



## Relaxation Training

When we are physically relaxed, mental relaxation follows, and when we are mentally relaxed, physical relaxation follows. Relaxation training can alleviate anxiety because it is difficult for the body or mind to be simultaneously relaxed and anxious.

### *Progressive Muscle Relaxation*

Progressive muscle relaxation is a technique in which the major muscle groups in the body are alternately tensed and relaxed. The process can proceed from the head to the feet or from the feet to the head. Progressive muscle relaxation can lead to deep levels of physical and mental relaxation. One tenses and relaxes the muscles in the forehead, eyes, jaws, neck, shoulders, upper back, biceps, forearms, hands, abdomen, groin, legs, hips, thighs, buttocks, calves and feet. Each muscle group is tensed for 5 seconds and then relaxed for 10 - 15 seconds, tensed for 5 seconds, relaxed for 10 - 15 seconds.

Different people carry muscle tension in different parts of their bodies, so the particular areas that need emphasis vary from person to person. Most people report increased levels of relaxation and decreased levels of physical tension and anxiety on completing a progressive muscle relaxation exercise. Repeated practice of any relaxation method creates even deeper levels of relaxation. Relaxation is a skill that can be developed much like playing the piano or throwing a ball. The more one practices, the greater the development of the skill.

### *Controlled Breathing*

This method is based on the observation that many people breathe shallowly or irregularly when anxious or tense. These breathing patterns lead to an imbalance of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the body, which can cause the physical symptoms of anxiety.

It is important to practice controlled breathing for at least 4 minutes, because this is roughly how long it takes to restore the balance of oxygen and carbon dioxide. The balancing works most effectively if you breathe deeply in and out an



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equal amount of time. If you put one hand on your upper chest and one hand on your stomach, the hand on your stomach moves out as you breathe in.

Try breathing in to a slow count of 4 and out to a slow count of 4 for 4 minutes right now and see if you become more relaxed. It doesn't matter whether you breathe through your mouth or your nose; breathe whichever way is comfortable for you. Breathe gently and don't take big gulps of air.

### *Visualization*

Imagery methods are also effective for learning to relax and manage anxiety. Imagery involves actively visualizing scenes that are tranquil and relaxing to you. Scenes may be actual places you know that feel safe and relaxing, or they may be scenes you create to be tranquil, safe, and relaxing. The specific scene is less important than how the image makes you feel.

The more senses you can incorporate into your image, the more relaxing visualization is likely to be. If you can imagine the smells, sounds, taste and tactile sensations as well as the visual aspects of the scene, you will improve your ability to relax. For example, if you imagine yourself walking along a tree-lined mountain path, you may want to focus your attention on the birds singing, the light dancing through the tree branches, the smell of pine, the greenness of the forest, and the cool breeze as it touches your skin. Each one of our senses can contribute to our experience of relaxation and comfort.

From "[Mind Over Mood](#)" by Geenberger & Padesky