

Relaxation

What is Relaxation?

- Our bodies respond to stressful situations in exactly the same way as they respond to frightening situations – we get ready to fight or run away. If the stressful situation is actually a worry about illness or money or family members, there is nothing to physically fight but our body gets ready just in case.
- Two of the most common body reactions to fear, worry or stress are muscle tension and breathing changes. Feeling tense can result in aching muscles and can leave you feeling exhausted. Changes in breathing can result in you feeling breathless or perhaps dizzy and lightheaded. Other related body symptoms can include palpitations, shaking, hot flushes and sickness.
- These symptoms are not dangerous but we often start worrying about them as well as the situation that started the worry in the beginning.

Two Relaxation Exercises

- Relaxation exercises help us control the unpleasant physical symptoms by reducing the energy levels in our body.
- It's a good idea to practice these exercises when you are feeling calm so that you are ready to use them when you feel anxious or stressed.
- When you practice make yourself comfortable in a chair or lay on a bed. The more you practice the easier it will be to use the relaxation technique when you are feeling tense or anxious.



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Exercise 1: Breath Calming

Breathing fast can leave you exhausted and feeling on edge. The aim of this technique is to slow your breathing rate down.

1. Start to count your breaths –find a rhythm and keep counting – “One breath in, one breath out.”
2. Once you have a rhythm going, start to slow down your counting so that you are taking two counts to breathe in and two counts to breathe out: “In... one... two... Out... one... two”. Repeat for a minute or two.
3. Again try to slow down further and add a pause between the in and the out breath: “In... one... two... hold..., Out... one... two”.
4. Keep slowing down your breathing and count slowly each time with the pause in between the in-breath and the out-breath. Try to get to a count of 3 or maybe 4 if you can. “In one... two... three... four... hold... Out... one... two... three... four”.

Exercise 2: Muscle Relaxation Technique

One method of reducing muscle tension is called Progressive Muscle Relaxation. In this exercise you tense up particular muscles and then relax them, working through your body's main muscle groups. Muscles should be tensed enough to feel a difference but not so hard that you strain or feel pain.

1. Start with your hands: Make two fists, squeezing the muscles in both hands as tightly as possible for 15 seconds, then release and let your hands go limp.
2. Repeat with your upper arms – raise both forearms and squeeze them against your bicep muscles. Hold for 15 seconds and release.
3. Move to your shoulders – raise them up to touch your ears, hold the tension for 15 seconds and then release, letting them relax down.
4. Forehead – Raise your eyebrows high as if you are surprised, hold for 15 seconds and release.
5. Continue working through different muscle groups – squeeze your tummy muscles, then your buttocks, move on to each thigh and then your calves and finally scrunch up your toes. Each time hold the squeeze for 15 seconds before releasing.

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