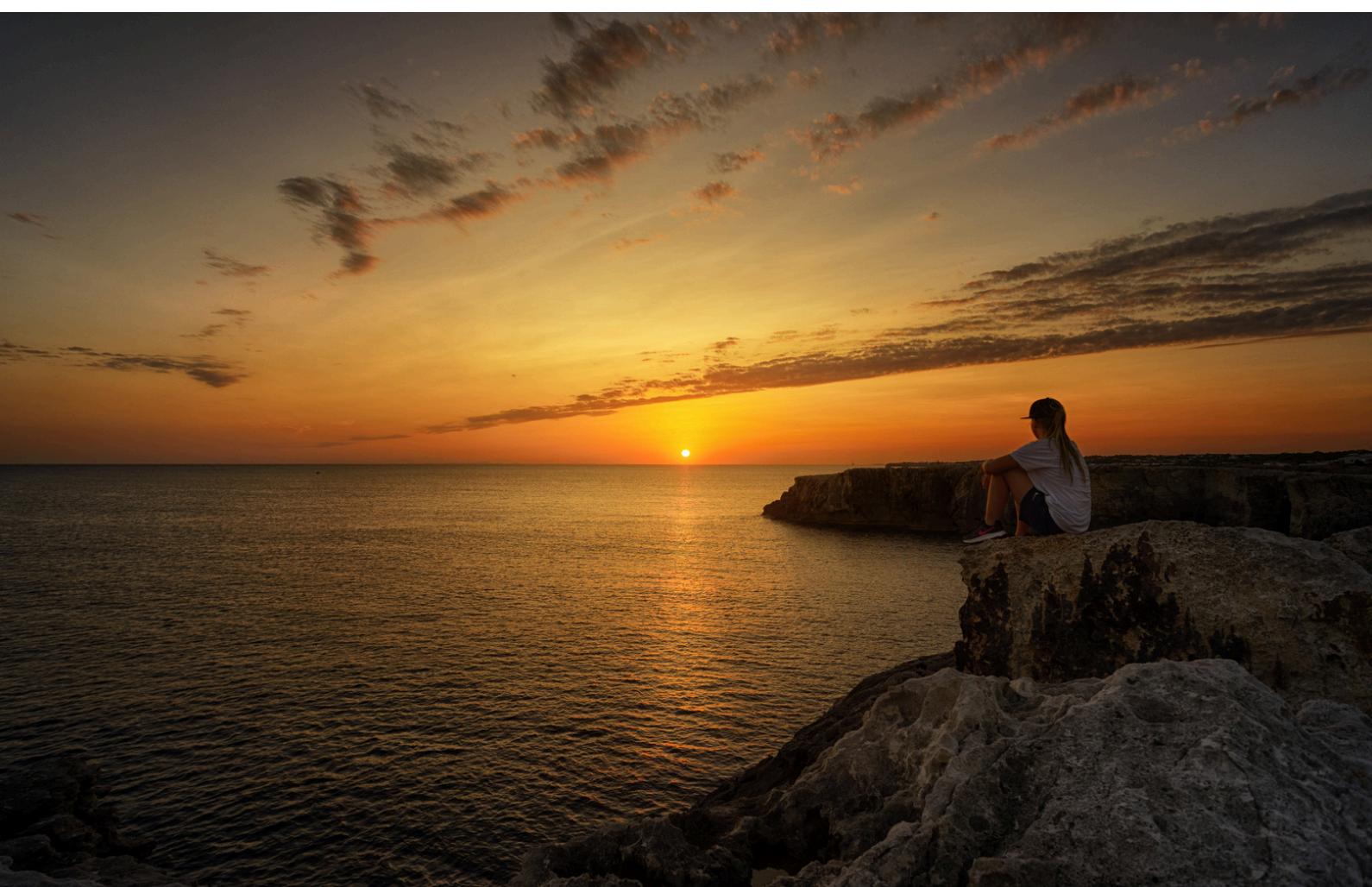


NORTH EAST CLINICAL

RELAXATION AFTERCARE GUIDE



**CREATING SPACE FOR CALM,
CREATIVITY, AND CONNECTION**

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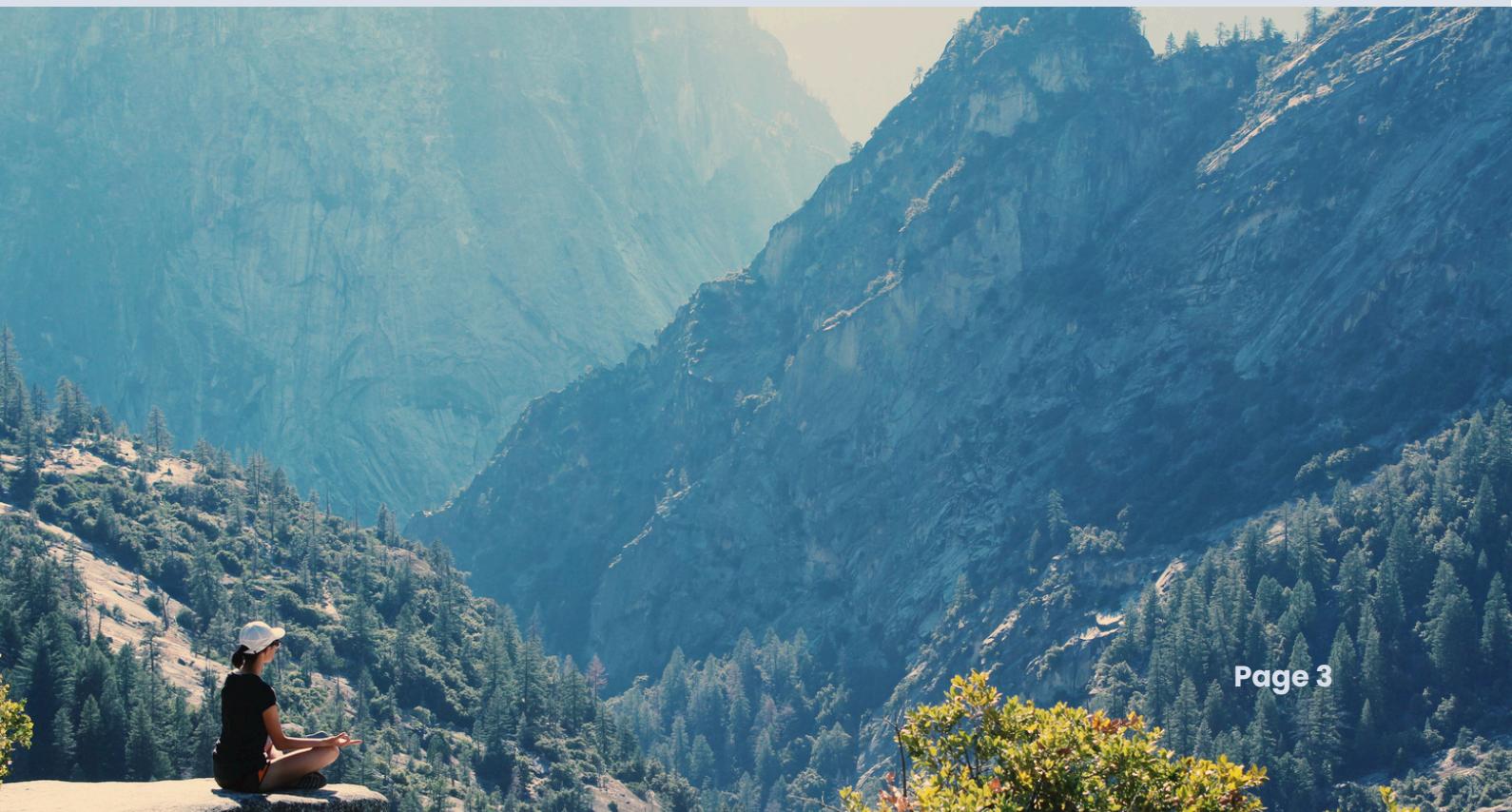
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Introduction: Why Relaxation Matters for Wellbeing

Relaxation isn't just a luxury — it's a core part of healing. When your nervous system has been activated by stress, emotion, or intense processing, intentionally shifting into a calmer, slower state can support integration and regulation. Restful time allows your body and mind to come back into balance, helping you feel more grounded, resilient, and connected to yourself.

Relaxation doesn't mean doing nothing — it means creating an environment where you feel safe, soothed, and at ease. This guide offers gentle practices and creative ideas to support that process.



MOVE YOUR BODY

Movement helps release physical tension, regulate the stress response, and reconnect body and mind. When we're anxious or emotionally overwhelmed, the body can hold that tension — often in the shoulders, jaw, hips, or gut. Movement signals to the body that it's safe to relax.

Physical benefits: improves circulation, relieves muscle stiffness, supports digestion, and helps regulate sleep.

Mental benefits: shifts focus from racing thoughts to body awareness.

Nervous system support: activates the parasympathetic (rest and digest) system through rhythmic, soothing motion.

Gentle movement is helpful when you feel disconnected, agitated, or "stuck."



Intense exercise may be too much after treatment, light movement can help release tension and stay connected to the present.

Stretching: Slow, intuitive stretching (especially neck, shoulders, hips, and back) can be grounding. Try a 5-minute stretch routine before bed.

Walking: A short 15–20 minute walk can reset your energy.

Yoga or Qi Gong: Low-intensity practices that focus on breath and awareness. Many free beginner videos are available online.

"Shake it out": Standing and gently shaking arms, legs, or whole body can release tension and regulate the nervous system.

Tip: Move for relief, not results.

Ask yourself: "What kind of movement would feel kind to my body right now?"

Resources

- <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/>
- NHS Active 10 Walking Tracker in the App Store
- <https://www.youtube.com/@yogawithadriene>

BREATHE & BE STILL

Breath and awareness practices are some of the most direct ways to calm the nervous system. They help shift you from fight-or-flight into a state of calm presence. Regular practice can build your capacity to tolerate stress and return to equilibrium more easily.

Physical benefits: lowers blood pressure and heart rate, improves oxygen flow.

Mental benefits: increases clarity, attention, and emotional regulation.

Emotional support: creates space from overwhelming feelings or thoughts.

Even a short breathing exercise can begin to calm anxiety or panic.

Breathwork & Meditation



Breath Awareness (2–5 minutes)

- Sit or lie down comfortably.
- Inhale slowly through your nose for 4 counts.
- Exhale gently through your mouth for 6–8 counts.
- Repeat for a few minutes, letting your breath be an anchor.

This elongates your exhale and gently signals to your body that it's safe to rest.

Guided Meditation: The Safe Place

- Close your eyes.
- Imagine yourself in a place where you feel completely safe and at ease. It could be a real location — a beach, a cozy room — or something imagined.
- Picture the details: what do you see, hear, feel? Is there warmth or a breeze? Notice the colours, textures, sounds.
- Let yourself rest here. You can return anytime.
- Take a few more slow breaths, then gently open your eyes.

Relaxation isn't always about solitude. Connection and creative expression can be deeply restorative.

Time with friends: Safe, supportive company can help regulate the nervous system. Even a quick check-in or shared silence can be soothing.

Creative hobbies: Drawing, crafting, music, or gardening can help shift your attention and give your brain a break from overthinking.

Reading or watching: Choose comforting, familiar, or uplifting content.

Journaling or mood-tracking: Externalising thoughts can offer clarity.

Try: Spend 10 minutes doodling with no goal — just let your pen move. Or write a letter to your future self about how you want to feel in the next few weeks.



SOCIAL CONNECTION

Co-regulation (soothing our nervous system through connection with others) is a powerful part of wellbeing. Social time can reduce feelings of isolation, increase oxytocin (the bonding hormone), and remind us we're not alone.

Physical benefits: lowers stress hormones and inflammation markers.

Mental benefits: improves mood, memory, and resilience.

Emotional support: creates safety, validation, and joy through shared experience. Connection doesn't need to be deep or long — even shared laughter or a simple check-in can make a difference.

CREATIVE EXPRESSION

Creativity offers a way to express emotion and access joy. When you engage in playful, non-outcome-based activities, it activates areas of the brain associated with pleasure, imagination, and emotional integration.

Cognitive benefits: supports focus, memory, and flexible thinking.

Emotional support: offers healthy expression and distraction from distress.

Mood support: increases dopamine and “flow” states when done regularly.

Creativity doesn't have to be skillful — doodling, rearranging a shelf, or coloring can all be powerful.

NATURE TALISMAN OR TOUCH STONE

You'll need:

- A smooth stone, pinecone, shell, or piece of driftwood
- Twine, thread or ribbon
- Dried herbs (like lavender, rosemary) or flowers
- Beeswax, oil, or a drop of essential oil for scent

1. Go for a walk and gather one or two natural objects that feel good in your hand — smooth, textured, weighty, or soft. Choose what you're drawn to.
2. At home, clean, brush or gently rinse your object.
3. Wrap a bit of natural twine around it to make it more tactile or symbolic. You can add herbs or flowers too.
4. Rub a tiny amount of beeswax or oil onto the surface to enhance texture and scent.
5. Sit for a moment. Close your eyes and feel the weight, texture, and temperature of it in your palm. Breathe.

Use it to ground yourself during anxious moments: hold it, trace its edges, or inhale its scent. Over time, it becomes associated with calm, like a touchable meditation.



TIME IN NATURE

Being in nature or caring for a living thing helps restore a sense of connection and belonging. Time outdoors can lower stress and blood pressure, while tending to a plant creates a rhythm of gentle responsibility and nurturing.

Physical benefits: supports immune health, improves sleep, reduces fatigue.

Mental benefits: enhances mood, reduces depression and anxiety symptoms.

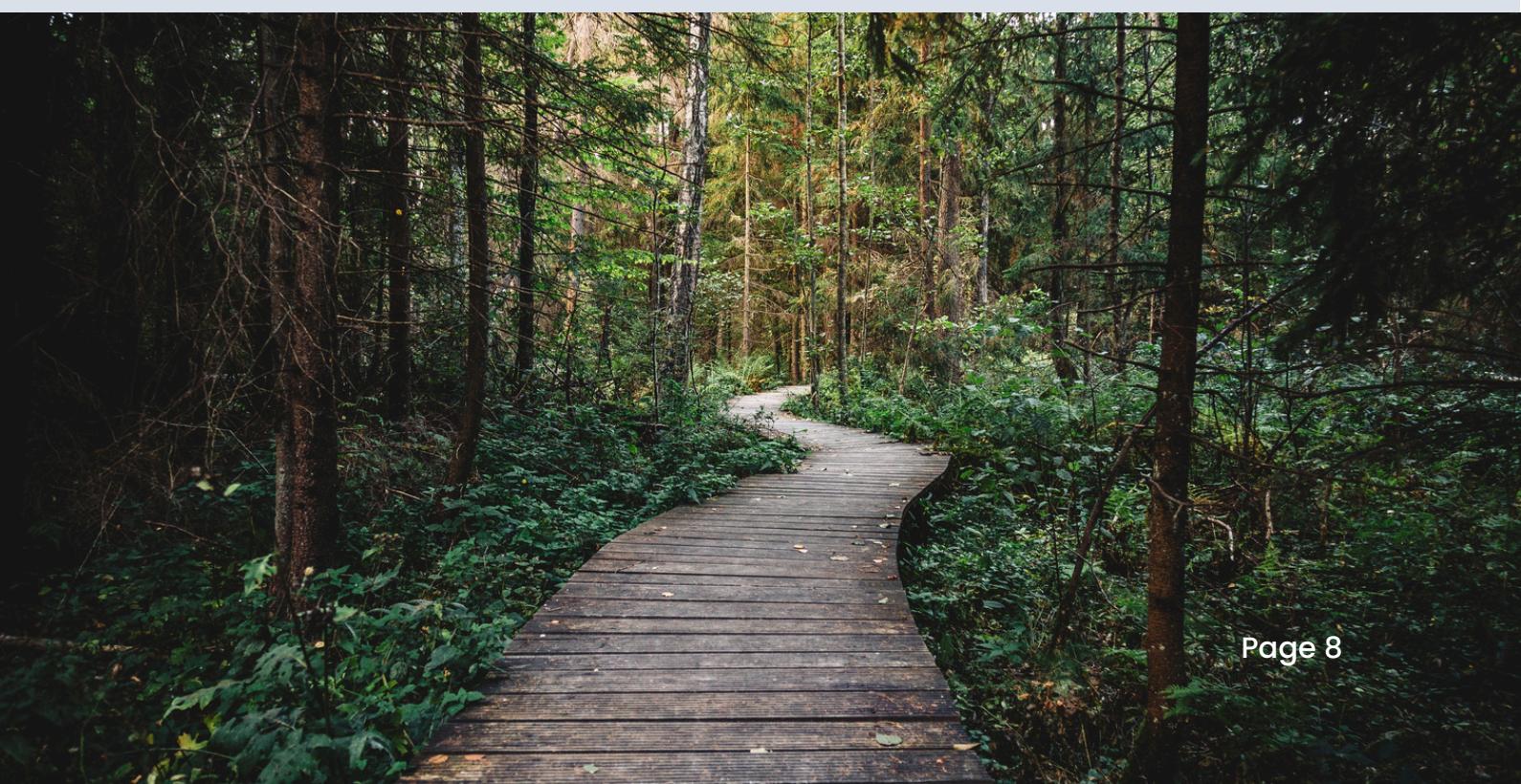
Emotional support: fosters patience, mindfulness, and a sense of continuity.

Watching something grow reminds us we're part of a larger living system.

Simple Ways to Connect

- Sit or lie down under a tree, in a garden, or by a sunny window.
- Watch the clouds or leaves move.
- Place your bare feet on grass, soil, or sand (grounding).
- Listen: birdsong, breeze, water, rustling.
- Touch a leaf or rock slowly and curiously, like you've never felt one before.
- Take a "nature bath": a walk with no phone, just your senses.

You don't need a forest. Try bringing nature indoors with a plant or a photo of your favorite landscape. And even 5 minutes counts!



NATURE PROJECT: CREATE A CARE RITUAL FOR AN INDOOR PLANT

You'll need:

A small houseplant (succulents, pothos, or spider plants are great starters)

A dedicated pot or container

A dish for watering

A place near natural light

Optional: decorate your pot with paint, markers, or collage

- **Choose** a plant you feel drawn to — or repot one you already have.
- **Create** a calm spot for it, somewhere you'll see it often.
- **Make** a ritual: water it on the same day each week, gently wipe its leaves, speak kindly to it, or sit with it for a few minutes.
- **Learn**: find out more about your plant as a species, its origin and habits.

Watching a plant grow reminds you that healing, like life, happens slowly and steadily — and needs regular, gentle attention.



SENSORY & GROUNDING PRACTICES

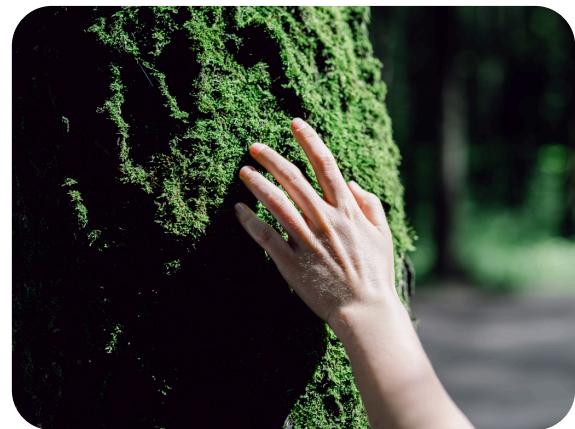
Your senses are the fastest way to reconnect with the present moment. When you're overwhelmed, sensory grounding can anchor you in your body and surroundings. These practices are especially helpful for trauma recovery, anxiety, or emotional processing.

Physical benefits: reduces cortisol levels, interrupts the stress cycle.

Mental benefits: breaks loops of worry, dissociation, or rumination.

Nervous system support: reinforces safety and orientation in the present moment.

Touch, smell, and sound can all serve as anchors when emotions feel too big.



FIVE SENSES RESET

This sensory walk uses all five senses to bring you back into your body and out of overwhelm. You can do this outdoors, indoors, walking, sitting, or lying down.

See

Notice 5 colors around you — name them out loud.

Find something beautiful or unusual in your surroundings.

Look at the light: where does it fall? What does it illuminate?

Touch

Place your hand on something with texture: fabric, wood, your own skin.

Run your fingers under warm or cool water.

Gently press your palms together and notice the sensation.

Hear

Listen for layers of sound: near, far, high, low.

Try sound-mapping: close your eyes and count the sounds you hear in 30 secs.

Put on soft music or nature sounds and really listen.

Smell

Smell a leaf, herb, cup of tea, or essential oil.

Notice the scent of the air — fresh, dusty, floral, earthy?

Try a grounding scent like lavender, rosemary, or eucalyptus.

Taste

Sip something slowly — tea, fruit water, or a small piece of chocolate.

Let the flavor settle in your mouth and describe it to yourself.

If you're eating, try one mindful bite — notice texture, temperature, flavour.

IF TIME IS SHORT...

Grounding 5-4-3-2-1 Walk

Go for a short walk and name:

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can touch
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can be grateful for

This engages your senses and gently brings you back to the present.

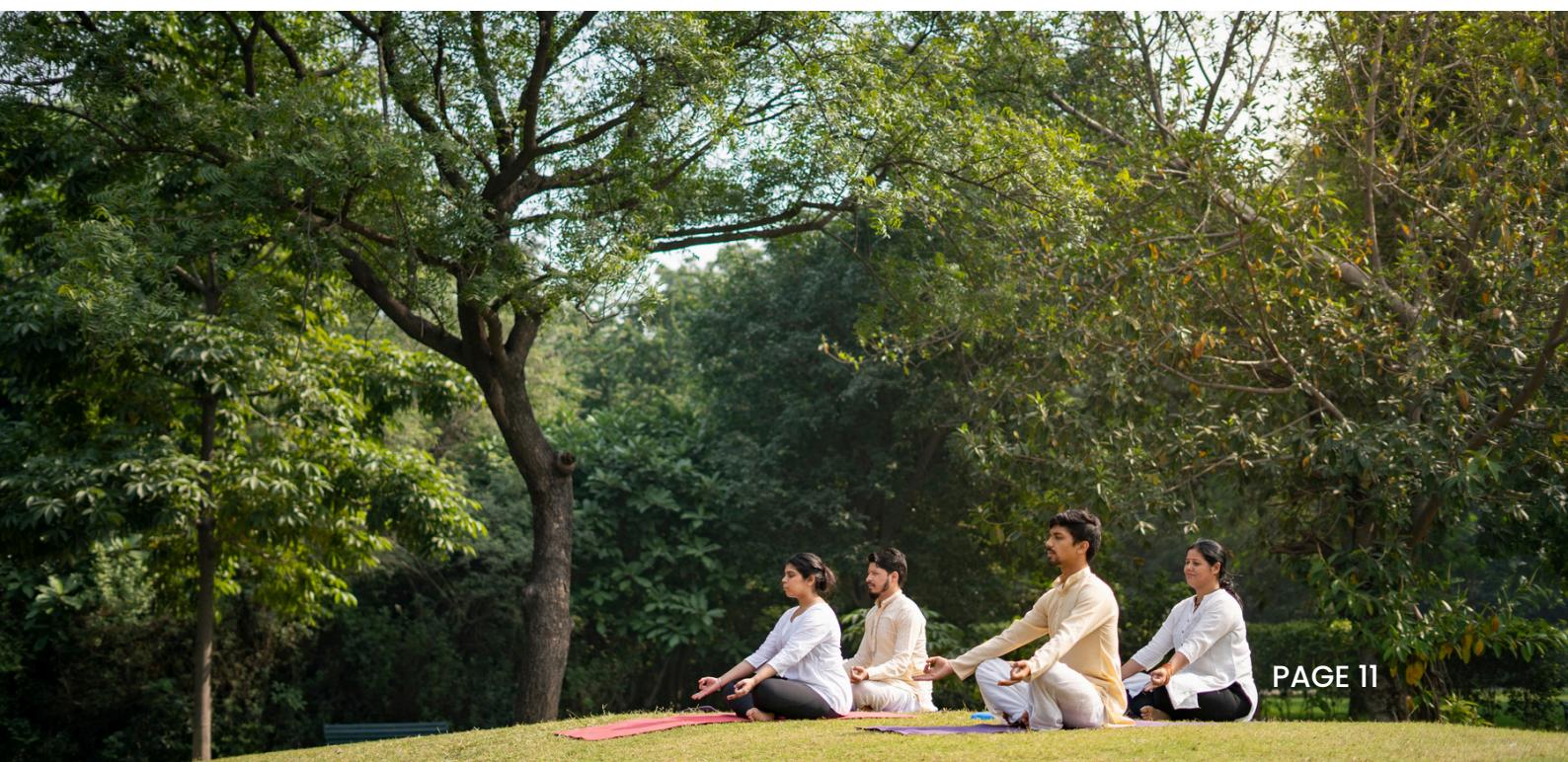


GIVE YOUR BODY AND MIND TIME TO RELAX

Relaxation is an act of care — not escape. It's a reminder to your mind and body that they can soften, slow down, and be safe. You don't need to do all of this at once. Even one small shift — a walk, a breath, a check-in with a friend — can be a step toward rest and recovery.

These practices aren't just calming — they help restore systems in the body and brain that get taxed by stress, fatigue, or trauma. They are especially important after emotionally intense experiences or during periods of healing.

You can think of relaxation as a regular way to clear out tension, restore balance, and give your nervous system room to breathe.





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