



RELAXATION



...and how NOT to avoid it!

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Relaxation

Relaxation is a chance for the mind and body to recover from life's everyday stresses and strains. Relaxation is something we often talk about, but somehow we never manage to find time for. This is a part of the stressful lifestyle so many people lead these days, and it is especially true for carers. And yet relaxation is a vital part of our lives.

Why is it important?

If we do not relax, our mind and body cannot recover properly, making it harder for us to be at our best. We may become irritable, anxious, or ill.

As carers, we will be less able to look after the person we care for, and life will become even more stressful, in a vicious spiral.

It is vital that we stop the spiral downwards and to take better care of ourselves. This pack has been designed to be used either on its own or in conjunction with our Stress Pack, and is a short introduction to the subject of relaxation. You will find a number of different exercises and ideas to try out. They may not all work for you, but try at least a few of them and see what difference they make!

You may feel that you do not have the time to relax. All of the exercises in this pack can take only a few minutes to take effect. The first exercise can be as short or as long as you like – a quick “emergency first aid” session or a long relaxation session. Try it and see!

Remember: Looking after YOURSELF is at least as important as looking after the person you care for.

Ways to Relax

There are a number of ways you can relax. Some can be expensive, but others are free. Here are some examples of what can work. You may have other ideas yourself – feel free to add them to this list.

- Go for a walk, ideally in the countryside or in a quiet park. If this is not possible, find a quiet area near to where you live. Take your time and enjoy the walk and (if possible) the scenery.
- Yoga – this is particularly good for toning up the body and improving breathing techniques, which can make a major difference to your ability to relax.
- T'ai Chi – this uses the movements involved in martial arts, but slowed down to promote control of one's body. It improves suppleness and general fitness, and is good for focusing the mind so that you do not "fall back" to worrying about your problems.
- Reading a book – fact or fiction
- Aromatherapy and other massages (including Indian Head Massage) – these are proven to help people to relax and have a beneficial effect on blood pressure.
- Reflexology – usually a foot or hand massage that can have beneficial effects for people who are stressed, as well as other benefits.
- Exercise that's fun for you. Remember gardening can be relaxing to some and a nightmare to others. There is little point in working the body hard as a form of relaxation if you are not enjoying it.
- Listen to music
- Some people find watching TV relaxing. If you fall asleep, it's working. If you want to throw a brick at the screen, it's not!



- **HAVING FUN.** Laughter is very good for the mind and body.

Relaxation Techniques

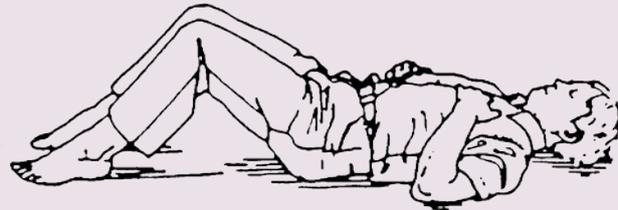
There are many different exercises and techniques to help you to relax. Here is a simple one that is quite effective:

1. You can practise this exercise almost anywhere – standing, sitting or lying down – but lying down is best.



2. Place one hand on your stomach and one on your chest, and close your eyes (you don't have to do this but it reduces distractions).
3. Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose into your abdomen so that it pushes up your hand. Your chest should move only a little. With practice, you will not need to have your hands in place.
4. Breathe out through your mouth making a quiet, relaxing whooshing sound like the wind as you blow gently out.
5. Take long, slow, deep breaths. You can take as long as you like for this, even only two minutes, but the ideal minimum is for five or ten minutes.
6. When you have learned to relax yourself using this method, you will be able to do it almost anywhere.

You should do this at least twice a day – or whenever you feel especially stressed.



It is especially effective when used in conjunction with music as a way of promoting a good night's sleep – but it could be used just before an important job interview or a meeting, for example.

MUSCLE RELAXING EXERCISES

REMEMBER. If you have any health problems, talk to your doctor before taking up any exercise. These exercises are supposed to help you feel tension, **not** pain. So, if it hurts, stop.

- Sit on a chair in a comfortable position, with both your feet flat on the floor. Close your eyes.
- Point your toes upwards. This should create some tension in your shins. Then relax.
- Push your heels upwards. Then relax.
- Tighten your calves, and then relax.
- Tighten your buttocks and thighs and while doing so push your feet firmly down onto the ground. Relax.
- Pull in your tummy (don't forget to keep breathing). Feel the tension and relax. Then push your tummy out (don't laugh) – and relax.
- Clench your right fist tightly but not painfully. Keep it clenched so that you can feel the tension. Relax. Let your hand and arm hang loose. Waggle it about a bit so that it goes floppy.
- Clench your left fist tightly as you did with the right fist. Relax your left arm and hand by letting it hang loose and waggle it about so that it goes floppy.
- Now clench both fists at the same time. Then relax them and let them hang loose and give them a bit of a shake.
- Shrug your shoulders. Keep them pressed upwards so that you can feel the tension (not pain) as your head is down between your shoulders. Then relax. Drop your shoulders down try to feel the relaxation spread through your neck and shoulders.
- Pull your shoulders back like a soldier as far as they will go so that you can feel tension but not pain. Let your shoulders drop and relax.
- Turn your head to the right as far as possible.
- Turn your head to the left as far as possible.
- Slowly drop your head back as far as it can comfortably go, then straighten your head. Next bring it forward and press your head into your chest. Can you feel the tension on the back of your neck and in your throat? Relax and return your head to a comfortable upright position.
- Open your mouth wide. Now close your mouth and frown. Smile.

MEDITATION TECHNIQUE

- Sit on a chair that you can sit upright on and be supported. A dining chair would be ideal.
- Place your feet on the ground.
- Place your hands on your knees in a comfortable position.
- Close your eyes.
- Start off with your breathing exercise. Wait until your breathing is steady and slow.
- Think about a walk you have taken. It might have been on a beach, in a wood, near a lake anywhere that you found relaxing and pleasurable.
- Remember, the surroundings are perfect. There are no disturbances. Try to remember the sights, the sounds and the smells. Try to remember everything that made that walk so relaxing.

HOW TO USE THESE EXERCISES TOGETHER.

FIRST

Follow the breathing exercise.

SECOND

Follow the muscle-relaxing exercises.

THIRD

Complete the meditation exercise.

FINALLY

Stretch your neck, fingers, hands, arms, legs and toes. Finish off with a great big yawn, and relax.

REMEMBER

Practice makes perfect. If you do these exercises every day it will help you to relax. You may prefer to do these exercises to some relaxing music. Whenever you do them, make sure that your surroundings are quiet. Make sure you do not have to rush the exercises. Look after yourself. Take the time to relax. It's good for you!