

RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

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Deep Breathing Exercise:

1. Sit comfortably, with your feet flat on the floor and your back supported. Place one hand on your abdomen and the other on your chest.
2. Inhale, slowly and deeply through your nose, drawing air down into your abdomen first and then allowing it to fill your chest. (You should notice the hand on your abdomen rising first, then the one on your chest.)
3. Exhale very slowly through your mouth, making a soft whooshing sound like the wind as you blow gently out.
4. Take several long, slow, deep breaths that raise and lower your abdomen. Focus on the sound and feeling of your breath as you become more and more relaxed.
5. Try holding your breath for a few seconds at the end of each inhalation; focus on emptying your lungs completely with each exhalation.
6. Continue breathing this way for several minutes.

After you have practiced deep breathing for a few days, you will find you can do it without needing to place your hands on your abdomen or chest. Then you are ready to practice deep breathing when you're stuck in traffic!

Stretching Exercises:

Shoulder shrug

Draw a big circle with your shoulders by slowly rolling them up toward your ears, then forward, down, and back. Repeat a few times, then reverse the direction of the roll and repeat. Squeeze the shoulder blades together, hold, and release.

Half circle neck roll

With your back straight and shoulders relaxed, pull your chin down toward your chest, then turn to the right as if you're looking at something sitting on your shoulder. Keeping your chin tucked, turn back to the center, and then toward your left shoulder. Repeat several times.

Shoulder and arm stretch

Reach your hands up over your head, and stretch toward the ceiling. Alternate reaching with your right arm, then your left. Then put your hands together, inter-lacing the fingers, and reach up again. Hold for 30 seconds, then relax. Repeat several times.

(continued on back)

RELAXATION TECHNIQUES, continued

Clearing Your Mind Exercise:

1. Sit comfortably (feet on the floor, back supported) in a quiet environment.
2. Select a simple or favorite object to focus on (e.g. a vase of flowers, a candle, a smooth stone, a leaf).
3. Look at the object carefully. Gaze rather than stare at the object for a minute, keeping your eyes soft and relaxed. Breathe deeply.
4. Close your eyes (don't do this exercise while driving!) and picture the object in your mind. Imagine you are turning over the object in your mind, gazing at it from every angle.
5. Keep your mind's eye on your object. If other thoughts enter your mind, gently push them away and return your focus to the object.
6. Remember to keep breathing deeply during this exercise.

Another way to use the Clearing Your Mind exercise is to focus on a word that you find relaxing or soothing, e.g. "Home", "Warm" or "Calm".

Progressive Relaxation Exercise:

1. Sit comfortably (feet on the floor, back supported) or lie down in a quiet location.
2. Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Imagine tension flowing out of your body with each breath.
3. Now contract the muscles of your feet as you inhale. Hold the contraction briefly, then relax as you slowly breathe out. Imagine the tension flowing out with the breath.
4. Move up your body, contracting in turn the muscles of the lower legs, upper legs, and so on through all of the muscle groups. End with your face, including the muscles of your mouth, jaw, eyes and scalp.
5. If a muscle seems particularly tense, repeat the contraction and release.
6. When you have finished going through the body, allow yourself to sit or lie still for a few minutes and just experience your relaxed muscles. Continue breathing slowly and deeply.
7. When you are ready, count backward from four to one. You may feel a bit groggy at first, but in a few minutes you will feel awake and refreshed.

Done regularly, this exercise not only relaxes you, it also trains your body to recognize and reduce muscle tension. You can do a mini-progressive relaxation on the muscles you use in your work, such as the neck, shoulders and lower back if you sit all day, or feet and ankles if you're on your feet a lot.