



# Relaxation Techniques

**Relaxation techniques or exercises reduce physical and emotional responses to stress and tension. They are simple to learn and help in coping with stress. If practiced regularly, relaxation techniques can lead to feeling more relaxed, with an improved sense of well-being, all the time.**

## Some symptoms of stress

### Mental

- Difficulty with thinking and concentration
- Worrying about little things
- Difficulty sleeping and/or bad dreams
- Negative thoughts
- Having trouble making decisions
- Forgetfulness.

### Emotional

- Feeling tense, anxious, irritable
- Lack of enthusiasm
- Depressed.

### Behavioural

- Problems with relationships
- Increased use of nicotine, alcohol or caffeine
- Poor time management.

### Physical

- Fast heart beat
- Chest pains
- Tense muscles, aches and pains
- Trembling
- Dizziness
- Numbness or tingling
- Fatigue
- A feeling of choking or a lump in throat
- Headache
- Nausea and vomiting
- Constipation or diarrhoea
- Flushing of the face or chest
- Fast, shallow breathing
- Sweating
- Lowered resistance to infection.



Continual, ongoing stress can lead to an anxiety disorder, depression or other serious medical condition.

## Techniques to relax

There are many ways to manage stress and to relax. Some relaxation techniques are described below.

Relaxation techniques or exercises can reduce:

- Levels of stress hormones
- Heart rate and blood pressure
- Muscle tension
- Perspiration
- Analytical thinking.

It is best to set aside a regular time each day to practice relaxation. Find a quiet, safe place and sit or lie in a comfortable position. It is ideal to build up to 10-20 minutes once or twice a day, plus about 3-5 minutes for five times each day.

### Controlled breathing

- Close your eyes and concentrate on your breathing. Take a slow deep breath in through your nose for three seconds, then breathe out through your mouth for three seconds. Think the word 'relax' as you breathe out.

- Clear your mind and think only about slow, deep breathing. Imagine the tension flowing out of your body each time you breathe out.

### Progressive muscle relaxation

- Close your eyes and focus on your body.
- Start at your feet and move up your body, relaxing each muscle group in turn.
- Tense the muscle as you breathe in, then relax it as you breathe out. Allow 15-20 seconds between each muscle group.
- Keep your mind focused on the muscle group you are working on.

### Visualisation

- Close your eyes and imagine a soothing, peaceful scene (e.g., a quiet place in the bush).
- See yourself there, relaxed, peaceful and happy.

### Mindfulness

Mindfulness means you controlling your mind, instead of letting your mind control you. Our thoughts and beliefs determine the intensity of our feelings and stressful feelings can be due to unhelpful thoughts. Mindfulness involves learning to be in control of what thoughts you pay attention to and focusing on the 'here and now', rather than the past or future.

### Exercise

Physical exercise releases muscle tension and increases the levels of 'feel good' chemicals (endogenous opiates) in our bodies. Any type of regular physical exercise is helpful.

**Note:** If you don't normally exercise, are more than 40 years of age, or are overweight, consult your doctor for a medical check-up before starting an exercise program.

### Self care

Ways to prevent a build-up of stress include:

- Practice relaxation techniques as often as possible
- Eat regular healthy meals, including plenty of fruit, vegetables and grains. Limit foods high in fat, sugar or salt
- Drink at least two litres (eight glasses) of water daily (unless a doctor advises not to)
- Exercise at a moderate level for at least 30 minutes on all or most days of the week

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- A warm shower or bath can be calming and relax muscles
- Talk about problems and worries with another person
- Accept that sometimes difficult problems or situations are outside your control
- Reward yourself with little things that you enjoy (e.g., fresh flowers, a massage, a hot bath)
- Balance work and play. Make time for hobbies. These will relax your mind and are a good escape from worries
- Organise your time. Make a 'to do' list. Prioritise daily tasks. Don't leave things to the last minute
- Learn to say no to jobs that put you under too much pressure
- Learn to recognise what's worth worrying about and what's not
- Cut down on cigarettes and alcohol – these can make stressful situations seem worse
- Reduce your intake of caffeine (coffee, tea, chocolate and cola drinks). Caffeine is stimulating and can hinder relaxation
- Remember to laugh and smile! Laughter makes our muscles go limp and releases tension and pressure. When events seem overwhelming, try to keep a sense of humour.

### Related fact cards

- *Anxiety*
- *Carer Support*
- *Depression*
- *Exercise & the Heart*
- *Exercises for Flexibility*
- *Post Traumatic Stress Disorder*
- *Sleeping Problems*

### For more information

**HealthInsite** - [www.healthinsite.gov.au](http://www.healthinsite.gov.au)

**Mental Health Association NSW Inc** – phone (02) 9339 6000 or website [www.mentalhealth.asn.au](http://www.mentalhealth.asn.au) (follow links to state mental health associations)

**DepressioNet** – website [www.depressionet.com.au](http://www.depressionet.com.au)

**Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)** leaflets – your pharmacist can advise on availability.

**NPS Medicines Line** – phone 1300 888 763 Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm EST.

**The Poisons Information Centre** – in case of poisoning phone 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

**Pharmacy Self Care Support** – phone 1300 369 772 and ask for the Pharmacy Self Care Field Officer.

Pharmacists are medicines experts. Ask a pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.

