Self Help - Relaxation

1. There are several things you can do to receive the maximum benefit from this relaxation guide. Choose a good time to practice: You need a time when it is unlikely that you will be interrupted for 20-25 minutes. Use a comfortable chair, recliner, or bed: A comfortable position is important while doing this exercise. Select a place where there are few sounds or lights to distract you. You may find that there are always distractions in your room; if so, you could get a set of soft earplugs from a pharmacist and use a soft, tied "blindfold."

2. Try to adopt a passive attitude of letting yourself become relaxed; don't force the relaxation. Don't worry about whether you are doing this "right," or the precise timing of this practice; instead, concentrate on how you feel.

3. Think about a 1 or 2 syllable word that has a very relaxed sound to it. Some people choose the word "one," some the word "peace," some use the sound "mmmm." Keep this word, and take it with you in your mind as you begin your exercise. Once you have the time, place, atmosphere, and a chosen word:

4. Sit or lie quietly in a comfortable position.

5. Close your eyes throughout the practice.

6. Systematically relax all of the muscles of your body. Start at your feet and progress up through your face. If, as you progress, an area of your body feels particularly tense, tighten the muscles in that area even more and then let go.

7. If an area still seems tense take your time. Stay there for a while. Relaxation comes at its own pace.

8. Mentally scan your body as you become relaxed. Remind yourself mentally that various parts of your body are beginning to feel heavy and relaxed.

9. Become aware of your breathing; concentrate as you take a breath in and as you let the breath out. As you breathe out say your chosen word to yourself. Breathe easily and naturally.

10. Do not worry about whether you were successful in achieving relaxation. Maintain a passive attitude and permit relaxation to occur. When distracting thoughts enter your mind, say to yourself, "I'll think about that later" and let your mind return to your chosen word; slowly repeat that word to yourself over and over.

11. Continue for 10 to 20 minutes. You may open your eyes to check the time, but do not use an alarm clock. When you finish, with your eyes still closed, sit or lie quietly for a few moments. After a few moments, remain quiet but open your eyes.

12. With practice, relaxation should come with little effort. Practice once or twice daily but not within 2 hours after a meal since digestion seems to interfere with the relaxation response. Once you are well practiced, you may find that you are able to relax in stressful circumstances by giving yourself a few moments to relax your body, concentrate on your breathing, and focus on your chosen word.

RELAXATION AND SLEEP
If you are having difficulty sleeping, relaxation may prove helpful. Many people find that if they do this exercise when they go to bed, sleep follows more easily. Even if sleep does not come right away, you can help your body to recuperate from the day by doing the exercise over and over during your sleeptime.
QUICK RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

As you become more experienced with how the body relaxes, some quick methods of relaxation may be useful. This exercise describes several "quick-release" techniques which can be done almost anywhere.

WHOLE BODY TENSION:
Tense everything in your whole body; stay with that tension, and hold it as long as you can without feeling pain.
Slowly release the tension and very gradually feel it leave your body.
Repeat three times.

VISUAL IMAGERY:
Open your imagination and focus on your breathing.
As your breathing becomes calm and regular, imagine that the air comes to you as a cloud - it fills you and goes out. You may imagine the cloud to be a particular color.

EYE FIXATION:
With your head level and your body relaxed, pick a spot to focus on (eyes are open at this point).
When ready, count five breaths backward. With each breath allow your eyes to close gradually.
When you get to number one, your eyes will be closed. Focus on the feelings of relaxation.

COUNTING TEN BREATHS BACKWARDS:
Allow yourself to feel passive and indifferent, counting each breath slowly from ten to one.
With each count, allow yourself to feel heavier and more relaxed.
With each exhale, allow the tension to leave your body.

SHOULDER SHRUG:
Try to raise your shoulders up to your eyes.
Hold for the count of four.
Now drop your shoulders back to a normal position.
Repeat three times.

SHOULDER ROTATION:
Rotate your shoulders back, down and around, first one way, then the other.
Do one shoulder, then the other.
Now do both at the same time.
Note: This is also good for back, arms, and neck.

CAT S-T-R-E-T-C-H:
Stand - feet slightly apart.
Take a deep breath as you stretch arms over head.
Slowly exhale as you lean forward, bringing arm and head down.
Do slowly and gently five times.

MEDITATION:
Alone in a quiet place, get as comfortable as you can. Then focus on a repeated word or phrase such as "calm" or "let it go," silently reciting it with each exhale. Let other thoughts, feelings and images drift away. Practice for 10 to 20 minute sessions.

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