

A RELAXATION PROCESS

Read slowly. If possible, ask a friend or relative who has a soothing tone of voice read this to you.

Get comfortable. Take a few moments to allow yourself to listen to your thoughts and to your body. If your thoughts get in the way of relaxing, imagine a blackboard in your mind and visualize yourself writing down all of your thoughts on the blackboard. By doing this, you can put those thoughts aside for awhile and know that you will be able to retrieve them later.

Now that you are ready to relax, begin by closing your eyes. Allow your breathing to become a little slower and a little deeper. As you continue breathing slowly and deeply, let your mind drift back into a tranquil, safe place that you have been in before. Try to recall everything that you could see, hear, and feel back there. Let those pleasant memories wash away any tension or discomfort.

To help yourself relax even further, take a brief journey through your body, allowing all of your muscles to become as comfortable and as relaxed as possible. Begin by focusing on your feet up to your ankles, wiggling your feet or toes to help them to relax, and then allowing that growing wave of relaxation to continue up into the muscle of the calves. As muscles relax, they stretch out and allow more blood to flow into them; therefore they gradually feel warmer and heavier.

Continue the process into the muscles of the thighs; gradually your legs should feel more and more comfortable and relaxed.

Then concentrate on all of the muscles up and down your spine, and feel the relaxation moving into your abdomen; as you do so you might feel a pleasant sense of warmth moving out to every part of your body. Next focus on the muscles of the chest. Each time that you exhale, your chest muscles will relax just a little more. Let the feeling flow up into the muscles of the shoulders, washing away any tightness or tension, allowing the shoulder muscles to become loose and limp. And now the relaxation can seep out into the muscles of the arms and hands as your arms and hands become heavy, limp, and warm.

Now move on to the muscles of the neck-front, sides, and back-imagining that your neck muscles are as floppy as a handful of rubber bands. And now relax the muscles of the face, letting the jaw, cheeks, and sides of face hang loose and limp. Now relax the eyes and the nose, and now the forehead and the scalp. Let any wrinkles just melt away. And now, by taking a long, slow, deep breath, cleanse yourself of any remaining tension.

This may take a few tries before you are able to notice possible effects. If so, take a break, clear your thoughts, and then attempt it again.

Relaxation Tips

Auto-suggestion

This exercise can be used to prepare your mind, body, and spirit for any activity that requires being relaxed and centered.

Sit or lie down in a comfortable position. Close your eyes. Imagine your forehead relaxing so much that it begins to melt and flow over the rest of your head and face, spreading deep relaxation as it goes. Relax the muscles of your jaw so that it hangs limp and loose. Your mouth will be slightly open. Now begin to regulate your breathing using the following counting cycle:

Inhale to the count of one; exhale to the count of two;

Inhale to the count of two; exhale to the count of four;

Inhale to the count of three; exhale to the count of six.

Continue increasing your count, exhaling twice as long as you inhale, up to inhaling for six counts and exhaling for twelve.

Now, beginning with inhaling for six counts and exhaling for twelve, reverse the cycle and shorten your breaths. Inhale six, exhale twelve, inhale five, exhale ten, and so on until you inhale one and exhale two.

After this breathing warm-up, you can learn by suggestion to experience a variety of sensations throughout your body. Here is a routine which begins by inducing the feeling of heaviness in your arm. Repeat each of the following phrases several times silently. Do this with purpose and meaning.

“My right arm is getting limp and heavy” -- six to eight times.

“My right arm is getting heavier and heavier” -- six to with times.

“My right arm is completely heavy” -- six to eight times.

“I feel supremely calm” -- one time.

Then open your eyes, shake off the heaviness, start over with the breathing cycle, and repeat the above auto-suggestions again.

If you do this for several days, you will begin to experience a wonderful feeling of heaviness in your arm. Then you can begin the same process with your left arm.

Auto-suggestions can be used to experience the following:

Heaviness and warmth in your arms and legs.

Your chest feeling warm and pleasant.

A clear and steady heartbeat.

Calm and clear breathing.

Your stomach feeling soft and warm.

A cool forehead.

Always end your auto-suggestions with “I feel supremely calm.”

One by one, you can add new sensations to those you already experience. Your final auto-suggestion might be:

“My arms and legs are heavy and warm”

“I feel supremely calm.”

“My heartbeat and breathing are calm and steady.”

“My stomach is soft and warm, and my forehead is cool.”

Relax with a sigh

Use this exercise when you are studying or during an exam. It releases tensions before they build.

The sigh is the body’s natural mechanism for tension reduction, so there is nothing to “learn” in this technique. Your body already knows how.

Put your spine straight and sigh deeply. Simply let the airflow out of your body. Focus on the sigh and then inhale naturally.

Twenty things I like to do

One way to relieve tension is to mentally yell “Stop!” and substitute a pleasant image (daydream) for the negative thoughts and emotions you are experiencing.

In order to create a supply of pleasant images you can call up during times of stress, conduct an 8-minute brainstorm on things you like to do. Before you begin, tell yourself your goal is to generate 20 ideas. Time yourself, and write as fast as you can.

When you have completed your list, study it. Pick out two activities that seem especially pleasant and elaborate on them by creating a mind map of each one. Write the activity in the center of a piece of paper, then using the mind mapping technique, write down all the memories you have about that activity.

You can use these images to calm yourself in stressful situations.

Meditation with white light

Use this exercise whenever you want to calm your thoughts.

- Find a quiet spot where you won't be interrupted. Sit comfortably. Loosen any tight clothing. Relax your entire body, beginning with your feet. Work your way right to the top of your head, telling each part of your body to relax as you go.
- Sit quietly for five to ten seconds, letting go of all thoughts as they arise.
- Next, imagine a white light entering your feet and flowing up your body, up your legs, through your pelvis and stomach, up your spine, through your arms, and up into your head. Imagine this white light filling your entire body with soothing, healing energy. See your body filled with a white light which gives you power, strength, and confidence. See and feel this white light as it flows through your body and out the top of your head.
- Whenever you feel ready, return to the room, open your eyes, and, like a cat, stretch your body slowly.

Limb breathing

This is an exercise to refresh your whole body.

In a comfortable place, lie down on your back. Close your eyes and relax. Do a quick body scan. Take slow, deep breaths. Focus on the air entering and leaving your lungs. As you inhale, imagine that the incoming air is fresh, clean, and full of invigorating energy. Leaving your body, with the air you exhale, are all your tensions, toxins and frustrations. Do this for several minutes, giving your imagination full rein.

Begin to imagine that the air you inhale comes in through your toes and up through the bones of one leg. When you exhale, the air leaves your chest and travels down your leg and out your toes. Do this three times with each leg. Now imagine breathing through each arm. The air enters your fingertips, moves up your arm into your chest and head. When you exhale, follow the air as it flows down your arms and leaves your hands. Do this three times with each arm.

Finally, do the process with both arms and legs simultaneously.

Setting your bio-alarm

Sometimes, after only a few hours of sleep, we wake up feeling miserable. Other times, we bounce out of bed feeling terrific. How we feel in the morning often depends on how we program our bio-alarm clock the night before.

After a long night of studying, you may go to bed with the thought, "I shouldn't have stayed up so late. I'll be exhausted tomorrow. I hope I hear the alarm in the morning." The next morning, you oversleep and miss class.

To wake up refreshed, experiment with this exercise.

Before going to bed, decide what time you want to get up in the morning. Now say aloud, "I am going to get up at seven," (or whatever time you chose). Next, lie in bed and allow your body to relax. Imagine feeling heavy and sinking into the bed. Now softly say (out loud if possible), "I will wake naturally at seven feeling refreshed, rested, and ready to start my day." Do a body scan by relaxing each part of your body starting with your feet, then ankles, legs, lower back, and so forth until you are completely relaxed and asleep. You will probably wake up feeling great, at exactly the time you chose.

Experiment with this exercise a few times while setting your alarm clock five minutes later. After a while, you'll never have to hear the buzz again.

Mastering these exercises to achieve the desired sensations can help you enjoy a peaceful state of relaxation. A relaxed state is useful before you take tests do affirmations and visualizations of success, participate in sports, or meditate. Deep relaxed states have also been used to sharpen attention, gain conscious control of physiological presses, control moods, and enhance abilities in everything from schoolwork to pain control and self-healing.