

## RELAXATION GUIDELINES

The following are some general rules of thumb to follow when practicing deep relaxation:

1. Find a quiet, comfortable place where you won't be disturbed by interruptions or intrusive sounds, lights, drafts, etc.
2. Arrange yourself as comfortably as possible by loosening tight clothing, sitting in a comfortable chair with adequate support or lying in a comfortable position. Leave your legs and arms uncrossed and comfortably positioned.
3. Allow time for your mind to become quiet. If distracting thoughts or images enter your mind, allow them to pass on through as you passively observe them and wait for your mind to become quiet and empty. Be a detached observer of whatever you experience.
4. If your mind tends to wander, gently return to your focus on relaxation. Various mental devices help maintain a focus. Common ones include concentrating on a rhythmic body function (heartbeat or breathing), images, repeated words or phrases, tensing-relaxing muscles, etc.
5. Remain alert and conscious as you relax. If you tend to fall asleep, sit up more directly to alert yourself or open your eyes briefly, then return to relaxing.
6. Allow your body to be the guide for how quickly or deeply you relax: go at your own pace. Like any other skill, it takes time to learn to relax deeply. Give yourself messages of appreciation for however much you are able to let go. Avoid self criticism and trust your own body's timing.
7. Avoid smoking before, during or after relaxation periods; smoking constricts blood flow and tightens lung tissue.
8. Wait to practice until an hour or more after you have eaten so that blood can return from its concentration in the digestive system and flow freely through out your body.
9. The more frequently and regularly you practice, the more quickly you'll be able to use the skill of relaxation to counter the stress response. Practicing twice per day, for 20-30 minutes, for 4-6 weeks is optimal to become skillful enough to relax in stressful situations, but any practice is better than none.
10. If you are initially uncomfortable with what you experience, you can always open your eyes and stop the exercise. Return to relaxing when you are ready and relax only as deeply as you feel comfortable with.

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# PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

## General directions:

It may seem strange, but learning how to relax can involve learning how to tense-up .....at least as a first step. You tense a muscle (like making a tight fist) and then release the tension by "letting go" of it (releasing your fist and letting the hand fall open). The release creates a momentum effect in the muscle, so that it becomes more relaxed than it was before you tensed it. Once you have completed this simple exercise with sixteen of the major muscle groups in your body, you will typically find that your body is deeply relaxed.

The procedure for tensing then relaxing a muscle group is as follows:

1. Breathe in, hold the breath, and tense the muscle group for 5 to 10 seconds, concentrating on the tense feeling in the muscles.
2. Release the tension as you breathe out.
3. Concentrate for 20 to 30 seconds on the relaxed feeling in the muscles. (Breathe comfortably).

Do this two times in a row for each muscle group. Then, if it feels relaxed, go on to the next muscle group. A useful progression is to begin with the hands, then proceed to the head, then to the feet. You can also go from feet, to hands, to head.

Remember to concentrate on the feelings in the muscles both when tensing them and when relaxing them. This is done so that you can become more aware of your body. The more aware of your body you become, the more you will be able to recognize tension building and then how to start the "relaxation response."

## MUSCLE GROUPS AND HOW TO TENSE THEM:

1. Right hand and forearm: make a tight fist with your right hand.
2. Right biceps: bend your arm at the elbow and tense as if you were lifting weights.
3. Left hand and forearm (same procedure as right).
4. Left biceps (same procedure as right).
5. Forehead and top of your head: frown hard, tensing muscles in forehead and top of head.
6. Nose and cheeks: squint, wrinkling nose and tensing muscles in nose and cheeks.
7. Mouth and jaw: clench your teeth, pull the corners of your mouth back toward your ears (forced smile).
8. Throat and neck: pull your head back and at the same time pull your chin down (make a double chin).
9. Chest and back: inhale, pull your shoulder blades together and down (as if you were standing at rigid attention).
10. Abdominal muscles: inhale and suck in abdomen.
11. Right upper leg: raise right foot about six inches, keeping leg stiff and straight.
12. Right calf: pull foot toward you, keeping leg stiff and straight.
13. Right foot: curl toes under and arch your foot.
14. Left upper leg (same procedure as right).
15. Left calf (same procedure as right).
16. Left foot (same procedure as right).

After you have finished, survey your body to determine if any muscles still feel tense. If so, repeat the procedure with that muscle group. Once they are all relaxed, enjoy the feelings of comfort and relaxation for a few minutes before becoming active again. The effect will wear off after about two hours, but will return more and more quickly the more you practice the technique.