

## Relaxation

In our time, stress has become a part of daily life, especially in cities. So that, many people do not even recognize that they are stressful. Stress can become the "normal" state. To be able to cope with stress and to relax, it is important to be aware of it first.

- Tense muscles, muscle aches
- Difficulty with falling asleep
- Poor appetite, stomach complaints
- Constant fatigue
- Headache
- Rapid and short breaths
- Difficulty with concentrating thoughts
- Feeling overwhelmed, panic

Given that there is no other medical explanation, such complaints show that you are under stress and you need relaxation.

### What can you do?

The best relaxation method changes from person to person. There is no single "right" relaxation method that is effective for everyone. The important thing is to find the method that fits you best. Some may benefit from walking or exercising while some others may enjoy resting on a beach or listening to music. Loosening your muscles is a good way of relaxing. You will see that physical relaxation will bring about mental relaxation. Mental relaxation, meditation and yoga are also effective methods for coping with stress. Since mind and body are not separate, they will positively affect each other regardless of whether you start from one or another. Nevertheless, whatever the method you are trying is, you will get the benefits in time, by practicing it over and over.

### A sample relaxation technique

At the beginning of the last century it was found out that stretching and then relaxing the muscles generate a general feeling of relaxation in the body. It was seen that people were less tense after they had done stretching exercises than they were before. You will see simple relaxation exercises below, which you may try by yourself almost anywhere you want. Remember that, each method will work better in time, as you practice.

- Sit comfortably. Step on the floor such that the bottom of your feet completely touches the floor. You will stretch and loosen the tensest parts of your body. Repeat each move for 3 times.

Start from your hands. Hands are among the areas that feel the stress most. When nervous, hands are **clenched fists** or something is held tightly. You may hold the book in your hand tightly, you may cling to the arm of the seat or clamp your hands together. Hence, you may start with relaxing your hands. First, stretch your hand by opening your fingers as much as you can. Feel the tension at your palms and on the outer faces of your hands. Then, leave your hands in your lap or to your sides. Do not hold anything. Leave them as they are, undisturbed. Feel that your hands are relaxed.

- Shoulders are also among the tensest parts of body. When nervous, they are kept tight and you bulge out. Stay straight and pull your shoulders down. Feel the tension at your arms and neck. Stay like that for a few seconds. Then, return your shoulders to their original position. Pay attention not to naturally sit or stand hunched.
- The solidity of neck muscles is another indicator of stress. Decreasing the load of the head relaxes the neck muscles. Move your head forward as much as you can. Dangle your head straightly downwards without turning it to right or left. After keeping like that for a while, slowly lift your head up. If you are spending most of your time reading, at a table, your head is usually leaned forwards. Thus, in contrast you let your head fall back. Look at the most distant point you can see at your top back for a while. Then slowly lift your head to its upright position.
- Face has many muscles and when you are tense, facial muscles are contracted unintentionally. To relax, first tighten your facial muscles as much as possible. Make the face when you eat something very sour. Try to feel all the muscles of your face and tighten them all. Let them relax after a few seconds. If you are using a contact lens and/or dental plates, instead of tightening your muscles try to let all your facial muscles free. Dangle your chin. Let all your mimics go. Think that you are looking ahead indifferently.

- How you breathe also determines your level of tension. When you are tense, you breathe rapidly. In order to relax, try to breathe slowly. Do not hold your breath. Try to breathe slow and orderly. Deep breath may also affect the body negatively in some situations. Thus, when you try to breathe orderly and slow, you will recognize that you are relaxing. Hearing the sound of your breath may also relax you.
  - While taking breaths, it is possible to decrease your level of tension mentally. Take a slow and deep breath from your nose into your stomach. Focus on the air going in you. Hold your breath for a few seconds and think about all the anxiety and stress related to your **past**, and then imagine that this stress goes out of your body as you breathe out. Repeat this two more times by in the second breath, thinking about your **present** worries and for the last breath thinking about your stress and anxiety regarding your **future**.
- Mental relaxation may automatically come with physical relaxation. However, if your thoughts are not giving you a space, you will need to do some mental relaxation, too. There two brief mental relaxation exercises below:
  - Stop the disturbing thoughts that preoccupy you as you would press the stop button of a video player. Imagine a place that you like. A place where there is no trouble, tension or pain... Imagine the details; the scene, sounds, smell... Focus on how you are feeling. Slowly come back where you are and bring the things you have felt there with you. Bringing the feelings here is the most important part of the exercise, because in tense situations remembering these feelings relaxes the person.
  - You may try doing physical relaxation while thinking about the situations that disturb you. First, relax your body. Think about an event or a situation that disturbs you. Then try relaxing again. Stroll between thinking about the stressful subject and relaxing, respectively, until you feel that you are completely relaxed while thinking about the disturbing event or situation.
- Sleeping does not necessarily mean relaxing. Most of the people sleep tensely. Learning to relax makes us to sleep more comfortably and rest while sleeping. If you have difficulty sleeping, you may try to exercises above before you sleep. The following suggestions may also help:
  - Do not study in your bed.
  - Do not go to bed just after you studied or worked. Let some time to pass.
  - Arrange your books and studying material such that you will not be able to see them from your bed.
  - Create a before-sleep routine.
  - Try to make your body as comfortable as you can in the bed.
  - Yawn. Yawning slows the breathing down and helps the secretion of a liquid in the eyes that is necessary for falling asleep. Yawn and slowly close your eyes.

You need to practice all these exercises frequently and regularly so that they can be helpful when you need. When you make relaxation a part of your daily life, you will be able to use them efficiently when you encounter with a stressful situation. Thus, the day of an exam is not the right time to start doing these. These exercises start working in time. If you do them regularly you will both be a calmer person in general and be able to cope with stressful times better.

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### **For More Information**

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