

# Relaxation Techniques for the Carer

## Breathing Exercises

Breathing deeply is a quick way to relax. You can do it almost any place and time you need to relieve stress. Deep breathing helps maintain a sense of calm and is part of almost all relaxation and meditation techniques. The key is to breathe deeply from your abdomen, rather than shallowly from your lungs and get as much fresh air and oxygen into your lungs as possible.

### Instructions

1. Sit or lie down in a comfortable position.
2. Put one hand on your stomach (and the other on your chest if possible)
3. Feel your breathing for a short time, noticing the rise and fall of your stomach
4. Breathe in (inhale) deeply through your nose. As you breathe in, the hand on your stomach should rise (and the one on your chest should move very little)
5. Breathe out (exhale) through your mouth - push out as much air as you can feel your stomach tighten as it flattens. Again the hand on your stomach should move (your chest shouldn't move much)
6. Be sure that you empty out all the air and then pause
7. Try to inhale to the count of 10 and then exhale to the count 10 - this helps to slow your breathing
8. Repeat this breathing for several minutes. If you are lying down, you can put a small book on your stomach and try to breathe so it rises as you inhale and falls when you exhale

# Muscle Relaxation

Muscle relaxation techniques are easy to do. Combining muscle relaxation with deep breathing can be even more effective in relieving stress. Some studies have shown that people find muscle relaxation useful for helping them to fall asleep.

## Instructions

1. Lie down in a comfortable position with your arms slightly out to the side and legs straight
2. Concentrating on each body part, one at a time, you will tense your muscles as tight as you can, hold them for 10 seconds, then release and completely relax
3. Start with your head and face - you'll move down through your body to your feet and toes:
  - Raise your eyebrows as high as you can and hold for 10 seconds and then release
  - Smile as wide and hard as you can, hold for 10 seconds and then release
  - Touch your chin to your chest, hold and then release
  - Force your arms straight making them unbendable, hold and then release
  - Make fists, hold and then release
  - Tighten your stomach, hold and release
  - Force your legs straight, hold and then release
  - Bend your ankles, pointing your toes at your knees, hold and then release
  - Curl your toes, hold and then release
4. After relaxing each body part, notice how heavy each part feels when it is totally relaxed
5. When completed, continue performing the deep breathing

## Mindful Meditation

Mindfulness meditation is a way to calm down and stop running on "auto-pilot" as many of us do in our busy lives. Several mindfulness meditation techniques relieve stress, including:

Body Scan

Focus attention on various parts of your body, as in muscle relaxation. Except that instead of tensing/relaxing you notice how each part feels without judging whether the sensation is good or bad.

Walking Meditation

Focus on what each step feels like - your foot touching the ground, the rhythm of your breathing as you move, the wind in your face, the beating of your heart

Mindful Eating

Sit down at the table, focus completely upon the meal (no television, newspaper reading or eating on the run) and eat slowly, completely enjoying and concentrating on each bite

Observing your breath is another technique you can use to develop mindfulness. The breath is a wonderful reminder of this present moment, since it's something we can directly tune into that purely occurs in the present. We can't hold our breath forever, or prevent the taking in of air, as long as we're alive. Focusing on your own breathing gives you something to pay attention in the moment, without making a judgment.

Mindfulness practices can be great for daily living, such as dressing, walking and brushing teeth. Setting aside a few minutes each day will build and stabilize mindfulness. Over time, the benefits gained from mindfulness are: a clearer mind and less stressed body, a greater sense of pleasure in ordinary things and fuller appreciation of life.

You might think that meditation sounds like day dreaming, but that's not the case. If you try it, you'll see that maintaining your concentration and bringing your mind back to the present when it starts to drift takes effort. You'll get better at it over time. Practised regularly, it actually changes the brain. The areas involved in joy and relaxation strengthen, while those involved in negativity and stress weaken.

As you try to focus the mind and pay attention, you'll be amazed to see how your mind jumps and wanders around planning, dreaming and remembering. Over time, with repeated practice, the mind is wandering is considered a breakthrough in changing the old pattern of automatic pilot - if you can see that your mind is somewhere far away, you can bring your attention back to the present.