a preference for numbers and small computational tasks.

Just start with a number of your choosing, for example 1.000, and then start counting backwards in steps of 13, or any number you feel like. The numbers can be adjusted for a change in difficulty.

*Another small example:*

*"Start at 100 and count back in steps of 7" gives you:*

*100 - 93 - 86 - 79 - 72 and so on.*

As with the Animal-String-Exercise, this can be combined with physical exercise to increase the effect.



# Mindful Walking

---

Mindful walking is a way of increasing your so-called attentiveness, the ability to consciously perceive and observe.

Mindful walking focuses your attention on the present moment, what is happening right now, and current experiences. Nothing is required for this except you and your body. Because you are not going anywhere specific, a way as long as ten steps is enough if you simply walk it back and forth. It is best to move as slowly as possible.

Notice the sensations in your body while you walk and breathe and visualize what is happening to you.

Feel, in detail, what exactly is happening to your body when walking:

How the front sole touches the floor,...

feel how your whole body weight moves from one foot onto the other,...

how the weight is balanced when the back foot leaves the floor, ...  
when it moves forward,...

when it touches the floor again...

While being in conscious contact with the perception of walking you can also observe your breath. See how the two rhythms, walking and breathing, are separate yet also interconnected.

The point of this exercise is to focus your whole attention on walking and breathing, from one moment to the next. If any other thoughts appear, try to simply let them pass and, again, focus your attention on your bodily perceptions.

# Light-Stream-Exercise

---

Sit down in a comfortable position. Close your eyes softly or look to the ground with eyes half open. Feel inside your body and start focusing on a single annoying bodily perception, like a pain or an unpleasant feeling. Try to visualize this perception and focus on it. See what kind of form it may have – is it round, angular, egg-shaped...?

See what kind of color it has – is it red, green, gray...?

See what temperature it has – is it cool, is it hot...?

How its texture is – rough, smooth, soft, brittle...

Now feel inside yourself again. Which color, right now, seems in a special way connected to healing for you?

Now imagine a light of this color coming towards you.

It floats by itself to the unpleasant bodily perception and surrounds it, permeates it...

It flows through the form and shakes it up, creating vibrations...

Observe in detail what happens to the form. Notice how it is surrounded and permeated by the light and how it slowly dissolves... into ever smaller parts... until they, too, start to dissolve and disappear.

Be patient. Let the light float and do its chores as long as it takes; as long as it is pleasant.

When a positive bodily perception has set in and the first form has changed so thoroughly that it can no longer be unpleasant, you can still use the light in other ways. It flows down from the head to the shoulders... over the torso and the belly down to your legs and your feet and finally into the earth.

You are now completely engulfed in the healing light. Rejoice for a moment in the warm and comforting feeling of being protected and surrounded by this light.

When you are ready, return your attention to the here and now and notice, how the light has changed your feelings and your body.

# Protective Circle of Light

---

Please sit down in a comfortable and upright position, for example on a chair with a backrest. Put your feet onto the ground next to each other and your hands on your legs, palms facing upwards.

Now close your eyes softly and focus on your breath. Breathe calmly and regularly.

While breathing mindfully, imagine that what you inhale is light through the top of your head – light in a color that is connected to healing for you – and how the light streams throughout your body. Then it leaves through the bottom of your feet.

With every breath you take the light gently flows from the top of your head through your whole body. When you exhale, it softly leaves through your soles.

Now repeat: Inwards through the top, outwards through the soles. So, slowly but steadily, a circle of light is forming all around you.

Taking in the light when inhaling and radiating it outward when exhaling, this circle of light is growing around you. It becomes thicker, denser and larger. When you feel the circle has grown enough, visualize yourself sitting within it...

how you fill it out and how it surrounds you...

how you can move in it, move it itself, how it always stays with you wherever you may go.

Rejoice in the light for another few moments and feel it protecting you.

Then slowly return your attention to the present and the room you are in.

# Mindful Ball-Throwing

---

This exercise is suited very well for preventing the onset of dissociation by focusing attention on a ball. It is also very useful for distracting oneself from negative thoughts.

You can do this exercise while sitting or standing. You need to find at least one co-player.

Throw a ball of any size to another player and really pay attention to the process of throwing it as well as later catching it. All players should focus entirely on the game.

Just as 'Brain Acrobatics' can be combined with physical exercises, they can also be combined with Mindful Ball-Throwing. For example, every time the ball is thrown, a city with a certain starting letter can be named.

# My Own Exercise

---

# My Own Exercise

---

## **Original citations the motto at the beginning refers to:**

Martin Luther:

*“Just as we cannot keep the birds from flying over our heads, but from nesting upon them, we cannot prevent bad thoughts, but can prevent their taking root in us.”*

Chinese Proverb:

*“That the birds of sorrow and worry fly above your head you cannot change. But them building their nest in your hair you can prevent.”*

*The exercises were modeled after:*

- Dolan, Yvonne M. (1991), *Resolving Sexual Abuse: Solution-Focused Therapy and Ericksonian Hypnosis for Adult Survivors*. W. W. Norton & Company.
- Harrer, M. (2014), *Achtsames Gehen*. Found here: <http://www.achtsamleben.at/praxis/achtsamesgehen/>
- Morgan, S. (2007), *Wenn das Unfassbare geschieht - vom Umgang mit seelischen Traumatisierungen. Ein Ratgeber für Betroffene, Angehörige und ihr soziales Umfeld*. Kohlhammer.
- Reddemann, L. (2007), *Imagination als heilsame Kraft. Zur Behandlung von Traumafolgen mit ressourcenorientierten Verfahren*. Klett-Cotta.

Publisher: Traumaambulanz Seelische Gesundheit  
Lukasstraße 3, 01069 Dresden  
Tel: 0351 41726750  
Fax: 0351 41726755  
E-mail: [traumaambulanz@uniklinikum-dresden.de](mailto:traumaambulanz@uniklinikum-dresden.de)  
[www.psychosomatik-ukd.de/traumaambulanz](http://www.psychosomatik-ukd.de/traumaambulanz)

Klinik und Poliklinik für Psychotherapie und Psychosomatik  
Universitätsklinikum Carl Gustav Carus  
an der Technischen Universität Dresden  
Anstalt des öffentlichen Rechts des Freistaates Sachsen  
Fetscherstraße 74, 01307 Dresden  
[www.uniklinikum-dresden.de](http://www.uniklinikum-dresden.de)

April 2017

Picture credits: Cover page Lotus "Designed by Freepik.com"