



NHS Fife Department of Psychology

A Guide to

Relaxation

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Relaxation

Why is relaxation helpful?

- When we are stressed, our muscles tense up. This tension causes uncomfortable bodily feelings such as headaches and backache.
- The aches and pains of tension can cause worry, making us even more anxious and tense.
- When we are tense/anxious our body system speeds up – relaxation **slows** us down again.
- If we can learn to turn **on** the bodily feelings of relaxation we can turn **off** the symptoms of tension. You can't experience relaxation and tension at the same time.

Everyday relaxation

It is a good idea to try and change your day-to-day activities in such a way as to include something relaxing every day. It is helpful to try and set aside some time every day for relaxing and unwinding. If possible this should be for a minimum of 30 minutes a day. If you live with other people you might need to train them gradually to accept that you would like to be left alone at certain times each day. For some people just managing to have 30 minutes on their own every day can make a great deal of difference. There are a number of things you can do that you might find relaxing. You might have to experiment to see which has the most relaxing effect on you. Why not try some of these

suggestions and see what effect they have on you. There may well be some other ideas that suit you better. Try them and see what is best for you.

Relaxing activities, some suggestions:

- Have a long hot bath – maybe try some aromatherapy oils in it (see page 10)
- Read an easy book
- Listen to some soft music
- Lie on your bed and imagine spending a million pounds
- Yoga
- Go for a walk
- Swim
- Cycle

Exercise

Physical effort helps to reduce anxiety by using up some of the build up of adrenalin stress hormones. Exercise can therefore make you feel better.

Relaxation exercises

These everyday activities can help you feel less tense, but learning to fully relax your muscles will help you more. The following pages explain how to use the relaxation CD/tape. Try it and see how you get on.

Using the relaxation cd/tape

Relaxation is a *skill* and comes with *practice*

The ability to relax is not something that comes naturally; it is a **skill** that has to be learned. The secret of learning any skill is **practice**, and relaxation is no exception. It is important to practise the exercises on the CD/tape regularly. You should not expect to be able to relax completely when you first start listening to the CD/tape. Gradual progress over a number of days is a more realistic aim. Some people find that they feel silly when they first start doing the exercises. However, they soon get used to it and find them helpful in the long run.

General guidelines:

- Try to decide in advance when and where you are going to practise; in this way you can develop a routine you are more likely to stick to. Make time for yourself.
- Make sure that you choose somewhere quiet and that no one will disturb you during practice. You could unplug the phone.
- Don't attempt the exercises if you are hungry. If you have just eaten, leave it for at least 30 minutes before attempting them.
- Don't attempt the exercises if the room is too hot or too chilly.
- Try to adopt a passive attitude; don't worry about your performance or whether you are relaxing successfully. Just have a go and let it happen.

Getting started:

In order to use the CD/tape effectively, you should

- Sit in a comfortable chair or lie in a quiet room, possibly with the lights off or on very low.
- Make yourself as comfortable and relaxed as possible before you start to listen to the CD/tape.
- Listen to the instructions on the CD/tape and follow them step by step.

What is on the CD/tape?

You will hear a woman's voice giving you three different relaxation exercises.

Exercise 1 This exercise focuses on the different muscles in your body and asks you to tense them and then relax them one at a time. It lasts about 15 minutes.

Exercise 2 This talks you through deep breathing by asking you to take long, slow breaths. It lasts about 5 minutes.

Exercise 3 This asks you to imagine that you are on a holiday and talks you through a variety of different relaxing scenes. It lasts about 8 minutes.

How to finish:

When you have listened through the CD/tape, continue lying as relaxed as you can for five or ten minutes. Take advantage of the relaxed feeling and try to think pleasant thoughts. When you get up, do so slowly. Do not jump up and rush off, as this will undo all the relaxation that you have just worked on.

KEEP PRACTISING YOUR CD/TAPE. TRY TO PRACTISE EVERY DAY.

WHEN YOU ARE USED TO THE EXERCISES AND FEEL COMFORTABLE ABOUT THEM, READ SECTION TWO OF THIS BOOKLET.

Section two – using what you have learned

Shortened relaxation

If you have been doing Exercise 1 and feel confident, you can begin to shorten it by missing out the 'tense' stage. You can simply go through the sequence of relaxing the different muscle groups. When you feel that you can do this effectively, you can adapt the routine to use at other times and other places. For example, you might try the exercise sitting instead of lying down; or you might move from a quiet bedroom to the living area, which is not so peaceful. In this way you will gradually learn to relax in a range of environments, which is what you need for real-life coping.

Cued relaxation

When you are able to use the shortened relaxation you can begin to use your relaxation skills throughout the day and not just at your designated 'relaxation time'. In this way, you will progress towards being able to relax at will. All you need for cued relaxation is something that will catch your eye regularly and remind you to:

- Change your posture to a relaxed one. Drop your shoulders.
- Release the tension in your muscles.
- Check your breathing.
- Relax.

As a cue, or reminder, you could use a small, coloured spot on your watch or something else you look at regularly during the day. Every time you see the cue, you will be reminded to relax and so you will be practising your relaxation skills several times a day. There are all sorts of cues you might use. Work out what catches your eye frequently and use this as a reminder.

Applied relaxation

The final stage of relaxation training is its application whenever you need to use it. With time and regular practice, relaxation will become a way of life and you will be able to relax at will. From time to time you will probably still feel some tension, which is normal, but now you will have a better awareness of it and the skills to bring it under your control.

SUMMARY

A final word

Relaxing is about slowing things down. Everyone is different – experiment until you find **your** best way to relax.

Ten minutes 'out' of a busy day is a good investment for your health and well-being.

Breathing exercises

If you start to feel yourself becoming stressed or anxious, controlling your breathing can be a very good way to make you feel calmer. Nobody will notice you are doing this exercise. You can use it anywhere, even in busy shops, on buses and when you are with other people.

STEP 1: breathe out

STEP 2: breathe in slowly to the count of four, 'one elephant, 2 elephant, 3 elephant, 4 elephant'

STEP 3: hold your breath for the count of four

STEP 4: breathe out slowly while counting elephants

Repeat the above steps until you begin to feel calm.

Remember, don't take too many deep breaths in a row or breathe too quickly, or you will become dizzy.

Take a few ordinary breaths in between the deep ones.

Further help

Websites

www.aromatherapy-essential-oils-guide

www.aworldofaromatherapy.com

www.napiers.net

Books

Brewer, Sarah (2000) *Simply Relax: The Beginner's Guide to Relaxation*
Duncan Baird ISBN: 1900131293

Butler, G and Hope, T (1995) *Manage Your Mind* Oxford ISBN:
0192623834
(Chapter 11: Learning to Relax)

Weekes, Claire (1995) *Self Help for your Nerves* Thorsons
ISBN: 0722531559 (Emphasises coping with physical aspects of anxiety
and panic. A little old-fashioned in style, but clear.)

Wilson, Paul (1999) *Little Book of Calm* Penguin ISBN: 0140285261

Worwood, Valerie Ann (1997) *The Fragrant Mind* Bantam
ISBN: 0553407996 (An easy read.)

Worwood, Valerie Ann (1991) *The Fragrant Pharmacy* Bantam
ISBN: 0553403974 (An easy read. Complete guide.)

Notes

To cut out and keep:



Controlling your breathing
THINGS TO REMEMBER

- **breathe in slowly** to the count of four, "one elephant, 2 elephant, 3 elephant, 4 elephant"
- **hold your breath** for the count of four
- **breathe out slowly** counting elephants

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