



Relaxation techniques for stress relief

A variety of different relaxation techniques can help you bring your nervous system back into balance by producing the relaxation response. The relaxation response is not lying on the couch or sleeping but a mentally active process that leaves the body relaxed, calm, and focused.

Learning the basics of relaxation techniques isn't difficult, but it does take practice. Most stress experts recommend setting 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. If that sounds like a daunting commitment, remember that many of these techniques can be incorporated into your existing daily schedule—practiced at your desk over lunch or on the bus during your morning commute.

Relaxation technique 1: Breathing meditation for stress relief

Sit comfortably with your back straight. Put one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach. Breathe in through your nose. The hand on your stomach should rise. The hand on your chest should move very little. Exhale through your mouth, pushing out as much air as you can while contracting your abdominal muscles. The hand on your stomach should move in as you exhale, but your other hand should move very little. Continue to breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Try to inhale enough so that your lower abdomen rises and falls. Count slowly as you exhale.

Relaxation technique 2: Rhythmic movement for stress relief

Loosen your clothing, take off your shoes, and get comfortable. Take a few minutes to relax, breathing in and out in slow, deep breaths. When you're relaxed and ready to start, shift your attention to your right foot. Take a moment to focus on the way it feels. Slowly tense the muscles in your right foot, squeezing as tightly as you can. Hold for a count of 10. Relax your right foot. Focus on the tension flowing away and the way your foot feels as it becomes limp and loose. Stay in this relaxed state for a moment, breathing deeply and slowly. When you're ready, shift your attention to your left foot. Follow the same sequence of muscle tension and release. Move slowly up through your body, contracting and relaxing the muscle groups as you go. It may take some practice at first, but try not to tense muscles other than those intended.

Relaxation technique 3: Body scan meditation for stress relief

Lie on your back, legs uncrossed, arms relaxed at your sides, eyes open or closed. Focus on your breathing, allowing your stomach to rise as you inhale and fall as you exhale. Breathe deeply for about two minutes, until you start to feel comfortable and relaxed. Turn your focus to the toes of your right foot. Notice any sensations you feel while continuing to also focus on your breathing. Imagine each deep breath flowing to your toes. Remain focused on this area for one to two minutes. Move your focus to the sole of your right foot. Tune in to any sensations you feel in that part of your body and imagine each breath flowing from the sole of your foot. After one or two minutes, move your focus to your right ankle and repeat. Move to your calf, knee, thigh, hip, and then repeat the sequence for your left leg. From there, move up the torso, through the lower back and abdomen, the upper back and chest, and the shoulders. Pay close attention to any area of the body that causes you pain or discomfort. Continue to move your focus around the body. After completing the body scan, relax for a while in silence and stillness, noting how your body feels. Then open your eyes slowly. Take a moment to stretch, if necessary.

Relaxation technique 4: Mindful meditation for stress relief

Mindfulness meditation, in particular, has become more popular in recent years. The practice involves sitting comfortably, focusing on your breathing, and then bringing your mind's attention to the present without drifting into concerns about the past or future.

Relaxation technique 5: Visualization meditation for stress relief

Find a quiet, relaxed place. Beginners sometimes fall asleep during a visualization meditation, so you might try sitting up. Close your eyes and let your worries drift away. Imagine your restful place. Picture it as vividly as you can—everything you can see, hear, smell, taste, and feel. Visualization works best if you incorporate as many sensory details as possible, using at least three of your senses. When visualizing, choose imagery that appeals to you; don't select images because you think they should be appealing. Let your own images come up and work for you.

Relaxation technique 6: Yoga and tai chi for stress relief

Yoga involves a series of both moving and stationary poses, combined with deep breathing. As well as reducing anxiety and stress, yoga can also improve flexibility, strength, balance, and stamina. Practiced regularly, it can also strengthen the relaxation response in your daily life. Since injuries can happen when yoga is practiced incorrectly, it's best to learn by attending group classes, hiring a private teacher, or at least following video instructions.

Relaxation technique 7: Massage therapy for stress relief

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.

Source: Help Guide

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