

LEARNING TO RELAX

Relaxation is useful for reducing physical and mental tension. Relaxation helps people to: reduce worry and anxiety, improve sleep, and relieve physical symptoms caused by stress (e.g. headaches, stomach pains, diarrhoea or constipation).

The following exercise will help you learn how to relax. This exercise should take about 15-20 minutes. However, if you only have 5 minutes to spare, 5 minutes is certainly better than nothing!

1) FIND A QUIET AND RELAXING PLACE

Choose a comfortable chair in a place that is free from noise and interruptions (make sure you take the phone off the hook). You may need to explain to your family what you are doing so that they will not disturb you. Telling your family may also reduce any embarrassment you may feel.

2) CLEAR YOUR MIND

Try to clear your mind of all worries or disturbing thoughts. If these worries or thoughts drift back into your mind while you are relaxing, just concentrate on your breathing and you will find they will drift out again. Let your mind be clear and calm.

3) PRACTISE THE SLOW BREATHING METHOD

Breathe in for 3 seconds and breathe out for 3 seconds, thinking the word "r e l a x" every time you breathe out. Let your breathing flow smoothly. Imagine the tension flowing out of your body each time you breathe out.

4) RELAX YOUR MUSCLES

For each of the muscle groups in your body, tense the muscle for 7-10 seconds, and then relax for 10 seconds. Relax your muscles in the following order:

- **Hands** - curl hands into fists, then relax.
- **Lower arms** - bend your hand down at the wrist, as though you were trying to touch the underside of your arm, then relax.
- **Upper arms** - tighten your biceps by bending your arm at the elbow, then relax.
- **Shoulders** - lift your shoulders up as if trying to cover your ears with them, then relax.
- **Neck** - stretch your neck gently to the left, then forward, then to the right, then to the back in a slow rolling motion, then relax.
- **Forehead and scalp** - raise your eyebrows, then relax.
- **Eyes** - screw up your eyes, then relax.
- **Jaw** - clench your teeth (just to tighten the muscles), then relax.
- **Tongue** - press your tongue, against the roof of your mouth, then relax.
- **Chest** - breathe in deeply to inflate your lungs, then breath out and relax.
- **Stomach** - push your stomach out to tighten the muscle, then relax.
- **Upper back** - pull your shoulders forward with your arms at your side, then relax.
- **Lower back** - while sitting, lean your head and upper back forward, rolling your back into a smooth arc thus tensing the lower back, then relax.
- **Buttocks** - tighten your buttocks, then relax.
- **Thighs** - while sitting, push your feet firmly into the floor, then relax.
- **Calves** - lift your toes off the ground towards your shins, then relax.
- **Feet** - gently curl your toes down so that they are pressing into the floor, then relax.

5) ENJOY THE FEELING OF RELAXATION

Take some slow breaths while you sit still for a few minutes enjoying the feeling of relaxation.

PRACTISE ONCE OR TWICE EVERY DAY
FOR AT LEAST 8 WEEKS

DURING THE DAY, TRY RELAXING SPECIFIC MUSCLES WHENEVER
YOU NOTICE THAT THEY ARE TENSE