

# Relaxation Exercises

Life's experiences may cause many stresses due to the losses and changes in our lives. Often it is difficult to relax due to worry and tension. Relaxation can aid healing and lead to a feeling of wellness. Relaxation is the letting go of physical and emotional tension, which can lead to a sense of peacefulness. There are many different ways to relax, and you can experiment to find the best ways that work for you. Before you try a relaxation exercise you should find a quiet place to practice. Try to practice relaxation exercises daily, about twenty minutes in the morning and twenty minutes in the evening before you go to bed is ideal. The following is a list of suggestions to help you get started.

**Deep Breathing:** The key to deep breathing is to breathe deeply from the abdomen, getting as much fresh air into your lungs as possible. Take in a slow deep breath in through your nose, pause, breathe out through your mouth just as slowly as you breathed in. Take a few regular breaths, then take another slow, deep breath. Do this for a few minutes. This stimulates the relaxation response in your body, which will lower your heart rate and blood pressure.

**Progressive Muscle Relaxation:** Focus on slowly tensing and then relaxing muscle groups in your body. Start at your feet and slowly work your way up to your neck and head. Tense your muscles for 5-10 seconds and then relax them for about 30 seconds.

**Visualization or Guided Imagery:** This technique involves getting in a comfortable position and forming mental images to take a visual journey to a peaceful or calming place. During the visualization you should use as many of the senses as you can. Guided imagery can be very powerful, and it helps with relaxing, falling asleep, and it can help with the healing process. You can listen to guided imagery led by the nationally known guided imagery therapist Belleruth Naparstek at the website listed below, or you can visit Health Journeys website to purchase her guided imagery.

Free Guided Imagery: <https://members.kaiserpermanente.org/redirects/listen/>

**Affirmations:** Tension can be created by negative thoughts or beliefs. Be aware of what you tell yourself, and try to replace negative thoughts with positive statements called affirmations. Some examples of positive statements are:

"I am an inherently worthwhile, loveable person."

"I am doing the best I can."

"I am healthy and happy."

"I have a lot of energy."

"My mind is calm."

"I am calm and relaxed in every situation."

"I radiate love and happiness."

"I am surrounded by love."

# *Relaxation Exercises Continued*

**Meditation:** Sit in quiet, comfortable place. Close your eyes and breathe deeply. Focus all your attention on your breathing, and block out all other thoughts. If you feel your attention wandering, bring it back to your breathing. As you inhale repeat the word “peace”, as you exhale repeat the word “calm”. Continue this exercise until you feel relaxed, do this for 15-20 minutes every day.

**Yoga, Tai Chi:** Yoga combines moving and stationary poses, combined with deep breathing. Yoga strengthens the relaxation response in your daily life. Tai chi is a series of slow, flowing body movements. These movements emphasize concentration, relaxation and the conscious circulation of vital energy through the body.

**Listening to Music:** Pick relaxing, soothing music that is harmonious and rhythmic. Close your eyes and practice deep breathing while you listen to the music, or combine the music with any other relaxation exercise for about 15-20 minutes until you feel your body has relaxed.

**Massage:** When you get a massage, as the muscles in your body relax, so does your overstressed mind.

**Being with Nature:** Take a walk in the woods, or go sit on a bench in a park. This is relaxing and good for the soul.

**Art Therapy:** Art therapy is a form of expressive therapy that uses art materials (paints, chalk, markers, etc.). This can be very relaxing and therapeutic.

**Aromatherapy:** Uses essential oils, and other aromatic compounds for the purpose of altering a person's mood, cognitive function or health. Lavender is a great stress reliever, it can help you relax and fall asleep at night also. Chamomile can be used to promote sleep, relaxation and meditation (try chamomile tea at night). Jasmine, sandalwood and rose are also know to promote relaxation.

**Journaling:** Journaling is a great way to process what you're going through, good or bad. Journaling is not only very therapeutic, but it also can be a great way to relieve stress. Practice journaling before going to bed, to help clear your mind.

**Use of Heat:** Using hot packs or taking a hot shower or bath can help relax tense muscles, and can help put your mind at ease. Take a hot shower or bath before going to bed to help you relax enough so that you can fall asleep. Combine with aromatherapy for added benefits.

**Exercise:** Regular exercise has many, many benefits. Not only does exercise have many health benefits, but it can help you get better sleep, lower your risk for depression, and lower your perceived stress and anxiety. Exercise can also help you prepare for relaxation by releasing muscle tension in your body. Exercise stimulates the release of a natural body substance called endorphin, which creates a feeling of well-being.