**Relaxation Techniques**

The benefits:

*When faced with numerous responsibilities and tasks or the demands of an illness, relaxation techniques may take a back seat in your life. But that means you might miss out on the health benefits of relaxation.*

*Practicing relaxation techniques can reduce stress symptoms by:*

* **Slowing your heart rate**
* **Lowering blood pressure**
* **Slowing your breathing rate**
* **Increasing blood flow to major muscles**
* **Reducing muscle tension and chronic pain**
* **Improving concentration**
* **Reducing anger and frustration**
* **Boosting confidence to handle problems**

Deep Breathing Meditation

*The key to deep breathing is to breathe deeply from the abdomen, getting as much fresh air as possible in your lungs. When you take deep breaths from the abdomen, rather than shallow breaths from your upper chest, you inhale more oxygen. The more oxygen you get, the less tense, short of breath, and anxious you feel.*

* Sit comfortably with your back straight. Put one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach.
* Breathe in through your nose. The hand on your stomach should rise. The hand on your chest should move very little.
* Exhale through your mouth, pushing out as much air as you can while contracting your abdominal muscles. The hand on your stomach should move in as you exhale, but your other hand should move very little.
* Continue to breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Try to inhale enough so that your lower abdomen rises and falls. Count slowly as you exhale.

*If you find it difficult breathing from your abdomen while sitting up, try lying on the floor. Put a small book on your stomach, and try to breathe so that the book rises as you inhale and falls as you exhale.*

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

*Progressive muscle relaxation involves a two-step process in which you tense and relax different muscle groups in the body.*

* Loosen your clothing, take off your shoes, and get comfortable.
* Take a few minutes to relax, breathing in and out in slow, deep breaths.
* When you’re relaxed and ready to start, shift your attention to your right foot. Take a moment to focus on the way it feels.
* Slowly tense the muscles in your right foot, squeezing as tightly as you can. Hold for a count of 10.
* Relax your right foot. Focus on the tension flowing away and the way your foot feels as it becomes limp and loose.
* Stay in this relaxed state for a moment, breathing deeply and slowly.
* When you’re ready, shift your attention to your left foot. Follow the same sequence of muscle tension and release.
* Move slowly up through your body, contracting and relaxing the muscle groups as you go.
* It may take some practice at first, but try not to tense muscles other than those intended.

Body Scan

*A body scan is similar to progressive muscle relaxation except, instead of tensing and relaxing muscles, you simply focus on the sensations in each part of your body.*

* Allow your stomach to rise as you inhale and fall as you exhale. Breathe deeply for about two minutes, until you start to feel comfortable and relaxed.
* Turn your focus to the toes of your right foot. Notice any sensations you feel while continuing to also focus on your breathing. Imagine each deep breath flowing to your toes. Remain focused on this area for one to two minutes.
* Move your focus to the sole of your right foot. Tune in to any sensations you feel in that part of your body and imagine each breath flowing from the sole of your foot. After one or two minutes, move your focus to your right ankle and repeat. Move to your calf, knee, thigh, hip, and then repeat the sequence for your left leg. From there, move up the torso, through the lower back and abdomen, the upper back and chest, and the shoulders. Pay close attention to any area of the body that causes you pain or discomfort.
* Move your focus to the fingers on your right hand and then move up to the wrist, forearm, elbow, upper arm, and shoulder. Repeat for your left arm. Then move through the neck and throat, and finally all the regions of your face, the back of the head, and the top of the head. Pay close attention to your jaw, chin, lips, tongue, nose, cheeks, eyes, forehead, temples and scalp. When you reach the very top of your head, let your breath reach out beyond your body and imagine yourself hovering above yourself.
* After completing the body scan, relax for a while in silence and stillness, noting how your body feels. Then open your eyes slowly. Take a moment to stretch, if necessary.

Visualization

*Find a quiet, relaxed place. Beginners sometimes fall asleep during a visualization meditation, so you might try sitting up or standing.*

*Close your eyes and let your worries drift away. Imagine your restful place. Picture it as vividly as you can—everything you can see, hear, smell, and feel. Visualization works best if you incorporate as many sensory details as possible, using at least three of your senses. When visualizing, choose imagery that appeals to you; don’t select images because someone else suggests them, or because you think they should be appealing. Let your own images come up and work for you. (beach, ocean, mountain, meadow, hammock, etc)*

*If you are thinking about a dock on a quiet lake, for example:*

* Walk slowly around the dock and notice the colors and textures around you.
* Spend some time exploring each of your senses.
* See the sun setting over the water.
* Hear the birds singing.
* Smell the pine trees.
* Feel the cool water on your bare feet.
* Taste the fresh, clean air.

*Enjoy the feeling of deep relaxation that envelops you as you slowly explore your restful place. When you are ready, gently open your eyes and come back to the present.*

*Don't worry if you sometimes zone out or lose track of where you are during a guided imagery session.  This is normal. You may also experience feelings of stiffness or heaviness in your limbs, minor, involuntary muscle-movements, or even cough or yawn. Again, these are normal responses.*

Yoga

*[Yoga](http://www.helpguide.org/mental/practicing_yoga_tai_chi_supplement.htm%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) involves a series of both moving and stationary poses, combined with deep breathing. As well as reducing anxiety and stress, yoga can also improve flexibility, strength, balance, and stamina.*

http://www.helpguide.org/mental/stress\_relief\_meditation\_yoga\_relaxation.htm