

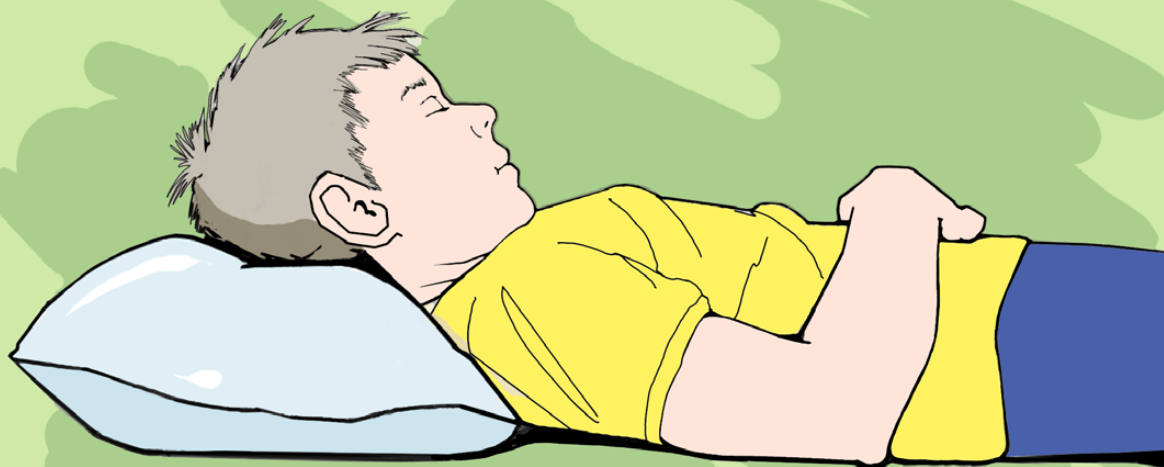


Kids!

PATIENT EDUCATION

How to Relax When You Need to Relax

MAYO CLINIC CHILDREN'S CENTER



BARBARA WOODWARD LIPS
PATIENT EDUCATION CENTER

Does your stomach feel like it's full of butterflies?

Do the palms of your hands get all sweaty?

Once in a while, does your heart feel like it's going to jump out of your chest?

Do you feel a little funny or dizzy in your head?

Does your jaw feel tight?

Do your muscles feel tight?

Do you have pain or nausea?

When you feel like this, do you wish you could make the feelings go away?

You can. You can tell your brain and your body to relax. And that can make you feel better faster.

What does "relaxed" mean?

Relaxing is a way to quiet your body — to make it calm even when there are a lot of things going on around you or inside you.

It takes some practice to learn how to make your body relax completely. It's a great thing to know how to do!

What is your body telling you?

Have you ever listened to your body when you're not feeling well, when you're in pain or you feel stressed? Do any of these things happen to you then?



If you're having a lot of symptoms or you're stressed a lot, you may:

- ➔ Have even more symptoms.
- ➔ React too strongly — like by yelling or throwing something.
- ➔ Have a hard time calming down after you're stressed.
- ➔ Get sick more often, have more pain and feel more tired.

Try to feel and listen to your body every day

It's a good idea to know how your body *usually* acts and feels. When you notice that you don't feel well, look at the picture. Which of those symptoms are you having? Do you have different symptoms? Be sure to tell a parent or other trusted adult how you feel.

When you know how you feel, then you can choose to change the feelings that bother you. And when you know how to relax, you can calm down faster!

Sometimes you can tell your body what to do

You have some control over:

- ➔ What you think.
- ➔ What you do.
- ➔ Your heart rate.
- ➔ Your breathing.
- ➔ The tight feeling in your muscles.

Relaxing is a great way to help your body when it doesn't feel good.

This information can help you learn how to calm your brain and your body. So hopefully you don't have problems, like those shown in the picture, very often.

What happens when you get worked up?

One minute, you're reading a book under a tree. The next minute, a bear sneaks up on you. What happens now?

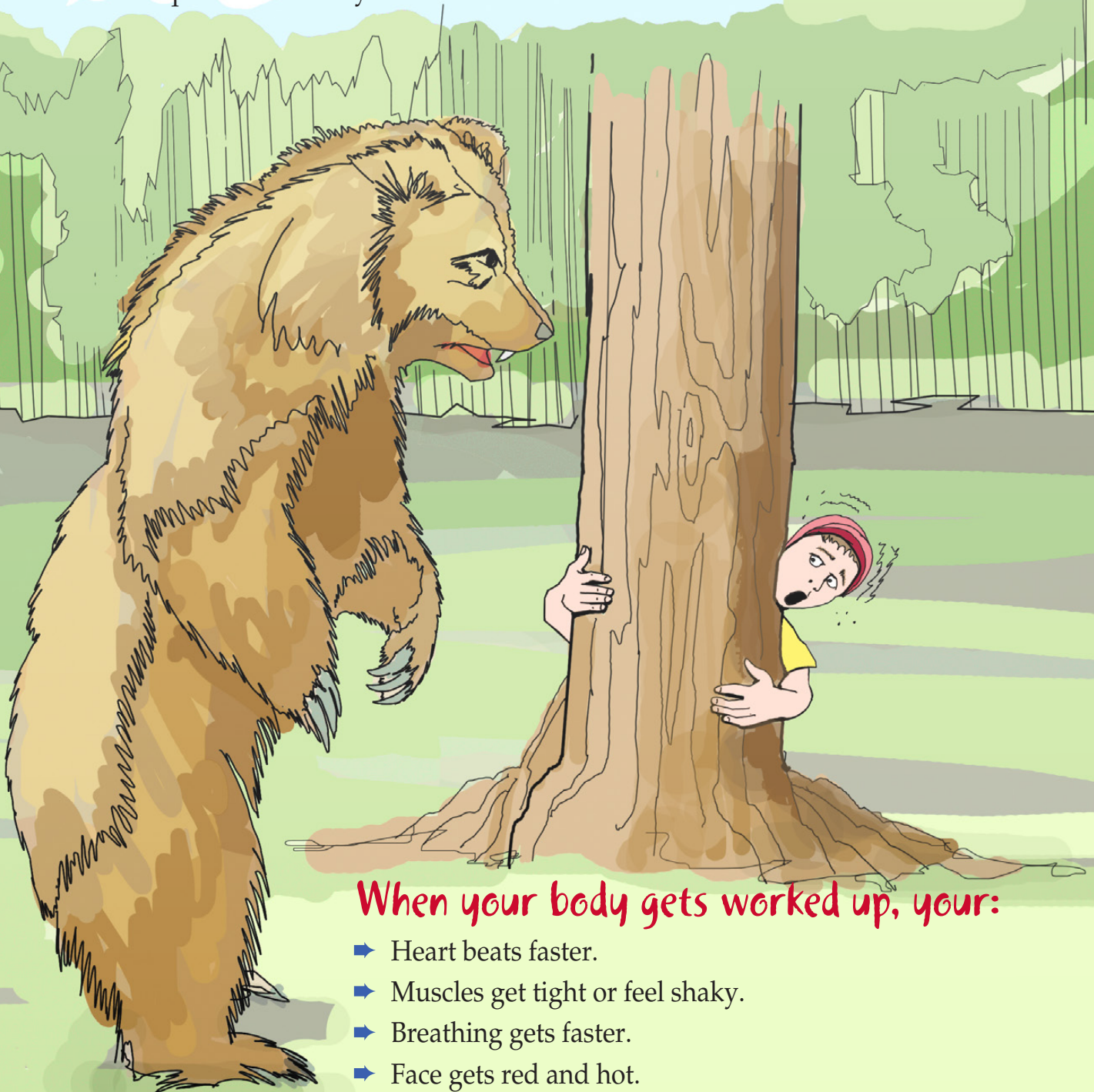
When your body feels bad or you are mad or stressed — or scared by a sneaky bear — your body gets all revved up. In that quick moment, your brain thinks that there are only two things you can possibly do: fight the bad feelings or get away from them. **YOU** may not be planning to fight or get away, but your brain and your body react as though you are!



This is called "Fight or Flight"

When you are getting worked up, your brain *reeeeally* wants to help you calm down fast. So it thinks that you should fight the problem or get away from it.

- "Fighting" can be real fighting, or it can be screaming at someone, talking back to your family or picking a fight for no good reason.
- "Flight," or running away, may mean running away from something that bothers or scares you (like a bear). Or it could mean getting so frustrated or mad that you want to leave or quit some activity.



When your body gets worked up, your:

- Heart beats faster.
- Muscles get tight or feel shaky.
- Breathing gets faster.
- Face gets red and hot.

If your body is revved up for a long time, you could have more pain or feel more stress. And then you'd feel really worn out. When that happens, you need to relax, don't you?

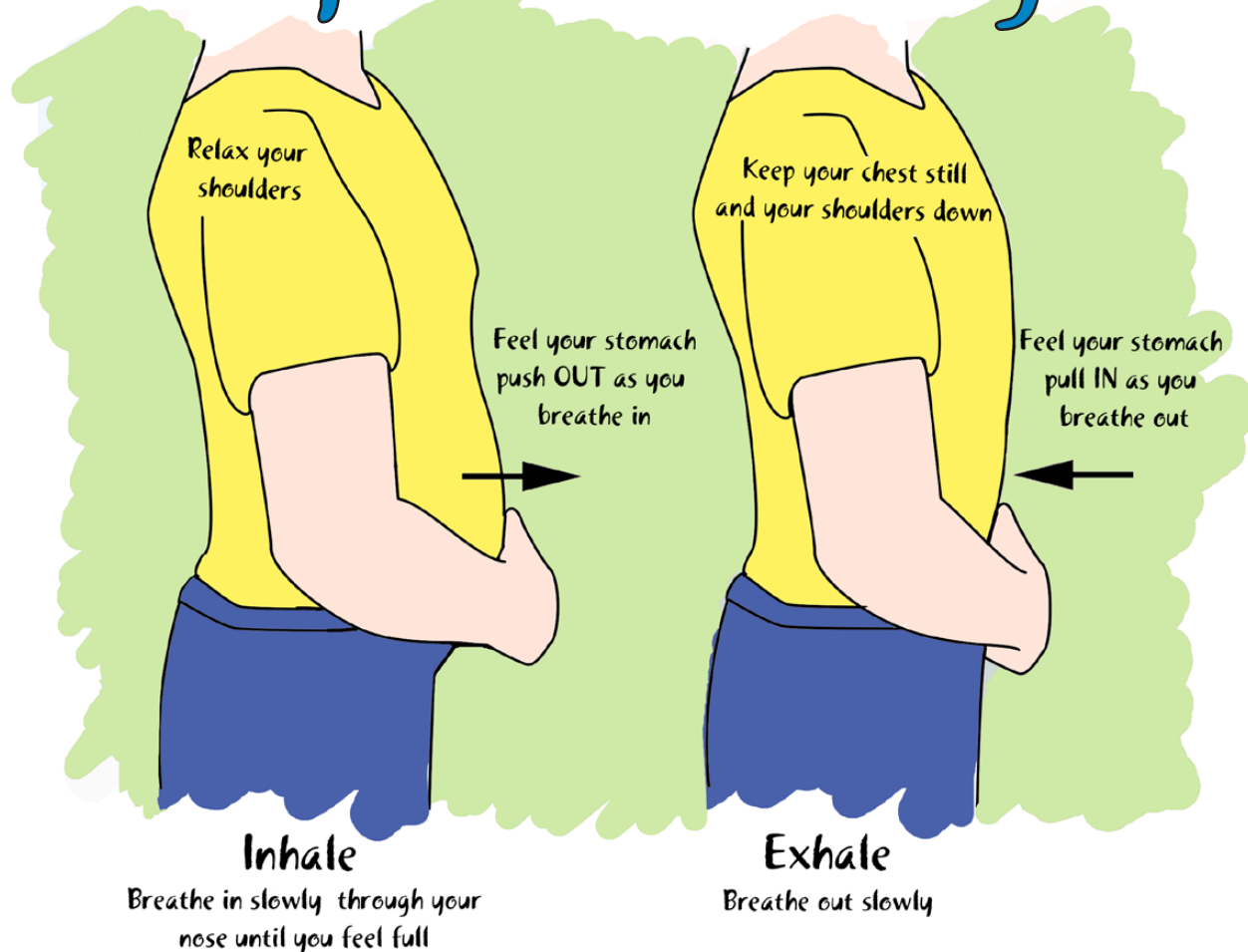
There are 3 fun ways to relax

1. You can do a new kind of breathing. It's called "relaxed breathing."

2. You can imagine yourself in a place that's really happy and safe for you. This is called "imagery."

3. You can tighten and relax all of your muscles. This is called "muscle relaxation."

Relax your breathing



You can use this exercise by itself or with other ways to relax.

1. Find a quiet place to sit or lie down.
2. Relax your shoulders.
3. Breathe in through your nose, slowly and evenly. Count to 4 while you do this, if that helps.
4. Pretend that there's a balloon in your belly. Watch to see if your belly moves out a little when you breathe. If you want to, lie down and put a piece of paper or small stuffed animal on your belly. See if it moves up when you breathe in. (The top part of your chest should stay pretty still.)
5. Slowly breathe out through your mouth, as if you are blowing a big balloon or blowing out a candle. You can count to 4 while you do this.
6. Let your stomach — and the rest of your body — relax for a few seconds. Then start over again. Practice until this is easy and relaxing to do.

A note to parents

You can tell if your child is doing relaxed breathing.

- The chest and shoulders are still.
- The belly moves out with each inhale and in with each exhale.
- The rest of the body looks limp or relaxed.

Use your imagination*

Imagine somewhere very happy and comfortable. This should be a favorite place, somewhere where you feel safe and you can be still and quiet.



A note to parents

This imagination exercise can be difficult for a young child to do alone. Practice often using these steps.

- Together, identify a relaxing place and review the questions.
- Have your child close his or her eyes and listen as you describe the relaxing place.

* This exercise is also called "guided imagery" and "visualization."

You can draw your “relaxation place” in this bubble!

Find a quiet place to sit or lie down. Use your senses to imagine this happy place.

- What do you hear?
- What do you see? Look everywhere.
- What do you smell in the air?
- What do you feel under your feet and in your hands?
- Is there anything you’d eat here? What do you taste?
- And what do you do when you are here?

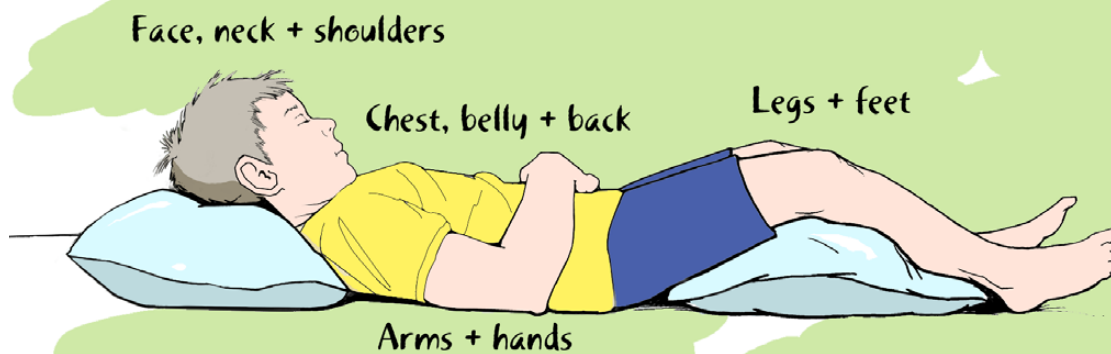
You can use this exercise by itself or with other exercises that help you relax.

Relax your muscles

This exercise teaches you how tight muscles feel when you are scared or stressed and you are thinking of fighting or running away. Some kids say that tight muscles make them feel like a robot — stiff and uncomfortable.

After you learn what tight muscles feel like, you will be able to make your muscles relax. Some kids say this feels like being droopy or floppy.

Relaxation "zones" of the body



- Lie flat and start at your toes or your head, whichever you want. Work on just one set of muscles at a time as you move up or down your body. Keep the rest of your body relaxed while you tighten one group of muscles.
- Tighten all of the muscles in the part of the body you're working on. Hold that for a few seconds. What does that feel like? After you can feel the tightness, let go of the muscles. Your muscles should feel warm, loose and relaxed now.

Relax each of these parts of your body:

- ➔ **Face, neck and shoulders:** Lift your shoulders to your ears and tighten your neck as you do it. Tighten your jaw. Scrunch your eyes and your forehead. Tighten your shoulders and bring them up. Then relax all of those tense muscles.
- ➔ **Chest, belly and back:** Hold your breath and try to pull your belly button down to your spine. Then relax your muscles.
- ➔ **Arms and hands:** Make fists and tighten every muscle in your arms. Then relax your arms and let them fall or lie loose at your sides.
- ➔ **Legs and feet:** Curl your toes. Tighten the muscles behind your lower legs, which are also called calves. And tighten the muscles in your upper legs, which are also called thighs. Lift your straight leg up until you feel tightness in your thigh muscle. Then relax your legs and let them dangle or lie loose. Notice how the muscles feel now.

Do this muscle-relaxation exercise for the whole body two times. After you finish, think about your muscles. If you still feel tightness, where is it? Help those muscles relax.

Does it feel a lot better when your muscles are really relaxed? That's how you want your body to feel most of the time.

A note to parents

Make sure your child stays in a relaxed state at least as long as he or she held the tightness. Practice daily with your child.

Parents: What you can do to help

Practice with your child

- ➔ Practice when he or she feels good and is calm. If the brain is already stressed, it won't learn new things as well.
- ➔ Practice every day. It makes a difference. Practice until your child says that it feels easy to relax and he or she can do it automatically.

The more your child practices relaxation, the better he or she will get at it. Keep trying. See what works best for your child. This effort on your part can help your child feel better overall throughout the day.

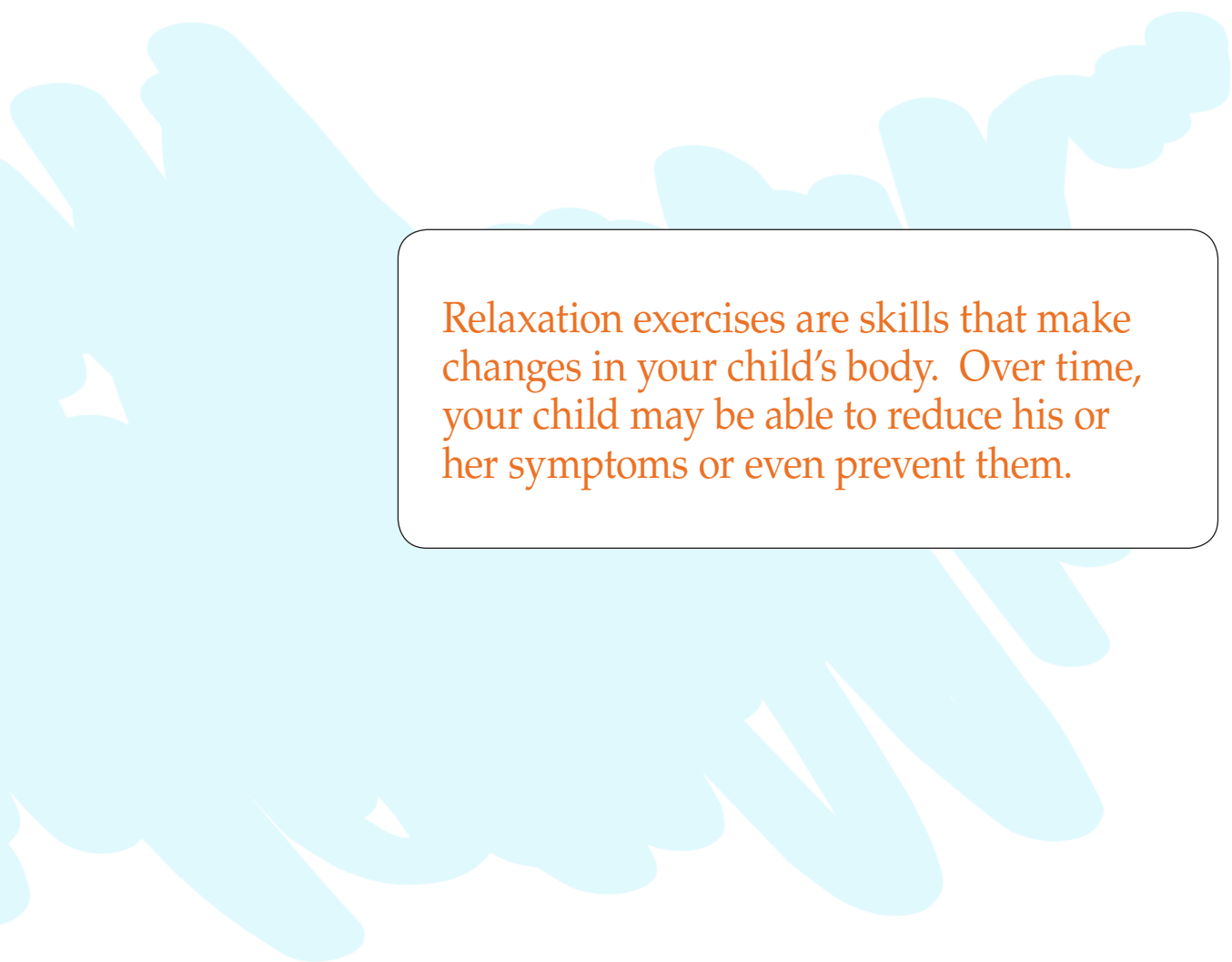
Practicing relaxation now will give your child lifelong skills.

Use a coach

For some kids, it can be frustrating to learn new exercises. Unfortunately, it's easy to think about quitting when one is frustrated. That's why your health care provider suggests that you have your child work with a coach to learn some of these exercises.

The best athletes, musicians, etc., are really good now because they had professionals teaching them how to do it.

The best person to help you learn to relax is someone who's trained to teach people how to do that. This is usually a psychologist, therapist, social worker, nurse, or someone similar. You won't have to work with this person forever, just until your child can easily learn to relax on his or her own.



Relaxation exercises are skills that make changes in your child's body. Over time, your child may be able to reduce his or her symptoms or even prevent them.

Parents and guardians:

This information may be too detailed for your child. But many parents and guardians have asked about it, so your health care provider wanted to make it available for you.

More information about your body

Your body has a lot of parts that work together.

1. **The brain and spinal cord.** The brain and spinal cord work together as the boss of the body. They tell the other parts of the body, like your legs and arms, what to do. The brain sits inside your head. The spinal cord starts at the back of your brain and goes all the way down your back. The spinal cord works with your nerves to carry messages from your brain to your body — then back to the brain again.
2. **The nerves.** Just as streets take you from one place to another, nerves carry messages back and forth from your brain and spinal cord to the rest of body. **Nerves carry messages FAST.**

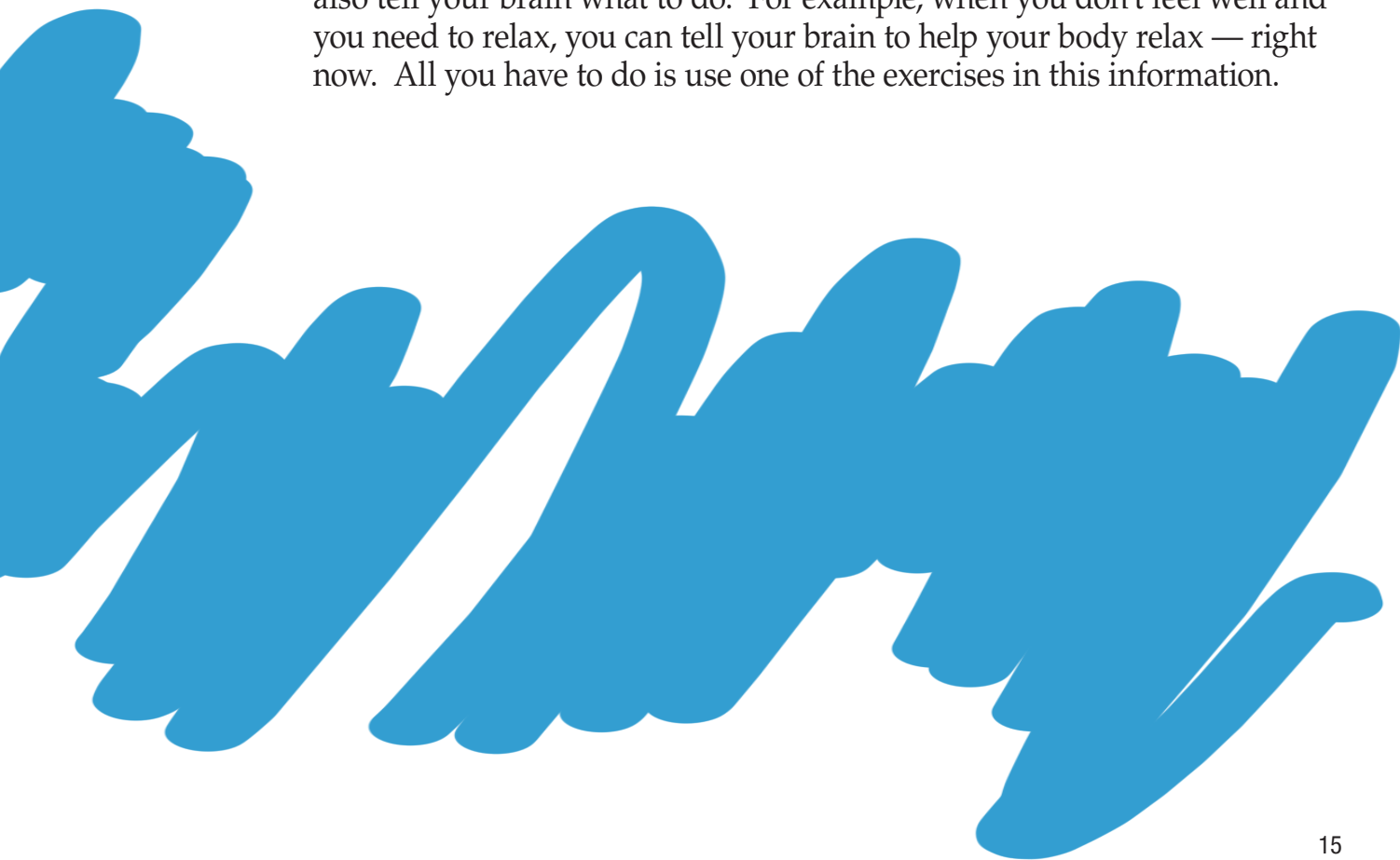


3. **The autonomic nervous system (ANS).** This part of the brain makes sure that all of the regular things in your body, like your breathing and heart beating, work just like they should. There are two parts to the autonomic nervous system:

- **The parasympathetic system:** This part of your brain and nerves makes sure that, even when you're resting or sleeping, your body keeps working. Your food is digested, and your blood keeps moving.
- **The sympathetic system:** This part of your brain is in charge of "fight or flight" activity. That means it gets your body ready to run away or stay and fight if you need to. You know this part of the brain is working when, for example, your heart beats fast, your stomach feels like it has butterflies or your hands get sweaty.

Sometimes, the "fight or flight" part of the brain gets turned on because you are scared about something dangerous, *like a bear*. Sometimes it gets turned on because you are nervous, stressed or in pain. If your "fight or flight" system is turned on a lot, it can really wear you out. That's why it's good to relax every day. It helps your body feel better and feel more balanced.

The brain controls a lot of what happens inside your body. But you can also tell your brain what to do. For example, when you don't feel well and you need to relax, you can tell your brain to help your body relax — right now. All you have to do is use one of the exercises in this information.





BARBARA WOODWARD LIPS PATIENT EDUCATION CENTER

Mrs. Lips, a resident of San Antonio, Texas, was a loyal patient of Mayo Clinic for more than 40 years. She was a self-made business leader who significantly expanded her family's activities in oil, gas and ranching, even as she assembled a museum-quality collection of antiques and fine art. She was best known by Mayo staff for her patient advocacy and support.

Upon her death in 1995, Mrs. Lips paid the ultimate compliment by leaving her entire estate to Mayo Clinic. Mrs. Lips had a profound appreciation for the care she received at Mayo Clinic. By naming the Barbara Woodward Lips Patient Education Center, Mayo honors her generosity, her love of learning, her belief in patient empowerment and her dedication to high-quality care.

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