

Deep Relaxation

Relaxing can encompass many things for many people. However, few know how to fully use relaxation skills to their full potential. While sitting with a book, listening to music, or surfing the net may be relaxing, they don't offer the full benefits that Relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, visualization, and imagery can provide. Relaxation can cause physiological changes such as:

- Decrease in heart rate, respiration, blood pressure, and muscle tension
- Reduction of anxiety and panic attacks
- Preventing stress from becoming cumulative
- Increased energy and productivity
- Improved concentration and memory
- Increased self-confidence and reduced self-blame. For many people, stress and excessive self-criticism or feelings of inadequacy go hand in hand. You can perform better and feel better when you are relaxed.
- Increased awareness of feelings

If you wait until you're feeling overwhelmingly stressed before employing a stress management technique, it is already too late. It is important to regularly work on strategies so that you can be proactive and strengthen yourself on a continual basis. If you make a commitment to deep relaxation, you will begin to notice the effects over time. You will then begin to notice tension in your body sooner and be able to relax easier because you have trained yourself and your body.

Deep Breathing

It is a big step to become aware of the stress in your life and take the steps to do something about it. Now it is time to relax! One of the most basic ideas to deep relaxation is deep breathing. Breathing slowly and deeply send messages to yourself and your body that you can relax and release tension. Try deep breathing several times a day for just a few minutes.

- Close your eyes
- Take a deep breath in through your nose to the count of 4 and out through your mouth to the count of 4.
- Make a concerted effort to push the air out of your diaphragm when you are breathing out. It may help to place your hands on your stomach.
- Continue this for several more breaths

Visualization and Imagery

The point of visualization is to lessen the tension or stress that you may have. Visualization can also be described as a sort of mental vacation. The key is to find a place or event that is or has been relaxing for you.

- Get comfortable in a chair and close your eyes.
- Begin taking three deep breaths in through your nose to the count of 4 and out through your mouth to the count of 4.
- Find a special place that you have been to that relaxes you or a place that you make up where you can feel relaxed.
- What do you see?
- What do you hear?
- Are there any smells?
- What do you taste?
- What do you feel?
- Spend some time in this place and when you are ready to leave this place open your eyes. Remember that you can return to this place anytime you need to or want to.

Imagery

Imagine that you are in a warm, comfortable place. Imagine a large aura above your head. This aura is a soothing color, whatever color is soothing to you at this moment. Imagine the aura liquefying and beginning its descent through your body starting at your head. It begins on the top of your head and flows over the top of your head. It then goes down your forehead and back of your head. It covers your eyes, nose, and mouth. It covers your neck bringing the feeling of warmth and relaxation. It then travels down your shoulders, back, and in the front of your chest and back. It continues to flush away all the tension, stress, and negative feelings that you are feeling. It makes its way to your legs and flows individually down each leg. Notice the warmth in your quads and hamstrings. It then flows down your calves and into your feet. Notice that your legs and feet feel heavy, warm, and relaxed. It then flows out of your toes and out of your body. Spend a few minutes noticing how the warmth feels collectively throughout your body. Take a few deep breaths in through your nose to the count of 4 and out through your mouth to the count of 4. Spend as much time in this state as you wish and open your eyes and continue on your day when you are ready to.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Noticing tension in your body is a great way to gauge how much stress is affecting your body. However, it's not always easy to tell if you are carrying it in parts of your body. This technique can be done throughout your whole body, but can also be done on certain trigger areas you know that you hold stress (shoulders, stomach, etc.). The key with progressive muscle relaxation is to do this a minimum of three times a week in order to train your body and brain to notice the tension and also the subsequent relaxation.

1. Sit somewhere comfortable, close your eyes, and take a few deep breaths in through your nose to the count of 4 and out through your mouth to the count of 4.
2. Begin by flexing your feet toward the sky. Hold (5 seconds) and release. Make sure not to strain the muscle too much. Notice the difference between the tense state and the relaxed state.
3. Point your toes. Hold and release.
4. Flex your calves, release.
5. Tense your hamstrings and quads by squeezing your leg muscles. Release.
6. Tense your buttocks. Hold and release.
7. Take a deep breath in through your nose to the count of 4 and out through your mouth to the count of 4.
8. Tighten your stomach muscles and release. Many people hold tension in their stomachs. Imagine the tension flowing away.
9. Tighten the muscles around your back and shoulder blades by pushing your shoulder blades back as if they were going to touch. Hold and release. Since the back also holds a lot of stress for many people, repeat this 2-3 more times to get as much tension out of your back as possible. This will also help you become more in tune with the tension.
10. Raise your shoulders as if you were going to touch your ears. Remember not too strain too much where it becomes uncomfortable. Hold and release.
11. Take a deep breath in through your nose to the count of 4 and out through your mouth to the count of 4.

12. Clench your fists. Hold and release.
13. Curl your wrists back and forth. Hold and release.
14. Clench your biceps by making a muscle. Hold and release.
15. Tilt your head from the left to the right. Hold on each side and release.
16. Drop your head as far as it will go. Hold and release.
17. Purse your lips together. Hold and release.
18. Tense the areas around your eyes by opening widely. Be careful not to strain too much. Hold and release. Notice the difference between the tense state and the relaxed state.
19. Tense the muscles in your forehead by squinting your eyes. Hold and release.
20. Open your mouth widely and close.
21. Spend a few moments noticing how your body feels. Scan your body and if you notice any tense areas and hold and release that muscle group.
22. Take 4 more deep breaths and open your eyes.

After several consistent weeks of doing this meditation, you should be able to notice tension in your body sooner how to take care of it sooner!