

Relaxation Exercise

This exercise begins with relaxing each muscle group in turn and finishes with a relaxation exercise for your mind. Don't worry if you find it hard at first, it takes practice to learn to relax. Aim to practice for 15 minutes at least once a day – remember relaxation is a way of being kind to yourself that you can't overdo.

First of all find a time and place where you will be comfortable and private for a few minutes. You can do the exercises sitting or lying down, what matters is that you feel as comfortable as possible. It will help you to relax if your head and neck are supported. These exercises can be done with an instrumental tape and some people find that this helps them to concentrate.

Before you start, take a few deep slow breaths. Try to breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth – you should be able to feel your stomach rise and fall with your breath.

This exercise tenses and releases each muscle group in turn, starting with your feet and moving up to your head. Do each exercise twice. Don't worry about remembering the exact order.

Breathe deeply in and slowly out again.

Curl up your toes inside your shoes and let go.

Breathe deeply in and slowly out again.

Keeping your heels on the ground, flex your toes up, you should feel the stretch down the back of your legs, and let go.

Breathe deeply in and slowly out again.

Now point your toes, lifting your heels from the ground, if you can do so comfortably, and let go.

Breathe deeply in and slowly out again.

Tighten your stomach muscles as though you are pulling your navel back to your spine and let go.

Breathe deeply in and slowly out again.

Clench your hands into fists, feel the nails dig into your palms, and let go.

Breathe deeply in and slowly out again.

Stretch your arms out in front of you, stretch your fingers apart, reach forward and feel the stretch across your shoulders, let them fall back to your side and let go.

Breathe deeply in and slowly out again.

Shrug your shoulders up towards your ears and let them fall and let go.

Breathe deeply in and slowly out again.

Pull your shoulders back, slide your shoulder blades together and arch your chest feeling the stretch across your front, and let go.

Breathe deeply in, and slowly out again.

Press your lips tightly together, and let go.

Clench your teeth, and let go.

Breathe deeply in, and slowly out again.

Shut your eyes very tightly, and let go.

Pull your eyebrows up towards your hair, and let go.

Breathe deeply in, and slowly out again.

Tighten ALL your face muscles, eyes, frown, clench teeth, and let go.

Breathe deeply in, and slowly out again.

Turn your head right over to one side, now across to the other side, and back to the middle.

Breathe deeply in, and slowly out again, just trying now to let go all your muscles as much as you can.

Let your eyes become heavy, your forehead smooth, let your jaw drop, and your tongue fall behind your teeth.

Now let your shoulders sag, and your arms become heavy from your shoulders to your elbows, to your fingers.

Now let your back melt into the chair, let go all the way from your neck, down to your shoulders, your waist and your hips.

Feel your chest muscles let go, and your stomach muscles.

Now let your legs become heavy, all the way from your hips to your knees and your toes.

Breathe deeply in, and slowly out again.

Now try and let your mind relax, try to picture yourself relaxing in a place that you know well, where you can picture all the details – what the weather is like, what you can feel, see, hear and smell. Consciously focus on painting a detailed picture in your mind so that you can imagine yourself relaxed in your favourite place. If you find it helps you then listen to the notes of the music. If your mind wanders don't worry, simply note any thoughts but don't pursue them. You can do that later, for now bring your mind back to the details of "your" place.