

# Relaxation Exercises

Life's experiences may cause many stresses due to the losses and changes in our lives. Often it is difficult to relax due to worry and tension. We know that relaxation can aid healing and lead to a feeling of wellness.

Relaxation is the letting go of physical and emotional tension. Relaxation can lead to a sense of peacefulness. There are different ways to relax. You can experiment to find the best ways that work for you. The following is a list of suggestions to help you get started.

## General Information:

The earlier you notice tension in the body, the easier it is to relax it. Tune in to muscles or organs that tend to be stress targets throughout the day. For example, a stiff neck could lead to a muscle tension headache unless these muscles are relaxed. If you feel that you are tense, look for something in your immediate environment that conveys a sense of peacefulness. For example, a picture of something natural like light filtering through the trees is peaceful. Focus on whatever is in your immediate environment to remind you that you can return to a sense of peacefulness.

Find yourself a quiet place to practice your relaxation exercise daily. Twenty minutes in the morning upon waking up and twenty minutes in the evening before bedtime are ideal. Some people like to use a relaxation exercise between work and home. Whatever you decide, try to make this a daily habit. Relaxation is a learned skill that requires practice.

More on next page →

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## **Music:**

Many people have favorite music that helps them relax. If this is a proven way for you to relax, choose music that is pleasing to the ear, and is harmonious and rhythmic. Music played by itself or used with other forms of relaxation can be very soothing.

## **Physical Exercise:**

Exercise is a good stress reducer. It can also help you prepare for relaxation by releasing muscle tension in the body. It stimulates the release of a natural body substance called endorphin, which creates a feeling of well-being.

## **Progressive Muscle Relaxation:**

Some people cannot relax due to muscle tension. Progressive muscle relaxation is done alternately tensing and relaxing various muscle groups throughout the body. You might wish to have someone help you with this at first.

## **Breathing:**

You may notice that when you are tense you forget to breathe. Begin by focusing your attention on your breathing. Sounds and thoughts may be distracting. Gently detach yourself from the sounds and thoughts. Return your attention to your breathing. Do not pressure yourself to perform or “do this right” as this creates more tension. The train of thoughts and sensations will come and go as you continue to breathe.

## **Affirmations:**

Tension can be created by negative thoughts or beliefs. We talk to ourselves all the time. Be aware of what you tell yourself. Replace negative thoughts with positive statements called affirmations.

Examples of positive statements:

- I could be choosing peace instead of this.

- I am an inherently worthwhile, loveable person.
- I am doing the best that I can.

### **Imagery:**

Imagery exercises are thoughts that have sensory qualities to them. The sensations include sight, taste, touch, smell and hearing. Many people find these exercises very powerful. For example:

- Imagine you are inhaling a healing light that begins its journey in your head. Take the light on a healing tour of your body, strengthening your immune system. Feel the light release tension and wash away anything that does not belong in the body.
- Think of a time and place when you felt safe and comfortable. Imagine those surroundings, inhale its fragrances, hear its sounds, touch its textures. Bring as much of that experience back to the here and now as possible. Whenever you feel ready, take a deep breath and open your eyes.

### **Summary:**

At the library or bookstore, you will find books and tapes already prepared on relaxation exercises. When you find exercises that work, have someone whose voice you find soothing record the information for you. The tape will lead you through the exercise so you can practice the technique.

Remember, there is no wrong or right way to do relaxation. As long as you relax, it doesn't matter how you do it. Whatever you decide to do, check with your health care provider for ideas and support for your new relaxation habit.

- **Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.**