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| **Relaxation** |

**Why is Relaxation Helpful?**

When we are stressed the muscles in our bodies tense up and this muscular tension causes unhelpful bodily feelings, such as headache, backache, tight chest etc. These aches and pains can cause mental worry, making us even more anxious and tense. Relaxing slows down the systems in the body that speed up when we get anxious. By learning to ‘turn on’ the bodily symptoms of relaxation, we can ‘turn off’ the feelings of tension.

# Relaxation in Everyday Life

* Stop rushing around – you achieve more by doing things calmly.
* Give yourself short breaks – relax, stretch, go for a walk.
* Adopt a relaxed posture – deliberately relax if you notice yourself tensing up. Drop your shoulders, sit back in your chair and unclench your fists.
* Inject pleasure and treats into your daily routine.

# General Guidelines

* Relaxation is a skill - The ability to relax is not always something which comes naturally; it is a skill which has to be learned.
* Decide when to practice – By deciding in advance when to practice relaxation, you are more likely to get into a routine which you can stick to.
* Environment – Choose somewhere quiet and make sure no-one will disturb you during your practice. Don’t attempt relaxation if the room is too hot or too chilly.
* ‘Passive’ attitude – Do not worry about your performance or whether you are successfully relaxing. Just ‘have a go’ and let it happen.
* Breathing – Try to breathe through your nose, using your stomach muscles. Try to breathe slowly and regularly. It is important that you do not take a lot of quick, deep breaths as this can make you feel dizzy or faint and even make your tension worse. When you place your hands on your stomach, you will feel the movement if you are breathing properly. Try this out before you relax to make sure that you are used to the feeling.

# Relaxation Techniques

* Breathing – Ensure the ‘out breath’ (through the mouth) is longer than the ‘in breath’ (through the nose). Pause between breaths. For example, breathe in (count 4), hold (count 2), breathe out (count 6), pause (count 2).
* Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) – Tensing and relaxing each muscle: full instructions included overleaf.
* Imagery – Imagine a pleasant scene, somewhere you feel relaxed and at ease. Imagine the scene as vividly as you can – notice colours, sounds and movements around you. Concentrate on any sensory experiences, e.g. warm glow of sun on your face. Stay with those feelings and images for as long as possible.

Healthy living is a matter of balance. Relaxation is part of the balancing process alongside other aspects of your lifestyle such as what you eat, your physical activity and how you handle stress. Learning to relax takes practice, as with learning any new skill.

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| **Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)** |

In Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) exercises, you tense up particular muscles and then relax them, working your way through the body.

# General Procedure

1. Once you’ve set aside the time and place for relaxation, slow down your breathing and give yourself permission to relax.
2. When you are ready to begin, tense the muscle group described. Make sure you can feel the tension, but not so much that you feel a great deal of pain. Keep the muscle tensed for approximately 5 seconds.
3. Relax the muscles and keep it relaxed for approximately 10 seconds. It may be helpful to say something like “Relax” as you relax the muscle.
4. When you have finished the relaxation procedure, remain seated for a few moments allowing yourself to become alert.

# Relaxation Sequence

1. Right hand and forearm: Make a fist with your right hand.
2. Right upper arm: Bring your right forearm up to your shoulder to “make a muscle”.
3. Left hand and forearm.
4. Left upper arm.
5. Forehead: Raise your eyebrows as high as they will go as though you were surprised by something.
6. Eyes and cheeks: Squeeze your eyes tight shut.
7. Mouth and jaw: Open your mouth as wide as you can, as you might when you‘re yawning.
8. Neck: Be careful as you tense these muscles. Face forward and then pull your head back slowly, as though you are looking up to the ceiling.
9. Shoulders: Tense the muscles in your shoulders as you bring your shoulders up towards your ears.
10. Shoulder blades/Back: Push your shoulder blades back, trying to almost touch them together, so that your chest is pushed forward.
11. Chest and stomach: Breathe in deeply, filling up your lungs and chest with air.
12. Hips and buttocks: Squeeze your buttock muscles
13. Right upper leg: Tighten your right thigh.
14. Right lower leg: Do this slowly and carefully to avoid cramps. Pull your toes towards you to stretch the calf muscle.
15. Right foot: Curl your toes downwards.
16. Left upper leg: Repeat as for right upper leg.
17. Left lower leg: Repeat as for right lower leg.
18. Left foot: Repeat as for right foot.

# Practice means Progress

Only through practice can you become more aware of your muscles, how they respond with tension, and how you can relax them. Training your body to respond differently to stress is like any training – practising consistently is the key.

**Audio resources of these techniques can be downloaded for free from:**

<http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/help-information/podcasts/>

<http://wellbeing-glasgow.org.uk/audio-resources/>