



SELF REGULATION

You can learn to “self-regulate” stress and tension in your body during the day, which can be helpful for managing pain. There are many ways of self-regulating, including paced breathing, muscle relaxation, and posture monitoring. After you practice and gain skill with these strategies, using them does not require a big time-commitment. Many of these things can be done with very little interruption in your normal daily activities. They simply involve tuning into your body and consciously regulating your stress and tension, in much the same way that you regulate the speed of your car with the brake and gas pedal. To be most effective, self-regulation strategies should be done relatively frequently during the day.

Breathing

1. How can breathing help to self-regulate stress and tension?

- Slow, paced breathing (about 6 breaths per minute) can directly stimulate a relaxation effect in your nervous system.
- Using this paced breathing technique does not have to interfere with your daily activities, but it does take practice to be effective. It helps to practice with a breathing pacer at first. Then you can apply this skill to help manage your stress level as needed during the day.
- When you have the opportunity, you should include a body scan with your breathing.

Body Scanning

1. What is body scanning?

- “Scanning” means to look over something. Body scanning means to tune into your body and to notice and release tension from your muscles.
- Guided versions of this scanning technique are provided on the PRIDE Patient Resources website. Practicing with the guided relaxation exercises on the website will help your success with self-regulation during your normal daily activities.

2. What is the purpose of body scanning?

- To become more aware of muscle tension and postural habits.
- To reduce stress and muscle tension in your body.
- To prevent tension from building up and causing pain (or other physical symptoms).

3. One Basic technique is detailed below (this should take about one minute, though you can do it longer if you want).

- Take in a breath. As you exhale, scan and release tension from your face.
- Take in a breath. As you exhale, scan and release tension from your neck and shoulders.
- Take in a breath. As you exhale, scan and release tension from your arms and hands.
- Take in a breath. As you exhale, scan and release tension from your chest, stomach, and back.
- Take in a breath. As you exhale, scan and release tension from your hips, legs, and feet.
- Take in a breath. As you exhale, scan and release tension from your whole body.
- Continue for as many breaths as you want.

Monitoring and correcting bad habits which may be contributing to pain

People with chronic pain often develop habits, such as muscle bracing, jaw clenching, poor posture, breath holding, and inhibited movement, which had contribute to pain. These habits tend to happen outside of one's awareness. You may be doing things that are contributing to your pain and not even realize it! You and your PRIDE therapists may identify some bad habits that you have developed. After you learn to modify these habits, you can correct them with frequent monitoring during the day. Just remind yourself to tune into your body and correct the habits whenever you can remember to do so. This monitoring process should take very little time and should not interfere with your daily routine. When you have more time, you can include scanning and breathing regulation as part of this monitoring process.