

Relaxation Instructions

While many activities can result in feelings of relaxation and well-being, deep relaxation results from developing specific skills which are designed to elicit physical and mental states of calm and well-being. Over time, practicing relaxation will result in decreased stress and in increased ability to maintain your composure even in difficult situations.

Relaxation Exercises

There are a wide variety of relaxation strategies available. Some are long (30 minutes or more) others are very short (15 seconds). It is good to practice both. Relaxation strategies can be divided into two general camps: those that have an emphasis on physical relaxation, and those that are mostly focused on mental relaxation. Pick the ones that best fit your particular needs. Physically oriented techniques include: Stretching, Ti Chi, Progressive Relaxation, Yoga, and others. Mental techniques include those such as Autogenics, Open Focus, Meditation, Guided Imagery and self-hypnosis.

Frequency of Practice

Establish a regular relaxation time and try to practice at least 4-5 times a week. Establish a regular relaxation habit and your skills will become more effective.

Time of Practice

Try to practice the same time each day to establish regular rhythm. Good times to practice may be in the morning before you start your daily activities, or at night prior to going to bed. If you fall asleep during practice keep the exercises shorter, practice sitting up, or try relaxing earlier in the day.

Duration of a Practice Session

Relaxation training is also concentration training. When you first start, you may find your focus is weak or fragmented. Your concentration will get better as you practice over time. Start with fairly short practice sessions and build to longer practice times. You may start with as short as 1 minute several times a day, and build to about 20 to 25 minutes once or twice a day.

Setting

Relaxation training should occur in an environment which is quiet, comfortable, and free of interruptions. As your skills become more advanced, experiment with practicing in more challenging, "real life" settings.

Preparation

All restrictive clothing should be loosened or removed prior to practice. Take care of your physical needs and turn off your phone. If you have something on your mind which might distract you, write it down so that you are free to concentrate.

Practice Posture

During initial practice sessions you should be very comfortable. Sit down or lay in a comfortable position which will allow your muscles to relax. Uncross your legs and arms, drop your shoulders, and allow your spine to lengthen slightly. If you lie on your back, you might want to

put a towel or pillow under your knees to support your lower back. Eventually you need to learn to relax in a variety of postures. After you are proficient in one position, move to others such as sitting, standing and even walking (for the brief techniques).

Passive Concentration

Regardless of which techniques you choose to practice, a key mental device is “passive concentration”. Passive concentration is an “allowing”, non-judgmental, non-critical approach to a task. Instead of analyzing, try simply noticing and watching what happens when you practice relaxation. Your ability to do this will improve with practice.

Using your Breath Cycle

Allow your breath to rise and fall naturally. Each time you exhale, your body tends to relax a little further. You can take advantage of this natural fact by timing soothing phrases and relaxing images with your exhalation.

Ending your Practice Session

Gradually bring yourself out of the session by attending to your breathing, the sounds around you and becoming aware of where you are, the time of day, etc. Stretch your arms and legs, and move a little before you attempt to stand.

Cautions

If you have consistent difficulty using relaxation techniques, or have a reaction that bothers you, consider getting relaxation training instruction from a qualified individual- a therapist, doctor or other person.