

Therapy Services

Relaxation

Relaxation is an inner feeling of being calm and in control of a situation. It does not mean simply sitting still and doing nothing. When you relax, tension in the muscles is reduced and this combined with a relaxed mind can help to make you feel calm, comfortable, less stressed. Relaxation may also help you to get a good nights sleep and may take the edge off the pain.

Let's look at 3 ways to become more relaxed

- 1 Relaxed breathing.
- 2 Progressive muscle relaxation.
- 3 Relaxing your mind.

Relaxation takes practice and you need to practice every day. It works best if you can do this several times throughout the day. It is not the answer to all your pain problems, but it certainly can help, given time.

Relaxed Breathing

- To begin with, it is easiest to do this exercise lying down or sitting in a chair but you could also practise in other positions e.g sitting on the bus, at work, at the computer, standing in the supermarket queue or doing the washing up, so you can fit it into your daily life.
- Lie in a comfortable position, either on your back (you may need a pillow under your head or knees) or your side with your knees bent or straight. If you're practising sitting in a chair, have your head and arms resting on cushions, pillows or arm rests.
- Place one hand on your upper chest and the other one on your tummy with your little finger resting on your belly button. This is roughly where the bottom of your lungs are situated and this is the part of the lungs that you're trying to get the air into, instead of all at the top.
- As you gently breathe in through your nose or your mouth, concentrate on the hand on your stomach and think about the air going right down underneath that hand and gently allow your stomach to be pushed out. Your chest should stay fairly still. Keep the movement gentle, relaxed breathing does not mean big deep breaths.
- Slowly and evenly, breathe out through your nose, feeling your stomach sinking.
- Breathe at a pace that feels natural for you. Again be aware of the hand on your stomach rising while the hand on your upper chest hardly moves.
- It is important to practice this exercise regularly every day, once every hour, try three or four relaxed breaths.

If you need this information in another format or language, please ask a member of staff to arrange this for you.

2. Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Again this can be performed either lying or sitting, supported with plenty of pillows or cushions.

- ▶ This exercise is not meant to hurt, it is not necessary to stretch the muscles hard, but gently and to a limit where you feel comfortable. It is important to practice every day, at least once a day but you can practice as often as you wish.
- ▶ This exercise works through all the parts of the body, you may start from your feet to your head or vice versa and you need to repeat each instruction twice, gently and gradually.
- ▶ Start with breathing exercises first (5/6 breaths) and with each breath feel more relaxed.
- ▶ **Then, think about your feet** - push them down away from your body feel that the muscles are tight and firm and then stop doing it and feel the same muscles go soft and floppy, let your feet go heavy.
- ▶ **Move on to your knees** - push your knees down into the bed or chair and feel your thigh muscles tighten and then stop doing it and feel your legs and thighs go soft and floppy.
- ▶ **Next move up to your hips** - squeeze your bottom muscles gently together and then stop and let all the muscles go soft and floppy.
- ▶ Check your breathing again before you move onto the upper part of your body. Tighten your muscles for at least 5 seconds and then let them go floppy for 30 seconds or more.
- ▶ **Shoulder blades** - brace your shoulders gently back; bring them closer together behind you.
- ▶ **Arms** - push your elbows down into the pillow, away from your ears.
- ▶ **Fingers** - spread fingers, long and separate.
- ▶ **Face** - close your eyelids let them rest heavily over your eyes, no wrinkles or creases.
- ▶ Think about your **mouth, lips and tongue**. Separate your teeth, let your lips go loose, your tongue go slack. Everything loose, slack, floppy, heavy, the whole weight of your body being taken by the chair, bed, pillows or cushions.
- ▶ Check your breathing again. Is it still nice and relaxed at the bottom part of your lungs? Then you can add in the mind relaxation.

3. Relaxing Your Mind

Allow your mind to wander and try the picture yourself in pleasant, enjoyable situations e.g.

- i) Lying on the beach in the sun.
- ii) In a comfortable chair looking out over your favourite view.
- iii) Sitting outside on a warm evening watching the stars appear.

Imagine what you would see, hear, smell, touch and do.

As with other techniques, do not expect to learn without practice. Do not rush and do not try too hard.

Is there anyone who should not do relaxation exercises?

Nearly everybody can benefit from some form of relaxation exercise. However, if you suffer from severe asthma or other severe heart and lung symptoms, severe mental illness or untreated post traumatic stress disorder, you should seek further advice from a health care professional e.g. physiotherapist or counsellor, to help you tailor the relaxation skills to your needs.

Please see this website for free relaxation audio resources: <http://wellbeing-glasgow.org.uk/audio-resources>.