



Stress Reduction

To get the most out of any relaxation technique:

- Try to do it twice a day for 20 minutes. Even 5 minutes twice a day would be helpful.
- Wait at least 2 hours after a meal.
- Find a quiet, comfortable spot away from interruptions or distractions.
- If your mind wanders, focus on your breathing. Keep repeating your chosen word or phrase, or listen to the music or audiotape you are playing in the background.
- Check the time with a watch or clock – do not use an alarm.
- When your time is up, sit quietly a little longer, first with eyes closed, then with eyes open.
- Don't worry if you're relaxing deeply enough or getting the right response. If you're doing it, your body will respond as it is supposed to.
- Afterwards, you should feel relaxed and calm. This effect should last for several hours.

What technique should you do?

There are many techniques, and no one method is better than another. Here are several for you to try. You may even want to combine pieces of one or more of them.

Deep breathing

This is the most basic technique. It can be used alone or with other techniques:

- Sit or stand in place, hands resting on lap, armrest or side. You can also place your hands on your stomach to feel it move as your lungs and diaphragm expand and contract.
- Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose. Let your stomach expand as much as possible.
- Exhale slowly through pursed lips. This allows you to control how fast you exhale as it keeps your airways open longer. Feel the “rhythm” in and out ... emptying out ... clearing ... cleaning.

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Autogenics

- Think of a mental suggestion such as “my left arm feels heavy and warm.”
- Focus hard on this suggestion. Try to actually feel your arm getting heavier and warmer. Convince yourself it is true.
- Then repeat the same process focusing on your right arm, right leg, etc. You can do this from head to toe, focusing on one limb at a time.

Clearing the mind

- Focus your thoughts on a single, peaceful word, thought or image.
- Try to forget about distractions around you.
- Focus on that one thought; repeat it over and over to yourself. Listen to the “rhythm” of it.

Progressive muscle relaxation

This technique works well going from head to toe, or vice versa, to relax your whole body. Follow these three steps with each muscle or muscle group:

- First, tense a muscle or muscle group (fists are easy to start with), and notice how it feels.
- Then release the tension and let it flow right out. Pay attention to that feeling.
- Concentrate on the difference between those two sensations.

Visualization

- This is a “mental vacation” – let your imagination run free!
- Think of your favorite place to be and put yourself there in your mind.
- Try to imagine all of the details. Tune in all your senses ... Are you lying on the beach? How does the sun feel on your skin? Do you hear waves? Seagulls? What does the air smell like? Do you see sailboats?



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