

# Relaxation



**There is no exact definition of stress because it is different for everyone, but most people view stress as how they feel in reaction to life pressures or demands. Too much stress can cause a variety of physical, emotional, and behavioral health symptoms or problems.**

**Practicing relaxation methods can relieve stress and can lead to improved health and well-being.**

## The Relaxation Response

Too much stress can hurt your health, but what is the alternative? How can you meet all the demands in your life without being stressed? Your body's solution to excess stress is the Stress Response which puts us in the "fight or flight" mode. You can help to relieve the Stress Response by bringing on the Relaxation Response which puts the body into "rest and digest" mode.

Because the Stress Response can wear your body down, it is important to engage the Relaxation Response to keep your body working properly.

## Benefits of Relaxation

- Slows your heart rate
- Increases blood flow to your muscles and tissues
- Lowers your blood pressure
- Slows down your breathing
- Reduces muscle tension which can reduce pain
- Improves your concentration and problem solving skills
- Reduces anger, anxiety and depression
- Boosts confidence and feelings of resilience

**Relaxation can help to reduce the symptoms of many diseases and conditions such as heart conditions, diabetes, chronic pain, sleeping disorders, anxiety and depression. Using relaxation methods in addition to the other treatments your health care provider prescribes can help you manage your health even better.**

# Relaxation Methods

**Relaxing is a skill, and it may take time to get good at it. Start with 5-15 minutes per day of any of these methods and work up to at least 20 minutes per day. As you practice, it will get easier and feel better.**

## **Exercise\***

Any form of exercise can help reduce stress when it is done in a way that is fun and enjoyable. Exercise releases endorphins which help improve your mood. Exercise can also be a healthy distraction.

Some types of exercise are walking, riding a bike, swimming, sports, gym classes, weight training, yoga, tai chi, yard work and even house cleaning.

**\*If you have any health problems talk to your health care provider before starting any exercise program.**

## **Doing Things you Enjoy**

Relaxing can be as simple as doing something you enjoy doing such as:

**Listening to music**

**Being outside in nature**

**Visiting with family or friends**

**Reading or listening to books**

**Laughing**

Laugh therapy can be done with a professional or you can watch a funny movie, have an uplifting conversation, or read a funny book.

## **Relaxation Techniques**

These techniques are designed specifically to help you learn how to relax.

### **Mindful Meditation**

Learn to achieve a calm, focused, harmonious mind and state of being. In this calmness is a more natural way of being that can help to reduce pain and discomfort.

### **Tense & Relax Method**

This method can help to relieve muscle tension and help reduce chronic pain. With regular practice, Tense & Relax helps you become familiar with what tension feels like and how to let it go.

### **Deep Breathing**

This can help with chronic pain, stress, muscle tension, anxiety, sleep disorders, and other conditions like high blood pressure.

### **Guided Imagery**

This method uses relaxation, mental visualization, and imagination to improve physical well-being, health, and mood. It can be self-directed or it can be done with a therapist, CD or video.

**Ask your health care provider about handouts on Exercise, the Relaxation Response, Mindful Meditation, Deep Breathing, Guided Imagery and the Tense & Relax method.**

# Deep Breathing Method

**Deep breathing can help with chronic pain, stress, muscle tension, anxiety, sleep disorders, and other conditions like high blood pressure. It can help to bring a Relaxation Response in your body.**

1. Find a quiet place to sit or lie down.
2. If you are sitting, try not to slouch but make sure you are comfortable. You can use cushions or back rests to help you sit more easily. If you are lying down, place a pillow under your head if you need to. Your face should be parallel to the ceiling and not tilted up or down.
3. Close your eyes.
4. Feel your breath as it comes in through your nose and fills your lungs and then goes back out.
5. Put one hand on your lower belly. Be sure your arm is relaxed and your elbow is resting on the floor or a pillow.
6. As you breathe in (inhale) slowly:
  - let your belly expand like you have a balloon in your belly that expands forward, sideways, backward, upward and downward
  - as your belly expands, feel your lungs fill with air
  - breathe in slowly like this for 4 to 10 counts.
7. As you breathe out (exhale) let your belly relax. Gently let the air in your lungs come out. This should take at least 4 to 10 counts too.
9. As you breathe like this, don't think about other things. Just think about your breathing. If you have other thoughts come up, just gently send them away.
9. Continue to breathe in and out as described in steps 6 and 7 for at least 10 to 20 minutes.
10. You can do the Tense & Relax Method after this deep breathing for more relaxation. Ask your health care provider for a handout on Tense & Relax or other relaxation methods.



