

Relaxation Techniques

Once you become aware of stress, it is time to relax! Relaxation techniques quickly rest your mind and body. They also reduce muscle tension, and they can help control pain. Relaxation can also provide you with more energy. If done while lying down at bedtime, certain relaxation techniques can help you sleep.

There are many ways to relax. Try out different methods until you find one that works for you. Learning to relax is a skill that takes time and practice. To get the maximum benefit, try to relax every day.

Below is a list of some common types of relaxation techniques. Some can be done anytime a person is experiencing signs of stress. Others need to be done in a quiet environment, away from noise, people, and other distractions

Quick Techniques

Quick techniques can be done anywhere and only take a few minutes. They often work well with young children.

Deep breathing. Sit or stand (using good posture) and place your hands on your stomach. Breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose, letting your stomach move out as much as possible. Hold your breath in for a few seconds and then let it out slowly through your mouth. Your hands on your stomach should move out and then in as you breath in and out. (If you become dizzy, that's a signal you are breathing too fast).

Tense-Relax. A lot of tension can be focused on certain parts of the body such as the forehead, neck, or shoulders. Simply tensing and then relaxing these areas can help the whole body relax. For a tense forehead, lift and then lower your eyebrows several times.

Rolls. If you do not have serious neck or shoulder involvement, you can do head rolls and shoulder rolls. Gently roll your head to the left, return to center, then roll to back, return to center, and then roll to the right. Now raise (or shrug) your shoulders as if you are trying to touch your ears. Move your shoulders back; then drop them slowly. Move them up, back, down, and around. Move them forward and then backward, keeping your arms limp. (It's best to have your eyes open if you do the head roll standing up to keep your balance).

“Four S.” The “Four S” technique is a quick stretch for the upper body: Smile, Slack, Sag and Smooth. First, SMILE and then take a deep breath. As you let the

breath out, allow your jaw to hang SLACK, shoulders to SAG, and forehead to SMOOTH out.

Rag-doll. The rag-doll stretch is good for the whole body. Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart. Raise your arms over your head and interlace your fingers. Turn your palms up and stretch, trying to reach the ceiling. Rise on your toes and stretch. Holding your arms and hands in this position, lean to one side until you feel the stretch; hold for 5 seconds. Then lean to the other side, feel the stretch and hold. Now reach, lean forward, and hold. Then go limp like a rag-doll and just hang toward the floor, letting all your muscles loosen. Bend your knees as you straighten up to ease any strain on your lower back. This can also be done while sitting—just let your head hang forward, your arms dangle loosely, and your legs go limp like spaghetti.

Other Techniques

Benson's Meditation. This method involves “clearing the mind” by concentrating on one pleasant thought (such as peace), a word (such as one), or an image (such as a candle or flower). This technique usually requires taking time out to find a quiet place. Get into a comfortable position, loosen any tight clothing, and assume a “passive attitude” by letting go of any other thoughts or feelings.

Imagery. This is like daydreaming and involves creating relaxing mental pictures. Try to make the scene as vivid as possible, with all the colors, sounds, smells, and feelings you can imagine in that setting. Examples of peaceful images include:

Imagine putting your pain into a toy boat and watching it sail out of sight.

Or put your pain into a balloon and then release it.

Imagine a white cloud wrapping itself around your pain and then blowing away.

Imagine floating on a raft or a soft, warm cloud, feeling weightless and pain-free.

Imagine lying on warm sand at a beach or in a beautiful garden feeling warm sun rays.

Try to make up your own pleasant scene. If you have trouble imagining a scene, ask your therapist to suggest some guided imagery cassette tapes.

Autogenics. This method is very similar to self-hypnosis. This technique can be practiced either sitting in a comfortable chair or lying down. Breathe in and say to yourself, “I am ...” breathe out and say “relaxed/calm.” Repeat, using other stress-reducing thoughts such as:

“My arms and legs are heavy.”

“My hands are warm.”

“My heartbeat is calm and regular.”

“My forehead is cool.”

“My mind is quiet and happy.”

“I am at peace.”

“I am free of pain and all other sensations.”