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## **Managing Emotions in Later Life: A Guide to TIPP Skills for Seniors**

By Suze Webb

As people grow older, they often face new emotional changes - grief, loss of independence, new health concerns, or social isolation. Navigating these emotions can be difficult. TIPP skills can be effective strategies to manage intense emotions in the heat of the moment.

TIPP skills are a part of Dialectical Behavioral Therapy; a form of therapy widely used across all age groups – including older adults – for emotional regulation and crisis management.

What are TIPP skills? TIPP stands for **Temperature, Intense Exercise, Paced breathing, and Progressive muscle relaxation**. These are quick, physical techniques that help regulate the body's physiological response to emotional distress and calm the mind. In short, TIPP skills can help someone cool off when they are overwhelmed by emotional stress. (Positive psychology)

### **Temperature Change**

What it is: Splashing cold water on the face, placing a cold pack on the neck or eyes, or holding a bowl of ice water.

Why it works: This activates the diving reflex, a biological response that slows the heart rate and rapidly calms the nervous system. It's especially helpful for managing anxiety or panic. (counseling center group)

Senior-friendly tip: Use a cool damp washcloth or a soft ice pack wrapped in a towel. Older adults and those with heart conditions should always check with a doctor before using cold exposure. (counseling center group)

## **Intense Exercise**

What it is: Engaging in short bursts of physical activity – like walking briskly, climbing stairs, or doing chair exercises.

Why it works: Physical activity burns off the adrenaline and cortisol released during stress, reducing emotional intensity. It also boosts endorphins, neurotransmitters that induce good feelings in the brain. (Harvard)

Senior-friendly tip: If mobility is limited, someone could try seated marches, arm raises, or leg lifts. Even a few minutes of movement can make a difference. (caregiver solutions)

## **Paced Breathing**

What it is: Slowing the breath to fewer breaths per minute. Inhaling for 2-4 counts, exhaling for 4-6 counts, and repeating. (Berkeley)

Why it works: This activates the parasympathetic nervous system, promoting a sense of calm and reducing feelings of anxiety. (utoledo)

Senior-friendly tips: Using a breathing app or counting silently while breathing to stay focused are helpful strategies. Practicing these daily builds emotional resilience over time.

## **Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)**

What it is: Tensing and relaxing muscle groups in sequence, usually starting from the feet and working upward.

Why it works: PMR reduces muscle tension caused by stress and increases body awareness, which can ease anxiety and depression (Cleveland clinic)

Senior-friendly tip: Focusing on gentle tensing if arthritis or muscle weakness is a factor. Simply noticing and relaxing each muscle group is often enough. (cci health)

As people age, emotional regulation becomes increasingly important – not only for mental well-being but also for physical health. Chronic stress can negatively impact the immune system, increase blood pressure, and worsen conditions like heart disease and diabetes. (Apa)

It's never too late to learn new ways to care for one's mental and emotional health. TIPP skills are simple yet powerful tools to add to an emotional toolbox. TIPP, along with added support such as DBT or senior-focused therapy, can help ease emotional distress and lead to a longer, healthier life.

## References

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