

Stress / Mental Health

What is it?

All anxiety conditions and reactions to stress cause a build-up of body tension and may result in many complaints such as:

Stomach trouble
Frequency of urination
Chest pain
Muscular tightness in the neck and shoulders
Migraine headaches
Depression
Alcohol dependence
Difficulty in concentration

Mental Relaxation (Five or Ten Minutes)

1. Select a comfortable sitting or reclining position.
2. Close your eyes and think about a place that you have been before that represents your ideal place for physical and mental relaxation. (It should be a quiet environment perhaps the seashore, the mountains, or even your own back garden. If you can't think of an ideal relaxation place, then create one in your mind).
3. Now imagine that you are actually in your ideal relaxation place, imagine you are seeing all the colours, hearing the sounds, smelling the aromas. Just lie back, and enjoy your soothing rejuvenating environment.
4. Feel the peacefulness, the calmness, and imagine your whole body and mind being renewed and refreshed.
5. After five to ten minutes, slowly open your eyes and stretch. You have the realisation that you may instantly return to your relaxation place whenever you desire, and experience a peacefulness and calmness in body and mind.

Deep Relaxation Technique

Best done once or twice a day. It can help your body recover from stress and prevent the build up of tension, fatigue, and anxiety.

1. Sit in a comfortable position (Support your upper back, neck and head). A quiet place where you will not be interrupted is best.
2. Slowly draw in and exhale a deep breath. Check your shoulders for stiffness or tense position. Allow them to fall naturally in a relaxed position. Take a second deep breath and close your eyes.
3. Complete a body check to locate any areas of tension and tightness. Take each area and relax the involved muscles. Visualise the tension releasing and slipping away as warmth and relaxation flow into the

area. You might imagine yourself basking in the sun and feeling the sun warm your area of tension.

4. Starting with your feet, slowly work up through the body relaxing muscle groups and areas of tightness and tension. Imagine warmth flowing into each area, muscles becoming heavy, and comforting relaxation replacing tightness or tension. Once you've progressed throughout the body, focus on the hands, (you can focus on any area of tension you'd like to work on). Create a sentence that you can repeat to yourself emphasising warmth, heaviness, and relaxation such as my hands are warm, heavy and relaxed.
5. Do not be discouraged if at first your mind tends to wander away to other thoughts. Once you are aware that you have wandered to other thoughts simply come back and focus again on the area you are relaxing. Try to notice how good it feels to have some quiet time to yourself and how comfortable it is to let go of any tightness or tension you may have.
6. Deep relaxation is most effective when practised for a length of twenty minutes. If you find that sitting still for that long is more stress-inducing than stress-reducing then start with a period of five or ten minutes and gradually build up to twenty minutes.
7. Always end your relaxation session with several deep breaths. Then after slowly opening your eyes, maintain your relaxation position for a few minutes before resuming your next activity.

Momentary Relaxation

While the relaxation exercises require an investment of time, from a few minutes to twenty or more, once you have achieved deep relaxation you can also begin to draw upon your memory of relaxation to achieve partial relaxation during the day. Taking a few deep, slow breaths can often bring on this feeling of relaxation.

The next time, you find yourself about to deal with a challenging, stressful situation, simply pause for a few seconds, turn your attention to your body, and allow your whole body to relax as much as you can keeping the situation in mind. You can easily learn to do this quickie relaxation technique in a few seconds and without the slightest outward sign of what you are doing. Anyone looking at you would notice, at most, that you had become silent and that you seemed to be thinking about something for a few seconds. You need not even close your eyes to do this. If you happen to have a few minutes alone before entering the challenge situation, you can relax yourself somewhat more thoroughly. Sit down if possible, get comfortable and close your eyes. Use your built-in muscle memory to bring back the feeling of deep relaxation and hold it for about a full minute. Then open your eyes, try to maintain the feeling of calmness that came with relaxation.

Physical Exercise

Exercise is good for the mind as well as the body. Jogging, brisk walking, aerobic dancing and swimming. Recreational sports such as squash and

tennis can all be excellent ways of reducing tension and frustration or perhaps a favourite activity or hobby such as gardening, sewing, listening to music or soaking in a hot bath, can be helpful in releasing the build up of tension.

20 Tips for Coping with Stress

1. Work off stress - physical activity is a terrific outlet.
2. Talk to someone you really trust.
3. Learn to accept what you cannot change.
4. Avoid self-medication with nicotine, alcohol, too much coffee or tranquillisers.
5. Get enough sleep to rest to recharge your batteries.
6. Take time out to play.
7. Do something for others (those in the helping profession can overdo this advice).
8. Take one thing at a time.
9. Agree with somebody. Life should not be a constant battleground. Avoid entrenched interpersonal conflicts.
10. Manage your time better - you need a system that works for you, not against you.
11. Plan ahead by saying 'no' now, you may prevent too much pressure piling up in the future.
12. If you are ill, don't try to carry on as if you're not.
13. Develop a hobby. Work or family commitments can become an addiction and you need something to counterbalance it.
14. The answer lies with you. Only you can change the way you react to stress.
15. Eat sensibly and exercise.
16. Don't put off relaxing - use a stress reduction technique daily. Progressive muscular relaxation and controlled breathing can be very helpful.
17. Don't be afraid to say No!
18. Know when you are tired and do something about it.
19. Delegate responsibility.
20. Be realistic about achieving perfection.