

QUICK RELAXATION TIPS

DEEP BREATHING: Take a deep breath. Hold it for about three seconds, then let it out all at once (with a sigh if it feels better!). As you let it out, let your jaw relax, your shoulders relax and think "calm." Let your teeth remain slightly apart (we should go through the day with enough space between our teeth for a small pencil).

TENSE-RELEASE: Tense yourself all over, one part at a time. Pull your toes up as if to touch your shins and hold it. Tense your thighs... your buttocks... tense your fists and your arms... take a deep breath and hold it. Clench your jaws and close your eyelids tight. Hold yourself tense all over for four or five seconds. Then let go all at once. Feel the tension leave your body.

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COOL AIR IN, WARM AIR OUT: With your eyes closed, shift your attention to the tip of your nose. As you breathe in, become aware of the air coming in your nostrils. As you breathe out, be aware of the sensations of the air passing back out. Perhaps you notice that the air coming in tends to be cooler and the air you breathe out tends to be warmer. Just be aware of cool air coming in and warm air going out.

HEAVY FEET: Just imagine that your feet and legs are getting heavier and heavier with each breath out. It's almost as if you are wearing lead boots. Your feet are getting heavy. Your legs are getting heavy. Imagine this for a few seconds.

WARM HANDS: Visualize your hands as warm, relaxed and warm. You might imagine them in a bucket of warm water, near a fire or in warm, woolly gloves. Perhaps you can even begin to feel the blood flowing down your arms into your hands. Your hands are warm... relaxed and warm.

BREATHING TENSIONS AWAY: Gently focus your attention on your feet. As you take in a slow, deep breath, imagine collecting all of your tension in your feet and legs, breathing them into your lungs and expelling them as you exhale. Then, with the second deep breath, inhale all the tension in your trunk, hands and arms and expel that also. With a third deep breath, collect and expel all that tension in your neck and head. With practice, you may be able to collect the tension from your entire body with one deep inhalation.

EQUALIZED BREATHING: *Take four seconds to breathe in and four more seconds to breathe out. That is, as you inhale count to yourself "1 one thousand, 2 one thousand, 3 one thousand, 4 one thousand " As you breathe out, count the same way. Repeat this exercise 4 or 5 times.*

ABDOMINAL (DIAPHRAGMATIC) BREATHING: *Place one hand on your chest and the other hand on your navel. Breathe so that only the hand on your navel moves—as you inhale, your hand moves in; as you exhale, your hand moves out. The upper hand does not move. Watch your hands as you breathe and see if you can breathe with only the lower hand moving.*

IDEAL RELAXATION: *With your eyes closed, take a moment to create, in your mind's eye, an ideal spot for relaxation. You can make it anyplace you want it to be—real or imagined. Perhaps it is a favorite room, a beautiful meadow, a beach on an ocean, or a floating cloud. See yourself in comfortable clothes. Now, once you have created this special place, go back therefore 15 seconds or so whenever you feel the need to relax.*

4S's – THE ULTIMATE MINI-QUICKI: *First, smile and make your eyes sparkle. (Yes, you can do this!) Then take a deep breath. As you let it out, let your jaw hang slack, shoulders sag and forehead smooth out. Go ahead, do it again; smile and make your eyes sparkle, breathe deep, let it out, and feel your jaw go slack, your shoulders sag, and your forehead smooth out. Remember the 4 S's: smile, slack, sag, smooth...*

There's a reason for each of those parts. As we get tense, our facial muscles tend to get tense and "hard-looking." Smiling breaks that up because it's difficult to remain as stressed after smiling. Deep breathing counteracts tension-filled shallow breathing. We tend to tense our jaws when stressed, so letting it hang slack lets go of some of that stress. The same with our shoulders—they tense with stress, so letting them go and relaxing releases the built up tensions. Letting our forehead smooth out releases the tension that tends to gather there when we frown or wrinkle our forehead

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Adapted from materials from the ISU Wellness Center.