

Relaxation Techniques

Deep Breathing

Deep breathing is one of the easiest stress management techniques to learn and the best thing about it is it can be done anywhere! When we become stressed, one of our body's automatic reactions is shallow, rapid breathing which can increase our stress response. Taking deep, slow breaths is an antidote to stress and is one way we can "turn-off" our stress reaction and "turn-on" the relaxation response. Deep breathing is the foundation of many other relaxation exercises.

- Get into a comfortable position, either sitting or lying down.
- Put one hand on your stomach, just below your rib cage.
- Slowly breathe in through your nose. Your stomach should feel like rising and expanding outward.
- Exhale slowly through your mouth, emptying your lungs completely and letting your stomach fall.
- Repeat several times until you feel relaxed.
- Practice several times a day.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Our muscles respond to thoughts of perceived threats with tension, which is one of the most common stress symptoms. Too much tension can cause stiffness and may result in headaches, stiff necks and backaches. One way to relieve this tension is through Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR). It involves tensing, then relaxing the body muscles from head to toe. Since PMR can increase blood pressure, people with hypertension should not use this technique.

- Wear loose, comfortable clothing. Sit or lie down somewhere comfortable.
- Begin with your facial muscles and frown hard for 5 – 10 seconds, then relax all your muscles.
- Work other facial muscles by clenching your jaw, tightly closing your eyes, and raising your eyebrows for 5 – 10 seconds. Feel the tension in these muscles and then release.