

Relax Your Way to a Stress-Free Day

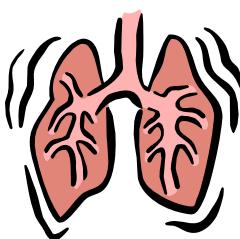
3 Relaxation Techniques for Managing Stress

We know that stress can actually be good for you when it's balanced by periods of relaxation. But the fact of the matter is that many of us struggle with relaxing. The following techniques can help you learn to relax and lessen the adverse effects of stress.

Deep Muscle Relaxation

One of the most common reactions to stress is muscle tension. Deep muscle relaxation helps you to relax your entire body from head to toe by first tensing, then relaxing various muscle groups. The whole process takes about 15 minutes and can be done almost anywhere. First, sit (or lie down) and close your eyes. Then, tense your facial muscles (purse your lips, squeeze your forehead, etc.); hold for 5 seconds then relax. Now move on to the neck and shoulders, tense, hold, relax. Keep on doing this for all the major muscle groups- arms, back, abdominals, hips, legs, and feet. By the time you're done, your muscle tension will have drained away and you'll feel revived and refreshed.

Breathing Deeply



Another reaction to stress is shallow, rapid breathing. Deep, slow breathing can actually interrupt your stress response and help you to relax. First, clear the "stale" air from your lungs by exhaling slowly (through your mouth) until your lungs feel completely empty. Then, inhale (through your nose) until you begin to feel your abdomen rise. Hold for 5 seconds, then exhale and begin the cycle again.

Repeat this exercise 4-5 times whenever you feel tense. Deep, abdominal breathing takes only a few seconds and can be done *anywhere!* So, when you find yourself tense and irritable, stop and take a breather.

The Power of Suggestion

Another technique for relieving stress is autogenic (or self-regulating) suggestion. With this technique, you tell yourself how you want to feel. When you are stressed, sit down, close your eyes, and give yourself calming mental suggestions such as, "My arms are light and airy, I am calm and peaceful," and so on. You can focus any and all parts of your body that feel tense. By putting your mind to it, you can talk yourself into a more relaxed, tranquil frame of mind.



Relax and Enjoy Your Life

These are just a few of the many ways you can help yourself relax and relieve stress for a more enjoyable lifestyle. The important thing to remember is that it's not so much how you relax that counts, but that you take the time to relax. Relaxation is one of the nicest things you can do for one of the nicest people you know- you.



Adapted from 1987 Parlay International "Relax Your Way to a Stress-Free Day"

