

Relaxation



Adapted from www.getselfhelp.co.uk

Relaxation is allowing physical and/or mental tension to be released. Tension is a natural response to threat and can be a very useful response, but often we don't need this tension, so it's okay to learn some relaxation skills that will help you to let it go. Two common types of relaxation techniques are breathing relaxations and progressive muscle relaxation.

Breathing relaxation techniques

Breathing out gently releases tension in the chest muscles and allows all muscles to release their tension more easily. Breathing relaxes you more effectively if you use your diaphragm (at the bottom of the lungs), rather than your chest muscles.

Abdominal breathing exercise

Sit comfortably in a chair and place one hand on your chest and the other on your abdomen (stomach). Take two or three fairly large breaths – which hand moves first and which moves most? Practice so that it is the lower hand on your abdomen that moves the most rather than the one on your chest.



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Another simple breathing exercise

This simple breathing exercise can be done in a few seconds, no matter where you are. It is particularly helpful at stressful times, but it's also useful to do it at regular intervals throughout the day.

Take a deep, slow breath in and hold it for five seconds. Feel your abdomen expand as you do this. Breathe out slowly, to a count of five. Breathe in again, make every breath slow and steady and exactly the same as the one before it and the one after it. As you breathe out, concentrate on expelling ALL the air in your lungs. Keep the out-breath going for as long as you can. Keep relaxed for a few seconds before you inhale again.

A quick breathing relaxation exercise

You can do this quick breathing relaxation exercise wherever you are (in the car, supermarket, waiting for an appointment).

1. Stop.
2. Drop and relax your shoulders.
3. Take two or three slightly slower and deeper out-breaths, relaxing as you breathe out.
4. Carry on with whatever you were doing, but a bit slower.

Progressive muscle relaxation

Progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) involves relaxing each part of your body in turn by tensing and then relaxing the muscles in that area. When we tense muscles and then relax them, they tend to come back to being more relaxed than they were to start with. To practice PMR, follow the instructions below (record them and play them back if you like).

Sit in a comfortable chair (or lie on the floor or on a bed). Make sure your whole body is comfortably supported, including your arms, head and feet. If you become aware of sounds, just ignore them and let them leave your mind just as soon as they enter.

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Close your eyes. Feel the surface you are resting on support your whole body – your legs, your arms, your head. If you can feel any tension, begin to let it go. Take two slow and deep breaths, and as you breathe out let the tension begin to flow out.

Become aware of your head – notice how your forehead feels. Tense the muscles in your forehead for a few seconds and then let any tension go – feel your forehead become smooth and wide. Close your eyes tightly, then release them relaxing the muscles around your eyes. Clench your jaw for a few seconds, then release it, letting the tension go from your mouth, your cheeks and your jaw. Let your teeth part slightly as the tension goes.

Now focus on your neck and shoulders. Lift your shoulders and tense all muscles in your neck and shoulders. Hold them tense for a few seconds and then release them. Let your neck lengthen as it relaxes and your shoulders will gently lower down as they relax.

Notice how your body feels as you begin to relax.

Be aware of your arms and your hands. Clench your fists and press your arms hard against the surface you are resting on for a few seconds. Now let your hands relax and your arms sink down comfortably. Now they may feel heavy and limp.

Be aware of your back – from your neck to your hips. Tense all these muscles for a few seconds and then let them all relax. Feel yourself sinking down into the chair.

Now tense your feet and your legs, pressing them for a few seconds against the surface you are resting on. Now release and let your hips, your legs and your feet relax and roll outwards. Notice the feeling of relaxation taking over.

Notice your breathing – your abdomen gently rising and falling as you breathe. Let your next breath be a little deeper, a little slower...

Now, allow yourself to feel completely relaxed and heavy... Lie still and concentrate on slow, rhythmic breathing...

When you want to, take a deep breath and open your eyes. Wiggle your fingers and toes, breathe deeply and stretch. Look around the room, staying relaxed but becoming more alert as you notice what you see, hear and feel. Pause before gently rising.

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Keeping going

Perhaps surprisingly, relaxation is a skill – it takes practice! Try to practice different kinds of relaxation throughout the day – from a full progressive muscle relaxation to very brief breathing relaxations.

Keeping on with your relaxation practice is important even if it doesn't seem to change anything straight away.

Many different kinds of relaxation routines are available on the internet or as apps, so be prepared to try different ones to find routines that are right for you.

