Relaxation Techniques

These are some brief relaxation techniques you can use to develop conscious control of your autonomic nervous system, anxiety, depression, pain and overall health.

When starting out, they must be practiced during times you feel fairly calm and focused to effectively train your system to relax. Once your system is trained, you can try them in situations where you feel more stressed and anxious. The more your body and mind learn to associate the techniques with feeling relaxed as you practice, the more effective they will be at releasing tension.

Focus on Diaphragmatic Breathing

* Sit straight with shoulders relaxed, legs and arms uncrossed.
* Take a deep breath allowing your abdomen and waist to gently expand.
* The chest should feel open and supported by the spine, with most of the expansion in the belly. During relaxation practice, the breath should maintain a steady flow, rising and falling in a wave-like rhythm.
* Think, “Breathe in relaxation, breathe out any tension”.
* Allow yourself to simply focus on your breath for a few minutes or more, allowing any thoughts or feelings to flow past like clouds in the sky.

Patterned Diaphragmatic Breathing

* If you are highly anxious and fearful in a specific situation, try the following pattern.
* Breathe in for four counts. Hold your breath for four counts. Breathe out for eight counts.
* Repeat 5 times, then breathe normally in an even rhythm.

Five Finger Exercise

Sit back and take a few deep relaxing breaths.

1. Inhale, and as you exhale, touch your thumb to your index finger.

Recall a time when your body felt a healthy fatigue, like how you felt sinking into a chair after a day of hiking, or just stepping out of a hot tub.

1. Inhale, exhale and touch your thumb to your Middle finger. Think of a time when you had a loving experience—when you felt a strong sense of closeness or connection with another.

You can also think about a spiritual or global sense of love and caring.

1. Inhale, exhale and touch your thumb to your ring finger and recall a time when you accomplished something, when you did something well and received some recognition for your efforts. Feel that sense of accomplishment and know that you deserve it.
2. Inhale, exhale and touch your thumb to your little Finger and imagine the most beautiful place you have ever been. Enjoy the visual picture, imagine the sounds, the feel of the air—take a moment to full absorb the total feeling experience of this beautiful place.

Body Relaxation—The Magnificent Seven

Begin by stretching out your arms and legs, then gently roll your head to relax your neck.squeeze your shoulder blades together then allow your shoulders to relax and roll down.

**First Breath.**

Take in a long, slow breath allowing your abdomen to expand. Let the air flow out slowly as you give yourself permission to relax.

**Second Breath.**

As you take in another long, slow breath, concentrate on the muscles in your scalp, forehead, eyes, mouth and face. Notice any tension, then exhale and think “relax” in those areas.

**Third Breath.**

As you take in a long, slow breath, concentrate on the muscles in your neck, shoulders, and back. Release any tension in these muscles as you exhale slowly, thinking “relax”.

**Fourth Breath.**

Breathe in deeply, and as you exhale allow the relaxation to flow down your arms into your fingertips and imagine them filling with a warm, relaxing color.

**Fifth Breath.**

As you take in your next long, slow breath, concentrate on any tension in the muscles in your chest, abdomen, and hips. Relax these muscles as you exhale and relax.

**Sixth Breath.**

As you take another breath and exhale, image that relaxation pours from your hips down your legs all the way into your toes which are filled with warmth and relaxation.

**Seventh Breath.**

As you take in another long, slow breath, notice muscular tension anywhere in your body. Hold the breath for a few seconds, and then exhale slowly while giving your whole body permission

to release and relax.

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