

Relaxation and Meditation Tips from Blue Ridge Pain Management

Although these instructions may be adequate, many people find it helpful to obtain relaxation training either individually or in classes. Your doctor or community health centre should be able to direct you to the nearest training centre.

Relaxation can be used when you feel tense and worried. Read the instructions and familiarize yourself with them before having a go. Be patient and give yourself several tries before expecting the full benefits. It can take time to learn how to relax. Keep a diary of your efforts so that you can follow your progress. A friend or relative may help you stick to the task, particularly when progress seems slow and difficult.

Preparation

- Sit in a comfortable chair or lie down somewhere comfortable in a quiet, warm room where you will not be interrupted.
- If you are sitting, take off your shoes, uncross your legs, and rest your arms on the arms of the chair.
- If you are lying down, lie on your back with your arms at your sides. If necessary use a comfortable pillow for your head.
- Close your eyes and be aware of your body. Notice how you are breathing and where the muscle tensions are. Make sure you are comfortable.

Breathing

- Start to breathe slowly and deeply, expanding your abdomen as you breathe in, then raising your rib cage to let more air in, until your lungs are filled right to the top.
- Hold your breath for a couple of seconds and then breathe out slowly, allowing your rib cage and stomach to relax and empty your lungs completely.
- Do not strain - with practice it will become much easier.
- Keep this slow, deep, rhythmic breathing going throughout your relaxation session.

Relaxing

After 5-10 minutes, when you have your breathing pattern established, start the following sequence tensing each part of the body on an in-breath, hold in your breath for 10 seconds while you keep your muscles tense, then relax and breathe out at the same time.

1. Curl your toes hard and press your feet down - then relax.
2. Press your heels down and bend your feet up - then relax.
3. Tense your calf muscles - then relax.
4. Tense your thigh muscles, straightening your knees and making your legs stiff - then relax.
5. Make your buttocks tight - then relax.
6. Tense your stomach as if to receive a punch - then relax.
7. Bend your elbows and tense the muscles of your arms - then relax.
8. Hunch your shoulders and press your head back into the cushion or pillow - then relax.
9. Clench your jaws, frown and screw up your eyes really tight - then relax.
10. Tense all your muscles together - then relax.

Remember to breathe deeply and be aware when you relax of the feeling of physical well-being and heaviness spreading through your body.

After you have done the whole sequence and you are still breathing slowly and deeply, imagine something pleasant, e.g. a white rose on a black background, a beautiful country scene, or a favorite painting. Try to 'see' the rose (or whatever) as clearly as possible, concentrating your attention on it for 30 seconds. Do not hold your breath during this time continue to breathe as you have been doing. After this, go on to visualize another peaceful object of your choice in a similar fashion.

Lastly, give yourself the instruction that when you open your eyes you will be perfectly relaxed but alert.

Short Routine

When you have become familiar with this technique, if you want to relax any time when you only have a few minutes, do the sequence in a shortened form, leaving out some muscle groups, but always working from the feet upwards. For example you might do parts 1,4,6,8 and 10 if you do not have time to do the whole sequence.

The Six-second Breath

This tip can be learned even if you have not learned the sequence above. Controlling your rate of breathing is one of the most important things you can do to stop your anxiety from getting out of control. If you keep your breathing to one breath every 6 seconds this will help. You can breathe in over three seconds and out over the next three seconds. This can be in stages, e.g. in-in-in, out-out-out and so forth. The six second breath can be used anywhere and any time when you feel anxious. It does pay however,

to practice this technique a few times per day so that you will have it rehearsed for a time that you really need it.