Relaxation Techniques

Deep Breathing • Progressive Relaxation
Guided Visualization • Meditation

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Types of Relaxation

- Deep Breathing
- Progressive Relaxation
- Guided Visualization
- Meditation
Deep Breathing

◆ Learning how to breath deeply, using your diaphragm muscle, is a very important part of learning to relax.

◆ Most people are “chest breathers.” This means that you are not using your full lung capacity when you breath.

◆ When you are feeling anxious, your breathing is shallow and rapid. In order to relax, you can change this to deep, slow breathing.
How to Breath Deeply

1)  Sit straight up in a chair or lie down on a bed or a carpeted floor

2)  Place your hands on your belly, just below your ribs.

3)  Take a slow, deep breath through your nose. As you inhale, expand your belly so that it pushes your hands.
4) Open your mouth slightly and exhale a slow, steady stream of air.

5) Continue breathing deeply for a few minutes until you feel calmer.

6) Practice deep breathing for 5-10 minutes each day until you get the hang of it.

7) Use deep breathing when you are feeling anxious to calm yourself down.
Tips for deep breathing

- Be sure that your shoulders do not raise up and your chest does not expand.
- Do not hold your breath at any point during deep breathing. Slowly take the breath in and slowly exhale it out, but do not hold your breath.
- Focus all of your attention on your breathing. Close your eyes or pick one spot of the room where you will focus your eyes.

Note: Deep breathing is the same kind of breathing that you use when you sing or play a wind or brass instrument.
Progressive Relaxation

◆ The idea behind progressive relaxation is that tensing and then releasing your muscles leads to a more relaxed physical state.

◆ You can get a cassette tape or CD that instructs you or you can make your own tape.

◆ The idea is to contract (tighten) each muscle group and then relax (let go). You can say “relax” to yourself as you do this.

◆ Be sure to take your time and hold each contraction for at least 5 seconds. Do each muscle twice in a row.
How to do progressive muscle relaxation

- 1) Lie down on a bed or carpet or sit in a comfortable chair.
- 2) Focus on deep breathing for a few minutes before you get started.
- 3) Scrunch up your face and hold it for 10 seconds. Relax for 20 seconds. Repeat.
- 4) Open you mouth as wide as it will go and hold for 10 seconds. Relax for 20 seconds. Repeat.
- 5) Clench your jaw for 10 seconds and then relax for 20 seconds. Repeat.
- 6) Raise your shoulders up as far as they can go and hold them for 10 seconds. Relax for 20 seconds. Repeat.
How to do progressive muscle relaxation

- 7) Tighten your arms muscles and hold them for 10 seconds. Relax for 20 seconds. Repeat.
- 8) Make a tight fist with your hands and hold them for 10 seconds. Relax for 20 seconds. Repeat.
- 9) Tighten your chest muscles and hold them for 10 seconds. Relax for 20 seconds. Repeat.
- 10) Tighten your stomach muscles and hold them for 10 seconds. Relax for 20 seconds. Repeat.
- 11) Tighten your back muscles and hold them for 10 seconds. Relax for 20 seconds. Repeat.
How to do progressive muscle relaxation

- 12) Tighten your hips and hold them for 10 seconds. Relax for 20 seconds. Repeat.

- 13) Tighten your thighs and hold them for 10 seconds. Relax for 20 seconds. Repeat.

- 14) Tighten your calves and hold them for 10 seconds. Relax for 20 seconds. Repeat.

- 15) Scrunch up your toes and hold them for 10 seconds. Relax for 20 seconds. Repeat.

- 16) Flex your toes and hold them for 10 seconds. Relax for 20 seconds. Repeat.
Tips for progressive muscle relaxation

- The exercise should take approximately 15 minutes.
- You may want to make a tape, following the guide above. Make sure to pause to give yourself enough time to contract and then relax each muscle group.
Guided Visualization

The best way to do guided visualization is to listen to a cassette tape or CD recording. These are typically a recording of a person’s voice that guides you to picture (visualize) a very safe, peaceful place. You can find these at bookstores or alternative healing stores.
Meditation can be quite simple. You can pick an image such as a peaceful waterfall or a field of flowers and focus on this image in your mind.

Sit in a quiet, undistracted place so you can focus.

Pay attention to your breathing and try to slow it down and keep it steady.

Close your eyes or focus on one object in the room as you relax.
Meditation (cont.)

- As distracting thoughts flow into your mind, let them flow out just as easily.
- Keep bringing your focus back to the meditation.
- You may want to try to meditate for 5 minutes at first, gradually adding 5 minutes on until you can meditate for 30 minutes, or even an hour.
Summary

- Start with learning how to breathe deeply. Once you can do this, try the other techniques.
- You may want to join a class or get some supplies to help you with your relaxation (e.g., a mindfulness meditation class, guided visualization tapes).