

Relaxation techniques

How do relaxation techniques help?

The many types of relaxation exercises^{1,2}

Get serious about relaxation exercises^{1,2}

References

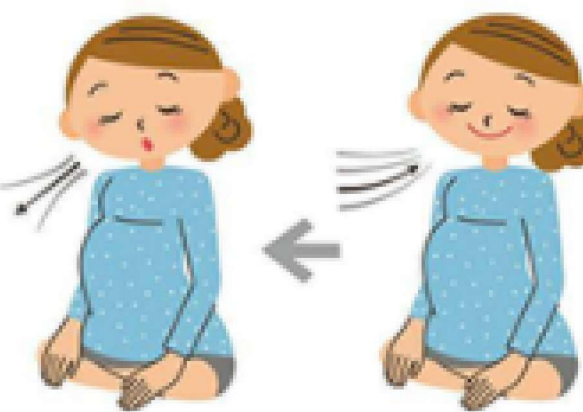
How do relaxation techniques help?

Stress can be harmful for the mind and the body. When you feel stress, your body responds by releasing hormones that increase your blood pressure and raise your heart rate. Stress leads to health problems like high blood pressure, headaches, stomach aches, anxiety and depression.

Relaxation techniques can help your body relax and lower your blood pressure and heart rate.¹ Relaxation techniques may be helpful in managing a variety of health conditions, including anxiety associated with illnesses or medical procedures, insomnia, labor pain, chemotherapy-induced nausea, and temporomandibular joint dysfunction.²

The many types of relaxation exercises^{1,2}

1. Deep Breathing



- One of the simplest ways to relax is to practice deep breathing. You can do deep breathing almost anywhere.
- Sit still or lie down and place one hand on your stomach. Put your other hand over your heart
 - Inhale slowly until you feel your stomach rise. Hold your breath for a moment
 - Exhale slowly, feeling your stomach fall
 - Repeat a few times

2. Guided Imagery^{2,3}

- This technique teaches to focus on pleasant images to replace negative or stressful feelings. Guided imagery may be self-directed or led by a practitioner or a recording
- Set aside 10 or 20 minutes. Find a quiet place and close your eyes
 - Take a few slow breaths to relax
 - Imagine being somewhere that makes you feel calm, like sitting on a tropical beach, or on a favorite park bench. Think about what you might experience there.



3. Meditation^{1,4}



- Meditation involves focused attention to help you relax. Meditation may help you react in a calmer way to your emotions and thoughts, including those that cause stress. Meditation has been practiced for thousands of years, and there are several different styles. This is one way to do it:
- Sit down in a comfortable position
 - Notice and relax your body, paying attention to your body's weight and how it feels
 - Focus on your breath. Don't change your breathing, just focus on your natural breath, the sensation of breathing in and out
 - When your mind strays, let the thoughts pass through. Go back to focusing on your breath. Keep at it for about 5 minutes

4. Progressive relaxation¹

- This technique involves tightening and relaxing the muscles throughout your body. Here's how to do it:
- Start with the muscles in your toes and feet
 - Tighten them for a few moments and then relax them
 - Move up your body, tightening and relaxing one muscle group at a time



5. Yoga and Tai Chi¹



- These approaches combine elements of other relaxation techniques—like breathing and meditation—with physical movement
- Tai Chi is typically low-impact and gentle
- Yoga can range from easy to intense
- To learn more, you can take a class or get a feel for it by watching videos online

6. Biofeedback¹

- Biofeedback teaches you how to control some of your body's functions, such as your heart rate or certain muscles
- With biofeedback, you will need to work with a therapist, who attaches sensors to your body to measure your temperature, muscle tension, and brain waves
- With practice, you can learn how changing your thoughts and emotions can affect these specific measures and your body's responses



Get serious about relaxation exercises^{1,2}

This might sound like a contradiction but getting good at relaxation might take some efforts. Keep these tips in mind as you find a relaxation technique that works best for you.

- **Learn** - You can do some more research about the practices described in this article. Look for local classes, books, online videos, or smartphone apps.
- **Practice** - The more you practice relaxation techniques, the more likely you are to benefit from them. Long-term and consistent use of these practices is more effective than short-term or occasional use.
- **Experiment** - In addition to the techniques described in this article, there are many other ways you can learn to relax. Be open to trying different approaches. In time, you will find the technique—or combination of techniques—that works best for you.⁴

References

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