

# Relaxation is a Remedy for Pain, Tension and Anxiety!

Our bodies know how to relax but in our busy modern lives we must create opportunities for it to occur. The stress reaction happens to most of us many times every day, activating the sympathetic nervous system and putting the body and mind on alert that danger is present. Long-term stress activation can be very damaging and cause or worsen many disease states.

*Relaxation Response* is a term coined by Herbert Benson of the Harvard Medical School to describe a natural state that is the antidote to the state of stress reactivity. This state provides relief from physical, mental and emotional tension and allows many people to reduce pain, alleviate symptoms, cope with stressful situations and to activate the body's natural healing ability.

In his book, Deep Healing, Emmett Miller, MD, refers to deep relaxation as the "Master Skill" for individuals wishing to take responsibility for their own health.

Deep relaxation can be dramatically effective in relieving symptoms such as inflammation, anxiety and muscle tension. It can be a lifesaver when dealing with stress and life crises. And when relaxation is combined with positive imagery for guiding us through an upcoming event, it can vastly improve our ability to perform at optimal levels, even when taking on some of life's greatest challenges.

By relieving tension, deep relaxation improves circulation and speeds up healing. When deep relaxation is used before surgery, people need less anesthesia, have less postoperative pain, leave the hospital sooner, and get back on their feet with minimal complications. (Miller, 1997,p.55, 56)

## Simple Relaxation Techniques

Self-care, bodymind practices to release tension, reduce stress and bring you home to your natural state of ease, peace and well-being.

### **Treat yourself as a dear friend, worthy of kindness, compassion, care and attention.**

Notice how you speak to yourself and think about yourself. Be kind in your thoughts and attitudes toward yourself, just as you are.

**Notice where you carry tension in your body.** When you notice your muscular reactions to stressful situations, you can begin to work with them in awareness and to release physical and mental tension.

**Notice your breathing.** When you hold the breath, your body becomes more stressed, tense and anxious. Notice your breath in various situations. Without forcing or making it be anything different, just tune into it throughout the day, allowing it to soften and deepen naturally.

**Stretch the muscles all through your body, gently and smoothly.** Stretching releases tension. Synchronize movements with the breath to make it even more effective.

Example: stretch up, breathe in. Stretch down, breathe out.

**Take mini- breaks to practice simple, gentle, small movements.** Synchronize these with your natural breath. Let it be easy and enjoyable. Here are a few examples:

- Shoulder lifts.
- Shoulder rolls
- Hand to heart: feel the warmth of the heart, warmth of the hand, let them warm each other
- Twist of the Wrist ("Adult thumb sucking")
- Slow motion blinking

**Regularly do simple things that you love and that make you feel happy.** Take time to do the things that bring you home to yourself. These things truly are medicine.

### **Practice Progressive Relaxation.**

Bringing your attention to your toes: Inhale: tighten toes; Exhale: release.

Continue up your feet and legs and gradually all through the body.

Each muscle group tightens with an inhale and then releases with an exhale. It works just as well to begin at head and face and work down.

**“Just This” Meditation.** Sit or lie comfortably. Connect to the breath. Feel the weight of the body release downward. Breathing in say silently “Just...” Breathing out say “...this.”  
Just... this....Just... this. Just this breath, just this moment. Being present.

### **Activate your Relaxation Response**

Choose a word or very short phrase that is neutral ( such as “one”) or one that has positive healing feelings for you (examples: love...peace... thank you, all is well... home...)

1. Sit comfortably, eyes closed
2. Begin at crown of head, release muscles all down through body, allowing tension to drain down through hands and feet and to melt away.
3. Breathe through the nose. Notice the breath and allow it to deepen and soften.
4. Silently say your chosen word with each breath.
5. Gently and kindly bring your awareness back again and again to the breath, the word and the body.

### **Day dream! Use your imagination to help yourself relax and heal.**

- Imagery is the natural language of the unconscious mind and a primary bridge between mind and body.
- Imagery is activated whenever we daydream, fantasize, remember or worry.
- Imagery affects all systems of the body and can activate physiological responses as vivid as an external event.
- Imagery is a powerful healing tool.

Sit or lie comfortably, allow your breath to deepen and lengthen and bring a soothing image or scene into your awareness. Experience the sensations of touch, fragrances, sounds and images as if you were really there.

A few examples of healing imagery practices:

- Resting in a rocking boat on a gentle sea.
- Walking in a beautiful garden, sitting in a restful spot.
- Safe place: In a relaxed, comfortable state, let an image arise of a place, real or imagined, where you feel comfortable and safe and whole. Let yourself be there fully and drink it in with all your senses. Visit this place often as a healing source within.
- Pain Relief: Inhale: imagine that you are breathing loving, kind attention right into the pain. Breathe in the sort of care you would give a beloved child or pet or friend. Breathe this kind attention right into the pain. As you breathe out, feel the tension and pain releasing with the breath.
- Medications as Healing Allies: Remember that whatever medication or medical procedure you choose is an ally in your healing process. Allow an image to form of the healing value of this treatment. Perhaps it becomes beautiful, radiant light or a magical seed that will grow healing within you. Each time you take it or receive it, do so with a sense of all the blessings and healing it brings into your body.

**Play, laugh and be silly!** Laughter is good medicine and will help you relax. What helps you lighten up? Who and what makes you laugh and feel happy and childlike?