



Relaxation Techniques

1. An Extended Relaxation Exercise

[The following exercise combines breathing exercises and muscle relaxation. When learning this exercise, have someone read it to you, in a calm, slow voice, allowing time for you to take and hold your breath, for you to let out your breath slowly, and for you to first tighten, and then relax your muscles slowly, as indicated in the script. You may also want to record the script and listen to the recording to help you relax. After you have done the exercise several times, you will be able to lead yourself through it.]

Close your eyes and get into a comfortable position. If you need to, you can make adjustments now or as we go along. Quiet moves will not disturb your relaxation. Help your body begin to relax by taking some slow, deep breaths. Take a deep breath now. Hold your breath and count silently to three, or five, or ten. Take the amount of time holding your breath that feels good to you. Then let your breath out in an easy, soothing way. Breathe in again and hold it a few seconds... and, when you are ready, again let it out. As you let your breath out, imagine breathing out the tension in your body, out through your nose and mouth, breathing out the tension as you breathe out. Do it yet again, breathing in slowly... holding it... and out.

*Make a tight fist with both hands... very tight ... so tight you can feel the tension in your forearms. Now, let go suddenly... Notice the feeling of relaxation flowing up your arms... Make a fist with both hands again... and suddenly let go. Again, notice the feeling of relaxation in your arms.... Let your mind move this feeling of muscle relaxation up your arms... through your shoulders... into your chest... into your stomach... into your hips. Continue to focus on this feeling of relaxation, moving it into your upper legs... through your knees... into your lower legs... your ankles and feet... Now let this feeling of comfortable relaxation move from your shoulders into your neck... into your jaw and forehead and scalp... Take a deep breath, and as you exhale, you can become even more deeply relaxed... *[Go back to the place above marked by the asterisk (*) and repeat this section a second time].*

However you feel right now is just fine. As you become even more relaxed and comfortable, each time you breathe out you can continue to drift even deeper into a state of comfort... safe and serene... When you relax, as you are now, you can think more clearly or simply allow yourself to enjoy feelings of comfort, serenity, and quiet. As a result of this relaxation, you can look forward to feeling more alert and energetic later on... You can enjoy a greater feeling of personal confidence and control over how you feel, how you think, and what you believe. You can feel calmer, more comfortable, more at ease, and more in control of what's important to you...

When you're ready, you can open your eyes. You may feel alert or calm – take note of the emotions you are experiencing at this time. As you open your eyes, you may want to stretch and flex your muscles gently, as though you are waking from a wonderful nap.

Source: Monika Erős Sarnyai MD, MA, and Jermeý Taylor, MPH, NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene





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2. A Brief Relaxation Exercise

[The following is a script for a breathing and muscle relaxation exercise that can be used to achieve a relaxed state rapidly. If possible, become comfortable with the longer version (above) before using this version. As with the lengthier script, it should be read in a slow, calm voice, allowing time to carry out the directions.]

Take two or three deep breaths. Each time, hold your breath for a few seconds, then let it out slowly, concentrating on the feeling of the air leaving your body... Now tighten both fists, and tighten your forearms and biceps... Hold the tension for five or six seconds... Now relax the muscles. When you relax the tension, do it suddenly, as if you are turning off a light Concentrate on the feelings of relaxation in your arms for 15 or 20 seconds... Now tense the muscles of your face and tense your jaw... Hold it for five or six seconds... now relax and concentrate on the relaxation for fifteen or twenty seconds... Now arch your back and press out your stomach as you take a deep breath... Hold it... and relax... Now tense your thighs and calves and buttocks... Hold... and now relax. Concentrate on the feelings of relaxation throughout your body, breathing slowly and deeply.

Source: Monika Erös Sarnyai MD, MA, and Jermeý Taylor, MPH, NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene



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3. A Guided Visualization Exercise (Example)

[Visualization exercises are based on identifying a setting that you find relaxing. This can vary from one person to another - for some, it may be a particular place to sit in a forest, for others a walk by the ocean or watching the sun set in front of your home. The exercise below uses walking on a path through the woods as an example. Identify a place where YOU feel safe and relaxed, then use that image to practice this exercise on your own.]

Put yourself in a comfortable position. Close your eyes. Check whether or not your body feels well supported and ready to become more comfortable. You can help your body begin to relax by taking in an easy deep breath, holding it for a few moments and then exhaling in a soothing, calming manner. Take in a deep breath now. Hold your breath and count silently to three, or five, or ten. Take whatever amount of time holding your breath that feels good to you. Then let your breath out in an easy, soothing exhalation. Breathe in again and hold it a few seconds... and, when you are ready, again let it out. As you let your breath out, imagine the tension in your body being breathed out with your breath, out through your nose and mouth, breathing out the tension as you breathe out. Do it yet again, breathing in slowly... holding it... and out.

Now go to your safe place. Imagine yourself going to the woods that you love... You walk slowly across a field, toward the line of trees... As you get closer, you can hear the wind rustling in the leaves. You see the green leaves against the blue sky, and you can see the tops of the trees swaying, in an ever-changing pattern as the breeze moves them... You come to the edge of the woods. As you enter the woods, the air gets cooler, and the fragrance of the leaves on the forest floor greets you. Along the path, the light is bright in some places, dimmer in others... The air is fresh, and the breeze cools your arms and face. The leaves rustle under your feet. The smell and the sounds of the leaves rustling make you feel happy and comfortable... At the side of the path, a patch of green moss looks soft and cool... You stop for a moment, and concentrate on the songs of the birds, and the sounds of small animals scampering through the leaves... In the distance, a dove coos... As you walk, you feel more and more relaxed and comfortable... You see a small stream, the water meandering slowly, a leaf floating slowly down the stream. Beside the stream is a patch of soft grass and you sit on the grass, watching the leaf float down the stream, hearing the water gurgling over the pebbles. The sun flashes on the water, making jewel-like sparkles. You listen to the breeze in the leaves, the birds singing, the water gurgling... As you sit, watching the sparkling water and listening to the gentle sounds of the birds and the leaves in the breeze and breathing the cool fresh air, your body becomes more and more relaxed... Now you stand up and slowly stretch, stretching every muscle of your body... and slowly, slowly, you retrace your path. You walk along the path, searching with your eyes for small flowers in the underbrush, recognizing a familiar bush. You pass the mossy bank and soon, the edge of the forest nears. As you leave the forest, the sun shines brightly, warming your skin, and you feel safe, rested, and relaxed.

Source: Monika Erös Sarnyai MD, MA, and Jerme Taylor, MPH, NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

