

RELAXATION

About 70% of medical complaints are related to stress. Symptoms are frequently perceived as far worse than they actually are. Imagine yourself sitting in a dental chair or in a doctor's office awaiting a blood test. You brace yourself against the chair anticipating pain. The stress and tension of your body is probably making the pain much worse. The doctor is likely to say, "Just relax." However, it does take more than a mere suggestion to enable you to relax, to gain control - especially if you are short of breath.

Healing proceeds more readily when mind and body are relaxed. When you are relaxed you are better able to use your lung capacity to the fullest extent. When you are tense you drastically reduce your lung functioning. Portions of your lungs may, indeed, be diseased; however, they are obviously functioning. If you can make the best use of the functional portion of your lungs, you will see an overall improvement.

The techniques described here will help calm nerves and alleviate sleeplessness. They will also aid in improving muscle tone, circulation and coordination. A cassette tape recording is available which will lead you through the relaxation techniques, step by step.

Tense muscles require more oxygen than relaxed muscles. As you learn to relax, your body will require less oxygen and breathing will become less strenuous.

Learning to relax takes time, more than one session. It may take many weeks. You must discipline yourself; and, practice regularly, at least twice a day. Stress does not arise overnight nor will it disappear overnight. Each time you practice you will improve and will begin to experience a less stressful condition. Eventually you will become aware of the fact that you are able to relax at will.

There are many forms of relaxation: progressive relaxation, self-hypnosis, mind control, mental imaging,

yoga, repetition of a word or sound. . . Progressive relaxation and mental imaging will be explained here. Once you have learned these techniques, you can relax under almost any stressful situation in no more time than it takes to inhale and exhale slowly. (One Deep Breath)

Progressive Relaxation

Progressive relaxation will take some time. It is the process of sequentially tensing and then relaxing the muscle groups throughout the body.

It is very important to feel the difference between total tension and total relaxation of the muscles. This will help you to recognize when you are becoming tense and, then, relax whatever muscle group is tense. For example, if you can teach yourself to recognize which muscle group becomes tense before the onset of a headache, chances are you can ward off headaches.

When the body is tense, it is often very difficult merely to think clearly; but, when the body is physically relaxed, the mind may also relax.

To practice progressive relaxation, sit in a comfortable chair, remove or loosen restrictive clothing and take off your eyeglasses. Close your eyes, uncross legs, place hands on your lap, palms upward; and, if you wish, support your head. You may wish to lie down if it is your bed time; however, sitting helps you remain alert for the recognition of relaxation and mental imaging. Mental imaging will be discussed after progressive relaxation.



Progressive Relaxation Guide

- In doing the exercises, release the tension in each muscle group immediately after holding the tension in each muscle a second or two. Gradual dissipation of tension is not as effectual.
- Try to use diaphragmatic breathing with pursed-lips during exhalation.
- Tighten all the muscles around the eyes and mouth. Maintain the tension for a few seconds. Relax. . .
- Tense the muscles in the forehead by lifting the eyebrows just as high as you can, feeling tension up into the scalp region. Hold the tension. . . Relax. . .
- Clench the jaws tightly together feeling tension throughout the lower part of the face and jaws. Hold this tension. Relax. . .
- Press your chin downward touching the chest. Hold the tension. Relax. . .
- Shrug shoulders upward as if trying to touch your ears. Hold the tension. Relax. . .
- Bend the right elbow and make a fist. Tighten. Relax. Straighten the right arm and spread the fingers. Hold the tension. Relax. . . Repeat with the left arm.
- Tense the muscles in the stomach region by tightening the area as if you were going to be hit there. Hold the tension. Relax. . .
- Tense the muscles in the right upper leg and thigh by pulling the large muscle on top of the leg toward the smaller ones underneath until the large muscle on top is hard. Maintain the tension. Relax. . . Repeat with the left foot and lower leg. Relax. . .
- Pull the toes of the right foot upward towards the knee feeling tension in the right calf and lower right leg. Hold this position. Relax. . . Repeat with the left foot and lower leg. Relax. . .
- If you wish, tighten as many muscles in the entire body as possible. Hold the tension. Relax. . .

Mental Imaging

Mental imaging often follows progressive relaxation since the body is now relaxed; however, simply sitting or lying comfortably and creating mental scenes which help you relax and set the mind at ease, is very effective. Mental imaging is also very effective after exercise since many of the large muscles are already tired, ready to relax. Stress is not completely nor directly eliminated by physical relaxation. Creating a private arsenal of coping thoughts to be used before, during or after the stress is an excellent means of maintaining good mental health. These thoughts may be of people you love, scenes, real or imagined, or a feeling as if you are part of nature. You might picture yourself as a beautiful, white bird in a cloudless sky, passing through time, leaving tension below; or, imagine yourself sitting on the bank of a great river, relaxing as you let your life flow with it; or, imagine yourself being comfortable with someone you love.

One Deep Breath

This technique utilizes diaphragmatic breathing.

* Sit in a comfortable straight back chair with your legs uncrossed and hands in your lap. You may even wish to choose to stand or lean against something once you understand the procedure.



- Inhale slowly through your nose while pushing your abdomen out. Feel your lungs fill completely with pure, fresh air; and, as you are inhaling, mentally say, 'Re-'
- Pause for a second or two.
- Exhale slowly through pursed-lips while you mentally say "-lax."

In order to obtain the maximum benefit from these forms of relaxation, find a comfortable place, probably your bedroom, where you can be by yourself. Turn off the radio, stereo or TV. Take the phone off the hook. Take off your watch and ask family members not to disturb you. Try to relax with one of these techniques at least twice a day, in the morning and in the evening or anytime you find yourself tense.