

RELAXATION TRAINING

Jeffrey L. Samelson, Ph.D.

Relaxation Training will help you in many ways. By assisting you in dealing with anxiety and tension, it will help you feel more comfortable in general and it will help you sleep better. Anxiety can have a disruptive effect on all but the most simple, repetitive tasks and learning to control anxiety may enhance your performance of complex tasks. This procedure is deceptively simple and consists of systematically learning to progressively relax various sets of muscles.

In its most basic form, relaxation training consists of nothing more than tensing and relaxing pairs of muscles, moving from the hands and arms, to the neck and shoulders, facial muscles and the rest of the body. You will get deeply relaxed and the technique is almost 100% effective. Once you have mastered the technique, you might want to experiment with making self-suggestions. These should consist of simple, repetitive statements or affirmations you can say to yourself when in a deeply relaxed state. You will be more receptive to such ideas or self-statements when you are deeply relaxed.

You will become better able to distinguish between tension and relaxation. You must become aware of tension in order to let go of it. Many people carry tension in their bodies without even knowing it, accumulating it during the day. It is almost as if we convert situational stress into physical tension. Having unnecessary tension in your muscles is a waste of energy and it is difficult to be relaxed psychologically when your body is tense. Conversely, it is almost impossible to feel nervous, anxious or irritable when your body is completely relaxed. As a result of becoming more aware of tension and learning to let go of it, you will feel more energetic, more calm and less drained. Relaxation training has other benefits. Anxiety can interfere with concentration. In addition to reducing the distracting effects of anxiety, Relaxation Training will give you practice focusing your attention, while excluding other thoughts.

Typically, I encourage people to practice Relaxation Training twice a day, once with this recording and once just mentally reviewing the instructions for memory. After practicing for awhile (two weeks or so), you may be able to do whole groups of muscles at once, rather than

RELAXATION TRAINING

Jeffrey L. Samelson, Ph.D.

page 2

just one pair at a time. You might tense your hands and arms, neck and shoulders and facial muscles all at once. After that, you might tense and relax the rest of your muscles and get totally relaxed in just a matter of moments. Toward the end of the tape, it is suggested that you bring to mind some peaceful, soothing scene. The more vividly you are able to picture the scene, the more relaxed you will become. Some people get so good at this technique that all they have to do is bring this scene to mind, take a deep breath and as they exhale, say the word "calm" to themselves and in a matter of seconds, it's like someone pulled the plug and all the tension drains out. On a moment-to-moment basis you'll be able to scan your body for tension and then just sweep it out..

The ability to distinguish between tension and relaxation is important. It will allow you to monitor your tension level in an ongoing way. If you can catch it at lower levels, it is easier to control. If you let your tension level get too high, there may be little you can do about it. It is important to practice the training even if you are not tense so that you will know how to do it when you are tense. Relaxation Training is an essential component in treating many problems: phobias, sleep problems, headaches and chronic pain, addictions, anger control and other types of impulse control problems. For sleep, you may have to go through the exercises a second or third time, but if you take the time to practice, you will get relaxed enough to fall asleep and your sleep should be deeper and more restful. If you awaken during the night, you can use the exercises to fall back asleep more quickly.

When you practice the exercises, be sure to select a time and place that will minimize interruptions or distractions. Frequent and regular practice is the key to success. The effects are cumulative. The more you practice, the better you will get at this valuable skill. The time you invest will result in valuable rewards.

(Note: If you have high blood pressure, you may want to only squeeze gently, particularly when holding your breath. If you have TMJ, you may want to refrain from clenching your teeth when tensing facial muscles. Also, don't listen to this recording while driving your car!)