

Relaxation

Physiotherapy Department

Patient Information Leaflet

Introduction

What is Relaxation?

Relaxation strategies are techniques to help calm the mind and relax the body. This can allow your muscles and joints to move more easily. The aim of relaxation is to reduce the stress response in the body, known as the 'fight-or-flight' response.

What are the benefits of relaxation?

Relaxation techniques can help manage chronic pain conditions when used together with other self-management tools such as pacing and exercise. Relaxation can help to break the cycle of stress, fatigue and pain. It can reduce painful muscle tension and increase energy levels. It can help to lower the heart rate and blood pressure. It may also help to improve sleep quality.

Relaxation Methods

Basic breath awareness

- Also called diaphragmatic breathing.
- Sit or lie comfortably, place a palm on your abdomen and breathe comfortably for a few moments, noticing the quality of your breath.
- Does the breath feel tense, strained, uneven and/or shallow?
- Simply observe the breath, without any judgement.
- Then gradually begin to make your breathing as relaxed and smooth as possible, introducing a slight pause after each in-breath and out-breath.
- Notice as you inhale (breathe in), that the abdomen naturally expands, and as you exhale (breathe out), the abdomen contracts slightly.
- Continue the breathing exercise for 6 to 12 breaths.

Deep breathing exercises

To help check that you are breathing correctly:

- Place one hand on your stomach
- Place the other hand on your chest

As you breathe in, the hand on your stomach should rise. As you breathe out your stomach should fall. The hand on your chest should move very little. Once you can do this comfortably:

- Sit quietly with your eyes closed
- Breathe in for the count of four
- Hold your breath for the count of four
- Breathe out slowly for the count of four, sighing as you do so
- Repeat for a few minutes.

Self-massage

Try this self-massage technique to reduce tension in the face. Sitting back in your chair, or with your elbows resting on a table:

- Stroke your forehead upwards into the hairline with alternate hands
- Using the fingertips gently smooth forehead from centre towards the temples, and with circular movements apply a little pressure
- Massage jawline using circular movements with your fingertips
- Massage shoulders and neck with both hands

Five minute relaxation in a chair

This technique will help you learn to recognise tension throughout your body and how to release it by tensing and relaxing each of the major muscle groups. To help you learn this technique you could ask someone to read the instructions out slowly and calmly for you to follow; or you could make your own recording by reading the instructions out loud.

If possible use a chair with arms. Sit upright in the chair with the small of your back supported by the back of the chair (use a cushion for support if it helps). Make sure your feet are flat on the floor and rest your hands in your lap.

- Close your eyes
- Concentrate on the sound of your breathing. Do not alter your breathing pattern; just breathe normally for a few minutes.
- Breathe out with a “sigh” for two breaths, letting any tense feelings out of your body as you sigh.
- Now, using the instructions in the table, go through each of the muscle groups, tensing them for a few seconds, then relaxing them.
- Breathe out with a “sigh” for two more breaths, letting out any remaining tension.

Muscle Group	Tensing Action
Feet & Legs	Push both your feet down into the floor, then let go
Stomach	Pull your stomach muscles in, then let go
Arms	With hands flat on your thighs, push down; then let go
Shoulders	Hunch your shoulders up to your ears, then let go
Forehead	Frown, then let go
Eyes	Screw your eyes up. Make sure your teeth are not clenched. Your tongue should lie loosely, not pushed up against the roof of your mouth. Then let go.

Autogenic relaxation

This technique involves imagining that your limbs are warm and heavy, that your body is relaxed and your mind is calm. It can be helpful to listen to a recorded script describing how to do this. There is an example of this in the free resources below.

Guided Imagery

This involves focusing your mind on positive images or imagined scenes to help you relax. It includes following along with a description of a peaceful place or calming scene. Pre-recorded examples are available on many free applications for your smartphone or tablet. It is often possible to access CD resources via your library.

How long should I spend doing relaxation?

Depending on your routine and circumstances you may spend as little as a minute or as long as half an hour doing relaxation. You may choose just one of the above suggestions or several in one session. If you struggle to find time, a little time spent doing just one of the above exercises is better than no relaxation at all. Regularity is the key. Try to find something you feel is achievable and enjoyable for you. If possible try to choose a time when you will not be interrupted or feel rushed. Try to do something at least two or three times each week. Some people prefer to spend a minute every day.

Free Resources

Road to relaxation – a guide to relaxation, includes breathing exercises

<http://www.dudley.gov.uk/health/office-of-public-health/looking-after-yourself/mental-health-and-wellbeing/>

Autogenic relaxation script with audio

<https://www.nhs.uk/Video/Pages/anxiety-control-training-podcast.aspx?searchtype=Search&searchterm=relaxation&offset=1&>

Breathing exercises

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/ways-relieve-stress/>

Note: Some of these resources have been designed for relieving stress and anxiety. However they may still be used to assist with the management of pain, even if you do not suffer from stress or anxiety.

If you have any questions, or if there is anything you do not understand about this leaflet, please contact:

[Department details here](#)

Russells Hall Hospital switchboard number: 01384 456111

This leaflet can be downloaded or printed from:

<http://dudleygroup.nhs.uk/services-and-wards/>

If you have any feedback on this patient information leaflet, please email dgft.patient.information@nhs.net

This leaflet can be made available in large print, audio version and in other languages, please call 0800 073 0510.

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Ulotka dostępna jest również w dużym druku, wersji audio lub w innym języku. W tym celu zadzwoń pod numer 0800 073 0510.

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Aceasta broșura poate fi pusă la dispoziție tipărită cu caractere mari, versiune audio sau în alte limbi, pentru acest lucru vă rugăm sunați la 0800 073 0510.

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