20 ways to relax without deep breathing

Relaxing your mind and your body is essential to reduce stress and stimulate your body’s natural healing processes. There are thousands of relaxation and mindfulness exercises available online, however many have a focus on practicing deep breathing, which although central to relaxation can be challenging or stressful for people who are experiencing breathlessness (such as people recovering from COVID-19). Here are some ideas for easy ways to practice relaxation and mindfulness without focussing on your breathing.

1. Listen to relaxing music
2. If it is safe for you to do so, go outside and feel the sun on your face
3. Put on something warm (like fluffy socks) and focus on how nice it feels
4. Use your hands to focus on a pleasant temperature, like a warm mug or a cool glass
5. Practice some gentle stretches
6. Imagine walking around your favourite place
7. When sitting, bring your attention to all the points of your body that are making contact with your chair or bed
8. Mindfully wash your hands, by focussing on the sensation of the water and soap on your skin
9. Do something repetitive but engaging, like colouring, knitting or doing a jigsaw puzzle
10. Eat your food mindfully – really focus and enjoy each mouthful (tip – try pretending it’s the last apple/chocolate/coffee etc. on earth!)
11. Stand up - bring your attention to your feet on the floor, and focus on standing up straight with relaxed shoulders
12. Take the time to enjoy something you routinely do, like putting on hand cream or brushing your hair
13. Focus on a pleasant texture, like clean sheets, a fluffy towel, or a smooth surface
14. If you have a pet, spend some time watching them relax
15. Look for guided visualisations online that don’t focus on the body – there are many relaxation scripts that involve visualising yourself somewhere pleasant
16. Re-read a book that you found relaxing or comforting as a child
17. Star gaze, or find pictures in the clouds
18. Listen to a play or a story
19. Have a go at art – start doodling, or try an online art tutorial
20. If you have access to them, try playing with children’s toys like lego, play-doh or kinetic sand