



Brief Relaxation Techniques

This is a list of some brief relaxation exercises that you may wish to employ anytime during your day, in between classes, before exams, while studying, before a presentation or speech, or prior to a big date or an appointment.

General Directions: For all of these exercises, it is best to be seated, eyes closed, feet flat on the floor or crossed at the ankles, and hands resting comfortably in the lap. Begin each exercise with a deep breath that you let out gently. As you let it out, feel yourself beginning to relax already.

Gentle Arousal: After the exercise, slowly and gently activate by breathing a little more deeply, wiggling your fingers and toes, and opening your eyes at your own rate.

Tense-Relax

(General directions first). Clench your fists. While keeping them clenched, pull your forearms tightly up against your upper arms. While keeping those muscles tense, tense all the muscles in your legs. While keeping all those tense, clench your jaws and shut your eyes fairly tight...not too tightly. Now while holding all those tense, take a deep breath and hold it for 5 seconds...Then, let everything go all at once. Feel yourself letting go of all your tensions. Just enjoy that feeling for a minute as your muscles let go more and more. If we had a finely-tuned electromyography hooked up to you measuring the level of tension in your muscles, it would show that you relax more and more for up to 20 minutes. Just enjoy focusing, gently, on letting go (Gentle arousal).

Heaviness & Warmth

(General directions first). Just imagine that your feet and legs are getting heavier and heavier and warmer and warmer. It's almost as if you are wearing some lead boots. Feet and legs heavy and warm, heavy and warm. Now, imagine your stomach and the whole central portion of your body getting warm...warm and relaxed. Your forehead is cool...cool...relaxed and cool. And your breathing is regular...easy and regular. Just feel the warmth and heaviness spread all over the body (Gentle arousal).

Breathing Your Body Away

(General directions first). Gently focus your attention on your feet and legs. Be aware of all the sensations from your feet and legs. Now, inhale and long, slow breath, and as you do, breathe in all the sensations from your feet and legs. In your mind's eye, imagine that you are erasing this part of your body, so that in your mind, you can see only from your hips up. Now, with another long breath, breathe in all the parts of your body to your neck, and as you exhale, breathe it away...Now, beginning with your fingers, breathe in your fingers, hands, wrists, and arms, and exhale them away...Now, your neck and head...as you breathe in, imagine your neck and head being erased and now breathe them away. Let's go back over the whole body in one breath, beginning with the feet. A long slow breath in, and as you do, erase any little parts that still remain. Now, let out a long slow breath as you exhale all the remaining parts. Just sit quietly for a minute and enjoy feeling yourself relax deeper and deeper (Gentle arousal).

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(continued)

A Favorite Scene, Place, or Person

(General directions first). As you're sitting quietly, recall in your mind the most relaxing thought you can. Perhaps it's a favorite place, a vacation spot, or a favorite retreat of some sort; or it might be a person with whom you feel at peace, or some scene—a meadow, or whatever works for you. Take a few seconds to get that in mind...Now, see or imagine that in your mind. Be sure to feel those good feelings you have when you are in that place. Just let them take over your whole awareness...If your thoughts wander, just take them gently back to that peaceful, relaxing place (Gentle arousal).

Ideal Relaxation

(General directions first). With your eyes closed, take a moment to create in your mind's eye, an ideal spot for relaxation. You can make it any place real or imagined and furnish it any way you want. Wear the clothes you are most comfortable in. Enjoy going there. You'll want to feel at ease and mellow as you lounge in your ideal place for relaxation. Just enjoy it for a minute...(Gentle arousal).

Cool Air In, Warm Air Out

(General directions first). With your eyes closed and while relaxing quietly, gently focus on the end of your nose. As you breathe in, feel the air coming in the tip of your nose. As you breathe out, feel the air coming out the tip of your nose...Notice that the air coming in is cooler than the air going out...Gently focus on the cool air coming in, and the warm air going out. As your attention wanders, just gently bring it back to the tip of your nose...(Gentle arousal).

Focus on a Word

(General directions first). Pick a word which has "good" vibrations associated with it for you—a word which you associate with relaxation, comfort, peace. It could be a word such as "serenity" or "cool, peaceful, joy, free," etc...Now, just let that word hold the center of your thoughts, gently bring it back to that word...After a while, perhaps your mind will drift to other gentle, restful thoughts. If so, just let it wander...When it does drift to stressful thoughts, move back to your original word (Gentle arousal).

Something For Use Anywhere

(General directions first). With practice, you will become more adept at relaxing, while awake, anywhere. As you do, here's a way to let yourself relax while going about your day. You can do it while walking, sitting in class, taking a test, on a date, etc. First, smile. Yes, smile to remind yourself that you don't actually have all the cares in the world on your shoulder—only a few of them. Then, take a long deep breath, and let it out. Now, take a second long deep breath, and as you let it out, feel yourself releasing the tensions in your mind and in your body. Just let yourself relax more and more, as you continue whatever you were doing (Gentle arousal).