

Relaxation Exercise

You can prevent anxiety becoming too severe by using “relaxation techniques”. Some people relax through, exercise, reading a book or listening to music. For others it is more helpful to have a set of exercises to follow. Remember, relaxation is a skill like any other and takes time to learn. Keep a note of how anxious you feel before or after relaxation. Rating your anxiety 1-10.

Deep muscle relaxation

Start by selecting a warm, comfortable place where you won't be disturbed. Choose a time of day when you feel most relaxed to begin with. Lie down, get comfortable, close your eyes. Concentrate on your breathing for a few minutes, breathing slowly and calmly: in two-three and out two-three. Say the words “calm” or “relax” to yourself as you breathe out. The relaxation exercise takes you through different muscle groups, teaching you firstly to tense, then relax. You should breathe in when tensing and breathe out when you relax. Starting with your hands, clench one fist tightly. Think about the tension this produces in the muscles of your hand and forearm.

Study the tension for a few seconds and then relax your hand. Notice the difference between the tension and the relaxation. You might feel a slight tingling, this is the relaxation beginning to develop.

Do the same with the other hand.

Each time you relax a group of muscles think how they feel when they're relaxed. Don't try to relax, just let go of the tension. Allow your muscles to relax as much as you can. Think about the difference in the way they feel when they're relaxed and when they're tense. Now do the same for the other muscles of your body. Each time tense them for a few seconds and then relax. Study the way they feel and then let go of the tension in them.

It is useful to stick to the same order as you work through the muscle groups:

- Hands – clench first, then relax.
- Arms – bend your elbows and tense your arms.
- Feel the tension especially in your upper arms. Remember, do this for a few seconds and then relax
- Neck – press your head back and roll it from side to side slowly. Feel how the tension moves. Then bring your head forward into a comfortable position.
- Face – there are several muscles here, but it is enough to think about your forehead and jaw. First lower your eyebrows in a frown. Relax your forehead. You can raise your eyebrows, and then relax. Now, clench your jaw, notice the difference when you relax.
- Chest – take a deep breath, hold it for a few seconds, notice the tension, then relax. Let your breathing return to normal.
- Stomach – tense your stomach muscles as tight as you can and relax.
- Buttocks – squeeze your buttocks together, and relax.
- Legs – straighten your legs and bend your feet towards your face. Finish by wiggling your toes.

To make best use of relaxation you need to:

- Practise daily
- Start to use relaxation in everyday situations
- Learn to relax without having to tense muscles
- Use parts of the relaxation to help in difficult situations, e.g. breathing slowly
- Develop a more relaxed lifestyle