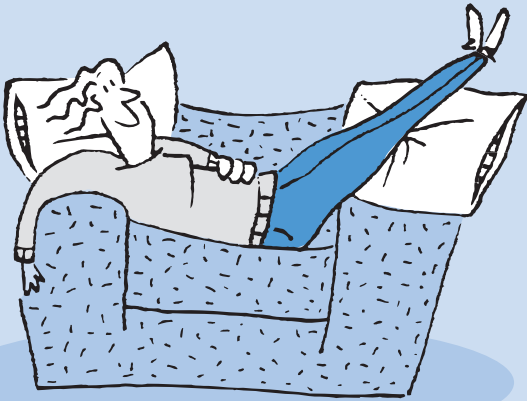


Relaxation



A Brief Guide

Patient Information

What is relaxation and why is it helpful?

- Rest is vital in helping to combat tiredness, irritability, reduce anxiety and provide respite from discomfort or stress. Over time, ongoing worry and anxiety can make us feel even more tired and irritable
- Relaxation is not about sleep, although regular, good quality sleep is an important part of our daily routine. Real relaxation is about making time to 'switch off' in our mind and body, and is a skill which needs to be learned and practiced regularly. When we, or someone we know, are faced with a serious/life threatening illness, anxiety, stress and fear are normal responses
- Fears about diagnosis and the future will cause anxiety and it can be difficult to switch off from fearful thoughts. Stress can build up if people feel unable to express their emotions
- Relaxation can help in reducing anxiety by giving ourselves time to 'switch off'. Relaxation can decrease blood pressure, decrease breathing and pulse rate, release muscle tension and increase energy levels.

How to practice relaxation

There are various methods to relaxation. What suits one person may not suit another. The important thing is to take time to try different ones in order to find which work best for you.

Some people relax by taking exercise, reading a book or watching television. However, the type of relaxation that makes a difference in coping with anxiety is regular, daily practise of some form of deep relaxation. Below are some examples of techniques to slow down your breathing, relax muscles and release tension. You might prefer listening to soothing music, a 'sounds of nature' recording or simply sitting in silence and using calm thoughts and focusing on relaxing your whole body and mind. You can purchase relaxation CDs from libraries, bookshops, music stores and online. If you search "Relaxation" online, there are a number of resources available.

- **Breathing techniques** - It is important to focus on getting your breathing into a slow and regular rhythm as this aids relaxation and helps to reduce some of the physical symptoms of anxiety. It can also help to relax your mind
- **Progressive muscle relaxation** - This technique teaches you to systematically tense then relax particular muscle groups in your body. As you release the tension, you notice how your muscles feel when you relax them. This exercise will help you to release your overall tension and stress levels and help you to relax.
- **Guided imagery/visualisation** - Is about using your imagination to try and relax your mind. Use your senses to help in creating a peaceful, relaxing scene/image: What can you see? What can you smell? What are you doing? Try to banish negative thoughts.

Breathing techniques

Breathing well is an integral part of helping us to relax. Comfortable deep breathing can help you get the oxygen you need to your brain and muscles, which helps to trigger a relaxation response. With anxiety or breathlessness, there is a tendency to over-breathe, with rapid shallow breaths, which in turn increases anxiety. Below are some brief descriptions of breathing techniques that can help you get the air you need without working so hard to breathe.

Better breathing tip: It is normal to hold your shoulders tense and high. Before starting any breathing technique, take a minute to drop your shoulders down, close your eyes and relax. Before you take a deep breath in with these techniques, you must fully exhale first.

- **Pursed Lip Breathing**

The aim of this is to slow your breathing down; it improves the exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide by keeping your airways open longer; it reduces the work of breathing and can increase the amount of time you can exercise or perform an activity.

1. Breathe in through your nose (as if you are smelling a flower) for a count of 2.
2. Breathe out very slowly through pursed lips (as if you are puckering up to blow out a candle) for 2-3 times as long as you breathed in.
3. Repeat.

- **Diaphragmatic breathing**

There is a tendency to use the muscles in our neck, shoulders and back when we over-breathe with those rapid, shallow breaths. What we need to do is train our diaphragm (the main muscle of breathing) to take over more of the “work of breathing” and help us relax.

This technique is best practised when you are feeling rested and while sitting down or lying back. However, it can be used if you become breathless during an activity as a way of regaining control of your breathing.

1. Relax your shoulders, place one hand on your stomach and the other on your chest.
2. Breathe in (for about 2 seconds), letting your stomach swell out. Your stomach should move more than your chest.
3. As you breathe out, your stomach should flatten again.
4. Repeat 10-20 times, 2-3 times a day (or whatever feels comfortable for you). If you feel lightheaded, stop for 30 seconds then start again.

Useful positions when short of breath

The following positions can help in opening your airways enabling you to regulate your breathing:



Place 2-3 pillows on a table and sit down, arms folded supporting head and shoulders on pillows.

Lean against a wall, pole etc. Place feet slightly apart and try to relax neck and shoulders until breathing is normal again.



An occupational therapist or physiotherapist can provide further information/advice on breathing exercises and breathlessness.

Progressive muscle relaxation

People are often so tense during the day that they do not even recognise what being relaxed feels like. Try and set aside about 15 minutes to complete this exercise. Find a place where you can exercise without being disturbed. Through practise you can learn to distinguish between the feelings of a tensed muscle and a completely relaxed muscle, but also when you are starting to get tense during the day.

Be careful! Take care not to hurt yourself while tensing your muscles. If you are unable to tense for 5 seconds, or repeat 2-3 times, go with what you are able to do. If you experience any pain in certain muscles, or there are muscles that you find difficult to focus on, then spend more time on relaxing other parts. If you have problems with pulled muscles, broken bones or any medical issues that would hinder physical activity, consult your doctor first.

1. Assume a comfortable position (you may lie down); loosen any tight clothing, close your eyes and be quiet.
2. Let your body go loose. Tune out all other thoughts.
3. Tense and relax each muscle group as follows (breathing in as you tense, breathing out as you relax): Repeat each exercise 2-3 times.
 - **Forehead** - Wrinkle your forehead; try to make your eyebrows touch for 5 seconds. Relax
 - **Eyes and nose** - Close your eyes as tightly as you can for 5 seconds. Relax
 - **Neck** - Stretch your head upwards and push your chin to your chest for 5 seconds. Relax
 - **Shoulders** - Shrug your shoulders up towards your ears for 5 seconds. Relax. Then push your shoulders down towards your feet for 5 seconds. Relax
 - **Upper arms** - Bend your elbows. Tense your biceps for 5 seconds. Relax. Feel the tension leave your arms
 - **Forearms** - Extend your arms out against an invisible wall and push forward with your hands for 5 seconds. Relax

- **Wrists** - Stretch wrist by pulling your hand up towards you, stretch out your fingers and thumbs for 5 seconds. Relax
- **Hands** - Extend your arms in front of you. Clench your fists tightly for 5 seconds. Relax. Feel the warmth and calmness in your hands
- **Back** - Arch your back off the floor for 5 seconds. Relax. Feel the anxiety and tension disappearing
- **Stomach** - Tighten your stomach muscles for 5 seconds. Relax
- **Hips and buttocks** - Tighten your hip and buttock muscles for 5 seconds. Relax
- **Thighs** - Tighten your thigh muscles by pressing your legs together as tightly as you can for 5 seconds. Relax
- **Feet** - Bend your ankles toward your body as far as you can for 5 seconds. Relax
- **Toes** - Curl your toes as tightly as you can for 5 seconds. Relax.

4. Fix the feeling of relaxation in your mind.
Resolve to repeat the process again.

Remember, people respond differently to various activities. Some feel pleasant or refreshed, and others feel calm and relaxed after an activity like this one. Some people notice little change the first time, but with practise you can start to see the benefits and your relaxation should increase.

Useful Contacts

British Lung Foundation: 73-75 Goswell Road
London EC1V 7ER
03000 030555, Mon-Fri, 9.00-5.00
Email: helpline@blf.org.uk
enquiries@blf.org.uk
Website: www.blf.org.uk

Albert Smith: YouTube “Relaxation and Sleep”

Relaxation for Living: Relaxation CD available from
Anxiety Care UK
Website: www.anxietycare.org.uk/docs/relax_cd.asp

Relaxation for Living DVD from
Anxiety Care UK
Website: www.anxietycare.org.uk/docs/rfldvd.asp

Anxiety Care UK: 98-100 Ilford Lane
Essex IG1 2LD

Books: Teach Yourself Relaxation
Richard Craize
McGraw-Hill Edition, 2008



Breathe Easy support networks are nationwide, providing support groups and social clubs for people with respiratory conditions. You can find your nearest group on the British Lung Foundation website.

Notes



Courtesy and respect

- A welcoming and positive attitude
- Polite, friendly and interested in people
- Value and respect people as individuals

So people feel welcome

Attentively kind and helpful

- Look out for dignity, privacy & humanity
- Attentive, responsive & take time to help
- Visible presence of staff to provide care

So people feel cared for

Responsive communication

- Listen to people & answer their questions
- Keep people clearly informed
- Involve people

So people feel in control

Effective and professional

- Safe, knowledgeable and reassuring
- Effective care / services from joined up teams
- Organised and timely, looking to improve

So people feel safe



The hospital is able to arrange for an interpreter to assist you in communicating effectively with staff during your stay through INTRAN.

If you need an interpreter or a person to sign, please let us know.

If you require a large print version of this booklet, please contact PALS on 01493 453240

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