

# Relaxation Techniques

**Relaxation techniques or exercises can reduce physical, psychological and emotional responses to stress and tension. They are simple to learn and help our bodies and minds cope with stress. If practiced regularly, relaxation techniques can lead to feeling more relaxed, with an improved sense of wellbeing, all the time.**

## Some symptoms of stress and tension

### Mental

- Difficulty with thinking and concentration.
- Impaired judgment.
- Worrying about little things.
- Difficulty sleeping and/or bad dreams.
- Negative thoughts.
- Difficulty making decisions.
- Forgetfulness.

### Emotional

- Feeling tense, angry, anxious, irritable.
- Crying.
- Lack of enthusiasm.
- Depression.

### Behavioural

- Problems with relationships.
- Unsociable.
- Increased use of nicotine, alcohol or caffeine.
- Poor time management.
- Low productivity.

### Physical

- Fast heart beat, palpitations.
- Chest pains.
- Tense muscles, aches and pains.
- Jaw or fist clenching.
- Dizziness.
- Fatigue.
- A feeling of choking or a lump in throat.
- Headache.

- Nausea and vomiting.
- Constipation or diarrhoea.
- Flushing of the face or chest.
- Fast, shallow breathing.
- Sweating.
- Lowered resistance to infection.

Continual, excessive stress can lead to an anxiety disorder, depression or other serious medical condition.

## Techniques to relax

There are many ways to release tension and relax. Relaxation techniques are simply tools for relaxing the mind and body and different techniques suit different people and situations.

Relaxation techniques or exercises can reduce:

- Levels of stress hormones
- Heart rate and blood pressure
- Muscle tension
- Perspiration
- Analytical thinking.

It is best to set aside a regular time each day to practice relaxation techniques. Find a quiet, safe place and sit or lie in a comfortable position. It is ideal to build up to 10–20 minutes once or twice a day, plus about 3–5 minutes for five times each day.

Some relaxation techniques are described below.

### Controlled breathing

- Close your eyes and concentrate on your breathing. Take a slow deep breath in through your nose for three

seconds, then breathe out through your mouth for three seconds. Think the word 'relax' as you breathe out.

- Clear your mind and think only about slow, deep breathing. Imagine the tension flowing out of your body each time you breathe out.

### Progressive muscle relaxation

- Close your eyes and focus on your body.
- Start at your feet and focus on one muscle group at a time. Move up your body, relaxing each muscle group in turn.
- Tense the muscle as you breathe in, then relax it as you breathe out. Imagine all the tension flowing out of your body.
- Allow 15–20 seconds between each muscle group.
- Keep your mind focused on the muscle group you are working on.

### Visualisation

- Close your eyes and imagine a safe, soothing, peaceful scene (e.g., a beach or quiet place in the bush).
- See yourself there, relaxed, peaceful and happy.

### Mindfulness and realistic thinking

Mindfulness means you controlling your mind, instead of letting your mind control you. Our thoughts and beliefs determine the intensity of our feelings and stressful feelings and emotions can be due to unhelpful or unrealistic thoughts. Mindfulness involves learning

to be in control of what thoughts you pay attention to and focusing on the 'here and now', rather than the past or future.

### Physical exercise

Physical exercise releases muscle tension and increases the levels of 'feel good' chemicals (endogenous opiates) in our bodies. Any type of regular physical exercise is helpful.

**Note:** If you don't normally exercise, are more than 40 years of age or are overweight, consult your doctor for a medical checkup before starting an exercise program.

### Self care

Ways to prevent a build up of stress and tension include:

- Practice relaxation techniques as often as possible and especially in situations that cause you stress
- Eat regular healthy meals, including plenty of fruit, vegetables and grain foods. Limit foods high in fat, sugar or salt
- Drink enough water every day to satisfy your thirst and to keep your urine 'light-coloured' (unless a doctor advises otherwise)
- Exercise at a moderate level for at least 30 minutes on all or most days of the week
- A warm shower or bath can be calming and relax muscles
- Talk about problems and worries with another person. They may help you see things in a different way
- Accept that sometimes difficult problems or situations are outside your control
- Learn to forgive yourself and others for mistakes
- Learn to recognise what's worth worrying about and what's not
- Learn to say no to tasks that put you under too much pressure
- Balance work and play. Make time for hobbies. These will relax your mind and are a good escape from worries
- Organise your time. Make a 'to do' list. Prioritise daily tasks in order of importance and allow ample time to get things done. Include, as priorities, relationships with the important people in your life
- Reduce (or stop) smoking and alcohol – these can make stressful situations seem worse
- Reduce your intake of caffeine (coffee, tea, chocolate, cola and energy drinks). Caffeine is stimulating and may make it difficult to relax.
- Reward yourself with little things that you enjoy (e.g., fresh flowers, a massage, a hot bath)
- Remember to laugh and smile! Laughter makes our muscles go limp and releases tension and pressure. When events seem overwhelming, try to keep a sense of humour.

## For more information

### **Beyond blue**

Phone: 1300 22 4636 or website  
www.beyondblue.org.au

### **Black Dog Institute**

Website: www.blackdoginstitute.org.au

### **Healthdirect Australia**

Phone: 1800 022 222  
Website: www.healthinsite.gov.au

### **Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)**

Your pharmacist can advise on  
CMI leaflets.

### **National Prescribing Service (NPS) Medicines Information**

Phone: 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424)  
Website: www.nps.org.au

### **The Poisons Information Centre**

In case of poisoning phone 13 11 26  
from anywhere in Australia.

***Pharmacists are medicines experts.  
Ask a pharmacist for advice when  
choosing a medicine.***

## Related fact cards

- » *Alcohol*
- » *Anxiety*
- » *Carer Support (website only –  
ask your pharmacist)*
- » *Depression*
- » *Exercise and the Heart*
- » *Exercises for Flexibility*
- » *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*
- » *Sleeping Problems*
- » *Smoking*

Your Self Care Pharmacy: