

BASIC RELAXATION TECHNIQUE

When you first try this exercise, you may want to begin by lying on the floor or on your bed. However, if you are tired, you may find that you cannot stay awake and you won't be able to develop the skill of *conscious relaxation*. This is a great exercise to help you sleep better at night, but for purposes of developing an awakened sense of relaxation, consider whether lying down works for you or not. If you too easily drift off to sleep, begin by sitting in a chair where you are comfortable and your back is straight and your feet touch the floor.

Loosen any tight clothing, such as your shoes, collar, or belt. Whether you begin by lying on the floor or not, you will eventually graduate to sitting either in a chair or on the floor. The purpose of this technique is to be able to mentally call relaxation to your body anytime, anywhere regardless of where you are or what physical position you find yourself. You are going to scan your entire body, locating tension pockets and relax each area, one area at a time, releasing tension completely. Here's how:

Focus your attention on your breath until your breathing begins to slow and deepen. Keep your mind focused on your breath. You might also conjure some peaceful image as you do this exercise. As you do so, you have already begun to relax.

Your attention will first focus on your feet, beginning at the toes. Starting with the toes, wiggle your toes, squeezing and flexing, and then relax and release any tension. Next, rotate the ankles, followed by flexing and pointing the feet. Then relax and release. Move up to the calves and the long muscles of the thighs with your attention, tensing and relaxing until you can let the tension go; your feet will fall outward comfortably.

Next, move your attention to your abdomen, midriff and lower back. This is another part of your body that can easily carry excess tension. Tighten your abdominals; hold the tension for a count of five, and then release. Do this two more times, releasing tension each time you relax. You may find yourself adjusting the angle of your lower back as you encounter and release tension.

Shoulders and arms are next. Shrug your shoulders, tense and release your arms, clench and release your hands. Do this three times and finally, release all tension and let your arms and shoulders relax. Even as you are relaxing and feeling your tension drain away, remember to continue focusing on your breath. Between each area of focus, draw your attention back to the breath and let all tension leave your body with the out-breath and draw in a sense of relaxation with the in-breath.

Are there any other tense muscles in your head or face or neck? Probably, since this is a major focal point for tension. Focus directly on your facial muscles, opening the mouth and eyes wide three times and then consciously release tension and let your face relax. If you feel tension in your neck, turn your head slowly to the right and then the left a few times and finally, settle the neck to relax. Finally, shift your attention to the very top of your head. Consciously tighten the scalp by lifting your eyebrows and then scrunching them. Do this a few times and when you release and relax the tension, your scalp will relax.

At first you may have to retrace these steps until all regions of your body are relaxed at the same time. Keep at it until you are able to relax completely. By focusing attention and deliberate movement on various areas of the body, you are able to let those muscles to relax.

When you have mastered this method of relaxation, you will have gained control of the tension you are prone to carrying in your body and you will be able to relax at will for the rest of your life. Focusing on your breath, you can maintain this sense of control by simple association. As a result, you can relax even if you are in a room full of people. This is also a great beginning point to begin your meditation.

In time, being able to relax will not take you 15 to 20 minutes, but rather moments. By simply scanning the body with the mind, and focusing on the breath, you will be able to achieve quickly any level of relaxation you desire.

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