

Appendix 8 Progressive relaxation

Relaxation is useful for reducing physical and mental tension. Relaxation helps people to: reduce worry and anxiety, improve sleep, and relieve physical symptoms caused by stress (e.g. headaches, stomach pains, diarrhoea or constipation).

If you follow the steps below you will be well on the way to learning how to relax. This exercise should take about 15-20 minutes. However, if you only have 5 minutes to spare, 5 minutes is certainly better than nothing!

1. Find a quiet and relaxing place: Choose a comfortable chair, or somewhere to lie down, in a place which is free from noise and interruptions.
2. Clear your mind: Focus your attention on your breathing, and try to clear your mind of worries or disturbing thoughts. If these thoughts drift back into your mind when relaxing, try and focus attention on pleasant, or at least neutral material (e.g. imagining a place where you have felt happy and calm).
3. Practice the slow breathing exercise (outlined in Appendix 6)
4. Relax your muscles: For each of the muscle groups in your body, tense the muscle for 7-10 seconds, then relax for ten seconds. The muscles should not be so tense that they become uncomfortable or the person gets cramp - but just enough to get the sensation of tightness. Muscles should be relaxed in the following order:
 - Hands - curl hands into fists, then relax
 - Lower arms - bend hand down at the wrist, as though trying to touch the underside of the arm, then relax
 - Upper arms - tighten biceps by bending arm at the elbow, then relax
 - Shoulders - lift shoulders up as if trying to cover ears with them, then relax
 - Neck - stretch neck gently to the left, then forward, then to the right, then to the back in a slow rolling motion, then relax
 - Forehead and scalp - raise eyebrows, then relax
 - Eyes - screw up eyes, then relax
 - Jaw - clench teeth (just to tighten the muscles), then relax
 - Tongue - press tongue against the roof of your mouth, then relax
 - Chest - breathe in deeply to inflate your lungs, then breathe out and relax
 - Stomach - push your tummy out to tighten the muscle, then relax
 - Upper Back - pull your shoulders forward with your arms at your side, then relax
 - Lower Back - while sitting, lean your head and upper back forward, rolling your back in a smooth arc thus tensing the lower back, then relax
 - Buttocks - tighten your buttocks, then relax
 - Thighs - while sitting, push your feet firmly into the floor, then relax
 - Calves - lift your toes off the ground towards your shins, then relax
 - Feet - gently curl your toes down so that they are pressing into the floor, then relax.
 - Mentally scan your body for any remaining signs of tension. Repeat muscle tension and relaxation on any identified areas.

5. Enjoy the feeling of relaxation

Take some slow breaths while you sit still for a few minutes enjoying the feeling of relaxation.

Practise once or twice every day for at least eight weeks.

During the day, try relaxing specific muscles whenever you notice that they are tense.

(Treatment Protocol Project 1997)