

10 Instant Ways to Calm Yourself Down

By [Therese Borchard](#) / Published Jun 24, 2015



As a highly-sensitive person (as defined by Elaine Aron in her bestseller *The Highly Sensitive Person*), I'm easily overwhelmed, or over-aroused (not in a sexual way — not on antidepressants).

I have been compiling ways to calm down over the years. I learned some in Aron's book, some as part of the mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) program I participated in, and just recently picked up a slew of them in Lauren Brukner's fantastic book, *The Kids' Guide to Staying Awesome and in Control*. Brukner is an occupational therapist who helps kids with sensory integration issues be able to keep it together in school. However, her calming techniques are brilliant for adults, too.

1. Hand Massage

I learned this one in both the MBSR program and in Brukner's book. What's great about it is that you can do it while attending a lecture, listening to your kids fight, or sitting at your desk working. No one will notice. Simply use the thumb of one hand and press around the palm of the other hand. It's very soothing.

2. Palm Push

By pushing your palms together and holding for five to ten seconds, you give your body "proprioceptive input," according to Brukner, which "lets your body know where it is in space." I like this one because it reminds me of tree position in yoga, which is the last of the standing series postures in Bikram yoga. By then, I am quite happy to hold the tree position. The palm push is like a mini, portable tree position I can pull out any time to calm down.

3. Closing Your Eyes

Aron says that 80 percent of sensory stimulation comes in through the eyes, so shutting them every now and then gives your brain a much-needed break. She also says that she has found that highly sensitive persons do better if they can stay in bed with their eyes closed for nine hours. They don't have to be sleeping. Just lying in bed with our eyes closed allows for some chill time that we need before being bombarded with stimulation.

4. Mindful Sighing

During the MBSR class, we would take a few mindful sighs between transitioning from one person speaking to another. Basically you breathe in to a count of five through your mouth, and then you let out a very loud sigh, the sound you hear your teenager make. I was always amazed at how powerful those small sighs were to adjust my energy level and focus.

5. Mindful Monkey Stretch

A couple of times during the MBSR class, we would stand in back of our chairs, move at least an arm's length from each other in a circle, and do these exercises that I call mindful monkey stretches. We brought our hands, arms extended, in front of us, then brought the arms down. Next we brought our arms (still extended) to our sides, and then

down. Next we brought our arms all the way past our heads and then swooped down, our head dangling between our knees, and hung there for a second. This exercise is extremely effective at releasing the tension we hold in different parts of our body. Our teacher said she does it before her lectures and it works to release the jitters.

6. Hugging Yourself

Did you know that a ten-second hug a day can change biochemical and physiological forces in your body that can lower risk of heart disease, combat stress, fight fatigue, boost your immune system, and ease depression? You can begin by giving yourself a hug. By squeezing your belly and back at the same time, you are again giving yourself proprioceptive input (letting your body know where you are in space), says Brukner, which can help stabilize you.

7. Wall Push

Another great exercise to ground kids (and I add adults) with sensory integration issues, according to Brukner, is the wall push, where you simply push against the wall with flat palms and feet planted on the floor for five to ten seconds. If you've ever experienced an earthquake, you can appreciate why this gesture is calming ... placing the weight of our body against a solid, immobile surface and feeling the pull of gravity is stabilizing, even on a subconscious level.

8. Superman Pose

If you do Bikram yoga, the superman pose is basically the full locust position (airplane position), except the arms and the hands are stretched out in front of you, not to the sides. "Lie on your belly on the floor," explains Brukner. "Extend your arms in front of you, and hold them straight out. Extend your legs behind you and hold them straight out." Hold that pose for ten seconds. It's a great exercise if you are groggy, overexcited, distracted, or antsy.

9. Shaking

Did you know that animals relieve their stress by shaking? Lots of animals like antelopes shake off their fear after being frozen in panic to escape a predator. In the MBSR program, we practiced shaking, for like 15 minutes at a time. I can't say it looked all that pretty, but neurologically, I do believe it was beneficial.

10. Bubble Breath

My favorite exercise in Brukner's book is the Bubble Breath, because it is so simple and calming. Brukner explains:

Breathe in for five seconds, out for five seconds.

Imagine you have a wand of bubbles. When you breathe out, be careful not to pop it.

Place one flat palm on your heart, one flat palm on your belly.

Breathe in through your nose and hold your breath for five seconds.

Breathe out a large "bubble" through pursed lips, blow out for five seconds.