

Some Strategies for Calming and Relaxing

Deep Breathing¹

1. Sit up straight, or lie down flat on your back
2. Exhale completely through your mouth
3. Slowly inhale through your nose, to the count of four
 - a. Start by expanding your diaphragm outward
 - b. Then expand your ribs sideways, slightly
 - c. Then lift your shoulders, slightly
4. Hold for two counts
5. Slowly exhale through pursed lips, to the count of four, ending by pulling in your stomach a bit
6. Hold for two counts
7. Repeat steps 2-6 a few times

The Relaxation Response: Meditation simplified²

- Sit quietly with your hands in your lap in a comfortable position
- Close your eyes, and breathe slowly and deeply from your diaphragm
- Relax your muscles, starting with your head, and moving down to your toes
- As you feel your self starting to relax, breathe normally
- Focus all of your attention at the end of your nose
- Observe your breath come in, and observe your breath go out
- With each out-breath, say a calming word to yourself, such as “oom”, “blue”, “peace”
- If your thoughts start to wander, gently bring your attention back to your breath and to the end of your nose; do not get frustrated with your inability to stay focused
- At the end of about 10-20 minutes (set a timer in you like), bring yourself gently back to normal consciousness, breathe, stretch, and go about your day

If you don't have time for a 10-20 minute meditation, try grabbing 2 or 3 minutes here and there to focus on your breath moving in and out of your nose. You won't get the full benefits, but the act of quiet focus nonetheless has a calming effect.

For more information, see http://www.mbmi.org/basics/whatis_rresponse_elicitation.asp

Progressive Relaxation: see Test Anxiety and Systematic Desensitization Handout for instructions.

Imagine your “calm scene.” Think of a place that you associate with calmness and relaxation – perhaps a beach at sunset, beside a stream, a grove in the mountains, an open meadow. Imagine this scene as vividly as you can – the sights, sounds, smells, feel of air moving. As you imagine this scene, relax, close your eyes, free your body of tensions. With practice, you will be able to invoke this scene as a trigger for relaxation.

Exercise aerobically. This is an excellent way to reduce body tension.

Laugh. Watch a comedy. Tell jokes. Watch <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5P6UU6m3cqk> .

Body Scan. Sit or lie down comfortably and close your eyes. Breathe slowly and deeply, using full, complete breaths. Move your focus to different parts of your body, in turn. There are several techniques for doing this: here is one in which you pair a number and a body part with release of tension.

As you think of each body part, imagining that someone is shining a light on it, imparting softness.

- 10 – think of your head and scalp. As you breathe in relaxation, release the tension from your scalp and then let it flow out with your breath.
- 9 – think of your face, forehead, eyes, cheeks, tongue, jaw. As you breathe in relaxation, release the tension from your face and then let it flow out with your breath.
- 8 – think of your neck and shoulders. As you breathe in relaxation, release the tension from your neck and shoulders, and let it flow out with your breath.
- 7 – think of your lower back. As you breathe in relaxation, release the tension from the muscles in your lower back and let it flow out with your breath.
- 6 – think of your upper arms, your forearms, your hands and fingers. As you breathe in relaxation, release the tension from your arms and let it flow out of your finger tips.
- 5 – think of your torso, your chest, your abdomen, your hips. As you breathe in relaxation, release the tension from your torso and let it flow out with your breath.
- 4 – think of your thighs, your calves, your feet, your toes. As you breathe in relaxation, release the tension from your legs and let it flow out your toes.
- 3 – think of your entire body, sinking deeper and deeper into a soft pillow. As you breathe in relaxation, release the tension from your body and let it flow off your body and onto the ground.
- 2 – think of your entire body, sinking even deeper into a soft pillow. Imagine that you are surrounded by a fluffy soft cloud. As you breathe in relaxation, release the tension from your body and let it flow onto the ground.
- 1 – think of your entire body, enveloped in a soft pillow, surrounded by a protective blue cloud that will keep all tension away from your body. As you breathe in relaxation, release your body into this cloud and...relax.

Practice Exercises that Stretch and Tone, such as Yoga, Pilates, Tai-Chi.

Get a Massage.

Suggested Reading:

Carlson, R. (1997). *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff – and it's all small stuff*. New York: Hyperion.

Borysenko, J. (2007). *Minding the Body, Mending the Mind*. New York: Bantam Books.

Davis, M., Eshelman, E., & McKay, M. (2000). *The Relaxation & Stress Reduction Workbook, 5th Ed.* Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). *Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life*. New York: Hyperion.

http://holistic-online.com/Stress/stress_home.htm - lots of stress management tips.

¹ Based on techniques described in “Traditional Breathing Techniques,” “Learning to Breathe Correctly,” and “Your First Deep Breath,” found on HolisticOnline.com. The second two topics are available via links at the bottom of this page: http://www.holistic-online.com/Yoga/hol_yoga_breathing_traditional.htm . Retrieved 10-9-06.

² Based on techniques described in Benson, H. and Klipper, M. Z. (1976) *The Relaxation Response*. New York: Harper Torch.