



Relaxation Techniques

Learning relaxation techniques can help in your everyday life. Here are a couple techniques that can tremendously help improve your ability to cope and decrease your level of stress.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

This procedure requires time to learn initially. Practice during a time when you will not be disturbed. As you refine this method, the procedure will become a quick, effective way to reduce stress. Here are the steps:

1. Sit in a comfortable chair or recline on a couch or bed.
2. Close your eyes and take 2 slow, deep breaths.
3. Exhale slowly. Pay attention to the gradual release in tension in your chest and shoulder muscles. Feel the weight of your body against the chair and the pull of gravity....like you are “melting” into the chair or bed.
4. Begin a series of simple exercises by contracting a particular group of muscles. Hold for count of 3, then release. Each time you tense and release, you can enhance the effect by paying attention to the experience of relaxation.
5. Follow this sequence:
 - feet & toes
 - calves & lower legs
 - thighs
 - buttocks
 - abdomen
 - lower back (arch)
 - chest (hold in deep breath)
 - hands & fists
 - upper arms
 - shoulders (shrug)
 - face (squeeze eyes and purse lips)

Allow a 10 to 15 second rest period between each muscle group before moving to the next area of your body.

Do this 1 to 2 times per day. Initially, this process may take 15 minutes to complete but can be mastered within the first week or so. Thereafter, this can be done in 4 to 5 minutes.

Guided imagery

This exercise helps you to focus your attention on an image or story, so that your mind can let go of worries or thoughts that keep you awake or promote anxiety and worry.

Get into a comfortable position (in bed). Close your eyes and relax. Begin to visualize a scene, memory, or story that you find calming. This is highly individual—find what works best for you by trying a few choices. For example: a favorite vacation or calming outdoor spot, a relaxing activity like curling up with a book in your favorite chair, or something repetitive like remembering the steps of an exercise or dance routine. The key is to find something that allows you to focus your attention and let go of

other thoughts. Begin to create this scenario in your mind. Visualize all the details of the image or story, as slowly and carefully as you can. Use all your senses to recreate this scene. Any time you find your mind drifting to an unrelated thought (a worry about the day or a “must do” for tomorrow), acknowledge it and let it go. Refocus on your relaxing story. It’s normal for this to take some time and practice in mastering this. Be persistent. Each time you practice you will get better at it.

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