

Relaxation exercises

This exercise involves tightening and relaxing all the different muscle groups in your body, one at a time. When you tighten a muscle it becomes hard and tightens around the bone, when you relax it loosens, creating a sensation of warm heaviness.

Sit or lie down in a comfortable position. Set aside 15 to 20 minutes with no interruptions or distractions. Relax yourself to the best of your ability. Consider the various muscle groups one at a time, and aim to learn the difference between tight and relaxed muscles. Try constantly to concentrate on the feeling in the muscle as it goes from tight to loose.

Hands and arms

Clench your fists, and tense your arms; feel tightness in your hands and arms, hold for 5 seconds then slowly relax them. Release and relax each muscle group for 10 to 15 seconds. See how far they will go, but do not push. Do not hold on at all; let everything go.

Shoulders

Hunch your shoulders, then gradually let them settle down. Proceed as above.

Forehead

Pull your eyebrows together, then gradually let your forehead smooth out.

Eyes

Screw your eyes up tight, then gradually let them smooth out, leaving your eyes closed, feeling your eyeballs sink, and your eyelids droop. Let them get really heavy.

Jaw

Bite your back teeth together, then gradually ease off, and let your jaw get heavy.

Back of neck

Pull your chin forward on to your chest, feel tightness, then relax.

Front of neck

Pull your chin forward on to your chest, feel tightness, then relax.

Breath

Slow and steady, letting yourself go each time you breathe out.

Tummy

Pull in your tummy tight, then gradually let it go, feeling it relax.

Thighs

Push your heels down hard against the floor, feeling the tightness in your thighs, then gradually let that go.

Calves

Point your toes, then gradually let that tightness go. Let everything go, further and further, and think about a really relaxing scene, for example, lying in the grass by a river, under a warm sun and a blue sky, or sitting by a fire in a big, comfortable chair. Feel yourself getting heavier and heavier.

Once you can tell the difference between tension and relaxation, you should be able to notice more quickly when your body is getting tense. When this happens, this should be your cue to try any of the following techniques of cued relaxation:

- Change your posture to a relaxed one when you notice yourself getting tense. Drop your shoulders down in a sideways widening direction.
- Repeat a sound or word which you find relaxing, for example, the word 'calm', or say to yourself, 'I am going to relax my body. It is feeling heavier and more relaxed'.
- Gaze at a fixed object in the room, such as a picture or ornament which you particularly like.
- Think of an image that you find particularly calming and soothing and imagine yourself there, for example, lying on a deserted beach or floating on a feather mattress through the clouds. Imagine the different sights, sounds, smells and sensations. Imagine your body feeling heavier and warmer.
- Breathe through your nose and become aware of your breathing. As you breathe out focus on your mental device (from preceding box). Breathe easily, slowly and naturally. Breathe from your stomach, not higher up in your chest.