



Easy Relaxation Tips

People are busier than ever in today's fast and furious lifestyle. This constant stress can have a negative impact on your health, contributing to ailments like insomnia, emotional overeating and high blood pressure. Unless you're lucky enough to be able to escape to a tropical island at the drop of a hat, learning how to deal with stress in a positive way is more important than ever.

When you're stressed, it's common to try to get through it by drinking alcohol, eating sweets, or smoking, but these are only temporary measures that do more harm than good. Instead of reaching for chocolate the next time you feel your shoulders creeping up to your ears with tension, try one (or all!) of the following relaxation techniques:

Deep breathing, an easy and convenient way to relax, it is the core of many other relaxation techniques. You can practice deep breathing anywhere. Simply take ten deep breaths, lifting your chest to fill your lungs completely and then exhaling all the way. Each breath will relax your body a little bit more and you will feel the tension seep out of your muscles.

Progressive muscular relaxation (PMR) helps release muscle tension. Your muscles tighten as one of the first signs of stress and can become a real pain in the neck (or lower back). But this pain doesn't have to be a way of life. PMR is simple yet effective at reducing pain and enhancing relaxation. Sit comfortably and close your eyes. Start by tightening a group of muscles, such as your fists, as much as possible. Hold this tension for a few seconds and then relax the muscles. Once your muscles are relaxed, consciously soften them even further in order to be as relaxed as possible.

Once you have mastered tensing and relaxing your fists, you can move on to other muscles groups and then to your entire body. Apply the same technique, starting at your feet, and working upward. It takes just 10 to 20 minutes to completely relax your entire body. To get the most relaxation possible, try combining PMR with deep breathing.

Mental imagery, or the picture in your mind's eye, can help you regroup and relax. Picture an idyllic and peaceful scene, such as a meadow or a beach, and use all of your senses. Do you smell jasmine in the air? Can you hear the birds singing and feel the light breeze on your skin? Your body can't tell the difference between a thought and a real event, so bring your peaceful scene to mind the next time you're feeling anxious. This "mini vacation" will help you feel refreshed, as if you'd really visited to a tropical paradise.

You can also visualize the stress flowing out of your body or running off your back like water. This imagery is particularly useful at work if you don't have much privacy. Instead of grabbing another cup of coffee the next time your boss changes a deadline on you, picture the stress flowing peacefully out of your body from your head to your toes and start smiling.

Meditation is the conscious act of focusing on one thought, object, or word. This deliberate focus occupies your mind and diverts your attention away from the problems that are causing you stress. Many people who meditate claim that it helps boost their creativity and ability to solve problems by allowing subconscious thoughts to arise to conscious awareness. But meditation isn't far out or mystical. Like deep breathing, you can do it anywhere and without specialized training.

Sit comfortably, close your eyes and relax your body, concentrating on breathing rhythmically. Feel your breath and focus on each breath you take. Thoughts will come to mind, but just let them pass without giving them any attention. You can also focus your attention on a phrase, such as a positive affirmation, an object, such as a candle flame, or a comforting word like "calm." Try clearing your mind for 10 minutes in the morning and again before you go to sleep, gradually increasing the amount of time you meditate each day.

Relaxing music and sounds can help you clear your mind after a busy day. Whether you listen to music, podcasts or use an app, you can find a source that will help you fall asleep easier, meditate, beat stress, and more. Many apps offer music, nature sounds, or guided meditations.

While most people can handle short-term stress with few difficulties, ongoing stress can suck the joy out of life. By dealing with problems in a positive way, you will be able to maintain your healthy lifestyle even when life is throwing you curveballs. Who needs chocolate when peace of mind is just one thought away?