



Health & Wellness

Relaxation Techniques for Stress Relief

In addition to its calming physical effects, research shows that relaxation increases energy and focus, combats illness, relieves aches and pains, heightens problem-solving abilities, and boosts motivation and productivity. Best of all— with a little practice— anyone can reap these benefits.

Stress: you can't avoid it, but you can counteract its negative effects by learning how to relax.

When practiced regularly, these activities lead to a reduction in everyday stress levels and generate a boost in feelings of joy and serenity. What's more, they also teach you how to stay calm and collected in the face of life's curveballs.

When stress occurs, your body floods with chemicals that prepare you to "fight or flight." While the stress response is helpful in true emergency situations where you must be alert, it wears your body down when it's constantly activated.

Relaxing brings your body back into balance.

As you deepen your breathing, you are reducing your stress hormones, slowing down your heart rate and blood pressure, and relaxing your muscles.

Let's start learning how to relax.

A variety of techniques can help you achieve relaxation. Those whose stress-busting benefits have been widely studied include deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, meditation, visualization, yoga and tai chi.

Learning the basics of these relaxation techniques isn't difficult. Set aside at least 10 to 20 minutes a day for your relaxation practice. If you'd like to get even more stress relief, aim for 30 minutes to an hour.

Get the most out of your relaxation practice:

- **Set aside time in your daily schedule.**

The best way to start and maintain a relaxation practice is by incorporating it into your daily routine. Schedule a set time once or twice a day. You may find that it's easier to stick with your practice if you do it first thing in the morning, before other tasks and responsibilities get in the way.

- **Don't practice when you're sleepy.**

These techniques can relax you so much that they can make you very sleepy, especially if it's close to bedtime. You will get the most out of these techniques if you practice when you're fully awake and alert.

- **Choose a technique that appeals to you.** There is no single relaxation technique that is best. When choosing a relaxation technique, consider your specific needs, preferences and fitness level. The right relaxation technique is the one that resonates with you and fits your lifestyle.

- **Do you need alone time or social stimulation?** If you crave solitude, solo relaxation techniques such as meditation or progressive muscle relaxation will help you quiet your mind and recharge your batteries. If you crave social interaction, a class setting will give you the stimulation and support you're looking for. Practicing with others may also help you stay motivated.

Relaxation Techniques

Deep Breathing

With its focus on full, cleansing breaths, deep breathing is a simple, yet powerful, relaxation technique. It's easy to learn, can be practiced almost anywhere, and provides a quick way to get your stress levels in check. Deep breathing is the cornerstone of many other relaxation practices, too, and can be combined with other relaxing elements such as aromatherapy and music. All you really need is a few minutes and a place to stretch out.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive muscle relaxation is another effective and widely used strategy for stress relief. It involves a two-step process in which you systematically tense and relax different muscle groups in the body.

Mindfulness Meditation

Meditation that cultivates mindfulness is particularly effective at reducing stress, anxiety, depression, and other negative emotions. Mindfulness is the quality of being fully engaged in the present moment, without analyzing or otherwise "over-thinking" the experience. Rather than worrying about the future or dwelling on the past, mindfulness meditation switches the focus to what's happening right now.

Guided Imagery

Visualization, or guided imagery, is a variation on traditional meditation that can help relieve stress. When used as a relaxation technique, guided imagery involves imagining a scene in which you feel at peace, free to let go of all tension and anxiety. Choose whatever setting is most calming to you, whether a tropical beach, a favorite childhood spot or a quiet wooded glen. You can do this visualization exercise on your own, with a therapist's help or using an audio recording.

Yoga

Yoga is an excellent stress relief technique. It involves a series of both moving and stationary poses, combined with deep breathing. The physical and mental benefits of yoga provide a natural counterbalance to stress, and strengthen the relaxation response in your daily life.

Tai Chi

If you've ever seen a group of people in the park slowly moving in sync, you've probably seen a bit of tai chi. Tai chi is a self-paced, non-competitive series of slow, flowing body movements. These movements emphasize concentration, relaxation and the conscious circulation of vital energy throughout the body. Though tai chi has its roots in martial arts, today it is primarily practiced as a way of calming the mind, conditioning the body and reducing stress. As in meditation, tai chi practitioners focus on their breathing and keeping their attention in the present moment.

Massage Therapy

Getting a massage provides deep relaxation, and as the muscles in your body relax, so does your overstressed mind. And you don't have to visit the spa to enjoy the benefits of massage. There are many simple self-massage techniques you can use to relax and release stress.

To learn more about each of these techniques, please visit your Health & Wellness Department.



Techniques to help you reduce stress levels and relax:

• Deep Breathing

• Progressive Muscle Relaxation

• Mindfulness Meditation

• Guided Imagery

• Yoga

• Tai Chi

• Massage Therapy