

## Why it's important to use relaxation techniques when we are suffering from anxiety.

Relaxation and breathing techniques are the foundation building blocks to start recovery. When we have been anxious for a long period of time the body gets used to being anxious and tense. What happens to the body when this happens? Tension gives the message of fear, that something awful is about to happen. This alerts the Autonomic Nervous System that imminent danger or a threat is about to happen.

The Autonomic Nervous System, which looks after the body's involuntary functions, for example the heart rate, blood pressure and digestion, when anxious are affected too. This system is divided into two parts, the first is the sympathetic part, which is on alert to get the body ready if we were in danger and the parasympathetic part restores order when the danger has past and the body calms down and relaxes. When we are anxious we over breathe or may Hyperventilate (taking too much air through the chest). However when the body becomes short of carbon dioxide, which happens when we over breathe, the sympathetic part of the nervous system goes on red alert. The body is ready to start the 'fight and flight' response which is our body's way to help us survive. When anxious we often misinterpret things by seeing danger or a threat in perfectly safe situations. For example if we are afraid to go out, afraid to fly, meet people at social functions, go for a meal or shop at the supermarket. None of these situations are dangerous are they but our body is acting as if they are. One reason is that our negative thoughts have given the body the message that there is something to fear and our nervous system has responded.

Why does relaxation help us? It helps by calming the body down, helping us to think more rationally, relaxes our muscles, switches off the nervous system, stops the production of stress hormones (as an example Adrenalin) and proves we are not in danger.

If we have been anxious for awhile the relaxation should be practiced regularly to help the body to get used to being relaxed.

### Deep Muscular Relaxation Technique

(This is a guided muscle relaxation video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ihO02wUzgkc> )

Many people confuse relaxation with recreation and thus it is necessary for anxiety disorder sufferers to learn to relax correctly by the elimination of all muscular tension and stress. This is not achieved by just "putting your feet up" but by learning proper muscle relaxation and then practicing it regularly. It should not only be used when a sufferer feels panicky or stressed out but should become a regular part of everyday life as a prevention mechanism.

Relaxation is the exact opposite of tension which means, that if you practice relaxation on a regular basis, many of your symptoms of nervous tension will disappear. After a fair amount of practice in relaxation, you should have no difficulty in falling asleep and your sleep will be deeper and more restful. You will also find that you have more energy for work and play. There should be an improvement in your concentration and mental alertness. Deep relaxation is a skill which is not learned in a day – the more you practice the sooner you will feel the benefits.

Do not expect to be able to relax properly at the first attempt. Like any other skill it takes time and practice to learn.

This programme is designed so that, by learning the difference between tension and relaxation of the muscles, during the programme, you will be able to notice when you are getting tense or anxious in everyday situations and you will then have the ability to get rid of the tension and anxiety by relaxing the appropriate muscles there and then.

It is important that you learn to use this method in your everyday life. To do this, you need to learn to carry out “differential” relaxation. This means having the ability to relax any particular group of muscles at any one time. It is therefore essential that you learn these exercises off by heart so that, wherever you are, you can notice tension arising and take immediate action to remove it. For example, you can relax your arm muscles whilst walking along the road and you can relax your leg muscles whilst sitting on a bus.

When you practice deep relaxation, it is important to be in a quiet, warm place where you will not be disturbed, have your clothing loose, be either sitting or lying down, your arms by your sides and your legs uncrossed.

You are now ready to begin the programme. Do not try too hard as this can bring on tension but allow the relaxation to just happen without forcing it. In the beginning some people try too hard and consequently they get more tense and panicky. This is perfectly normal and will pass as your body becomes accustomed to being properly relaxed. Follow the instructions but take things slowly.

You should practice this relaxation programme at least twice a day until you know it off by heart and are able to relax any set of muscles at any time.

Try to keep your mind focused on the word relax. Keep your breathing regular, shallow and relaxed. Don't hold your breath and, notice how as you breathe out, you relax a little more. Keep your eyes closed. Breathe in and out through your nose and each time you breathe out relax a little more. Keep concentrating on the word relax.

The following exercises demonstrate the difference between tension and relaxation.

### **1. The muscles in your hands and forearms:**

You tense these muscles by clenching your fists as tightly as you can.

Start now and count steadily to ten, notice the tension.

Relax your fists.

Notice the difference between tension and relaxation in your hands and forearms.

Keep focusing on the word relax.

## **2. The muscles in your upper arms:**

You tense these muscles by bending your arms at the elbows and trying to touch your wrists to your shoulders.

Start now and count steadily to ten, notice the tension.

Relax your arms.

Notice the difference between tension and relaxation in your upper arms.

Keep focusing on the word relax.

## **3. The muscles in the back of your arms:**

You tense these muscles by straightening your arms as hard as you can.

Start now and count steadily to ten, notice the tension.

Relax your arms.

Notice the difference between tension and relaxation in the back of your arms.

Keep focusing on the word relax.

## **4. The muscles in your shoulders:**

You tense these muscles by shrugging your shoulders tightly into your neck.

Start now and count steadily to ten, notice the tension.

Relax your shoulders.

Notice the difference between tension and relaxation in your shoulders.

Keep focusing on the word relax.

## **5. The muscles in your neck:**

You tense these muscles by pressing your head back as far as you can.

Start now and count steadily to ten, notice the tension.

Relax your neck.

Notice the difference between tension and relaxation in your neck.

Keep focusing on the word relax.

## **6. The muscles in your forehead:**

You tense these muscles by raising your eyebrows as though enquiring.

Start now and count steadily to ten, notice the tension.

Relax your eyebrows.

Notice the difference between tension and relaxation in your forehead.

Keep focusing on the word relax.

## **7. The muscles in your brows and eyelids:**

You tense these muscles by frowning and squeezing your eyes tightly shut.

Start now and count steadily to ten, notice the tension.

Relax your brows and eyelids.

Notice the difference between tension and relaxation in your brows and eyelids.

Keep focusing on the word relax.

## **8. The muscles in your jaw:**

You tense these muscles by clenching your teeth as hard as you can.

Start now and count steadily to ten, notice the tension.

Relax your jaw.

Notice the difference between tension and relaxation in your jaw.

Keep focusing on the word relax.

### **9. The muscles in your tongue and throat:**

You tense these muscles by pushing your tongue against the roof of your mouth.

Start now and count steadily to ten, notice the tension.

Relax your tongue.

Notice the difference between tension and relaxation in your tongue and throat.

Keep focusing on the word relax.

### **10. The muscles in your lips and face:**

You tense these muscles by pressing your lips together tightly.

Start now and count steadily to ten, notice the tension.

Relax your lips.

Notice the difference between tension and relaxation in your lips and face.

Keep focusing on the word relax.

### **11. The muscles in your chest:**

You tense these muscles by taking a deep breath and holding it

Start now and count steadily to ten, notice the tension.

Relax your chest by breathing out.

Notice the difference between tension and relaxation in your chest.

Keep focusing on the word relax.

## **12. The muscles in your stomach**

You tense these muscles by making your stomach muscles hard as though expecting a punch.

Start now and count steadily to ten, notice the tension.

Relax your stomach.

Notice the difference between tension and relaxation in your stomach.

Keep focusing on the word relax.

## **13. The muscles in your hips and lower back:**

You tense these muscles by arching your back and clenching your buttocks.

Start now and count steadily to ten, notice the tension.

Relax your hips and lower back.

Notice the difference between tension and relaxation in your hips and lower back.

Keep focusing on the word relax.

## **14. The muscles in your legs and feet:**

You tense these muscles by straightening your legs and pointing your toes down.

Start now and count steadily to ten, notice the tension.

Relax your legs and feet.

Notice the difference between tension and relaxation in your legs and feet.

Keep focusing on the word relax.

Now completely relax for 10-15 minutes and let the feeling of relaxation spread throughout the whole of your body. Keep focusing on the word relax and enjoy that feeling of deep relaxation. Try and return to your daily activities keeping the body as relaxed as you can