

Learn to Relax

There are different ways in which you can learn to relax. Some methods will take you through a series of physical exercises to tense and then relax each of the large muscle groups in your body. Others will teach you to imagine relaxing pictures in your mind, and these calming images will help you to feel more pleasant. It is important to remember the following points.

- There is no **one way** of relaxing.
- People find **different methods** useful at different times.
- It is important to **find what works for you**.

Physical relaxation

This method usually takes about 10 minutes and is very useful if you feel constantly tense or wound up. Using a series of short exercises, all of the major muscle groups in your body are tensed for about 5 seconds and then relaxed.

Concentrate on what the muscles feel like when they are tensed and what they feel like when they are relaxed. You will find that some parts of your body will be more tense than others, so try to find the very tense areas.

By the end of the session you should feel completely relaxed, so enjoy this pleasant feeling. A number of people like to do these exercises before they go to bed. It does not matter if you fall asleep. Like everything else, the more you practice the better and faster you will become at relaxing.

There are various tapes which you can buy that will teach you how to relax. Choose one you like and find restful. If you can't find one, then try the following exercises. Before you start, remember the following points.

- Choose somewhere warm and quiet.
- Sit in a comfortable chair or lie on your bed.
- Choose a time when you will not be interrupted.
- Tense your muscles just enough to notice what it feels like. Don't overdo it.
- Tense your muscles for about 3-5 seconds.
- Tense each muscle group twice.
- After you have tensed a muscle, try not to move it again.

Quick relaxation exercises

Arms and hands: Clench your fists and push your arms straight out in front of you.

Legs and fists: Push your toes downward, gently raise your legs, and stretch them out in front of you.

Stomach: Push out your tummy muscles, take a breath and hold it.

Shoulders: Scrunch up your shoulders.

Neck: Push your head back against the chair or bed.

Face: Scrunch up your face, squeeze your eyes tight and push your lips together.

Controlled breathing

There are times when you may suddenly start to become tense or angry, and on these occasions you won't have time to go through the relaxation exercises.

Controlled breathing is a quick method in which you concentrate and gain control of your breathing. You can use this method anywhere, and often people don't even notice what you are doing!

Slowly draw in a deep breath, hold it for 5 seconds and then very slowly let it out. As you breathe, say to yourself 'relax'. Doing this a few times will help you to regain control of your body and help you to feel calmer.