DEALING WITH STRESS

STOP! An emergency quick relaxation technique

Remember that mental stress will lessen when you relax muscles. This really does happen, even when you may be in a situation where only partial relaxation is possible. Don’t believe that you are the sort of person who can never relax. You can. Everyone can to some degree, but strong feelings of tension make relaxation difficult especially if they are allowed to build up. So recognise your feelings of tension (even if these seem to you to be weird or alarming). Accept them for what they are. Use the STOP! technique to lower the arousal and bring it back to manageable limits. Do this before it gets out of hand.

Say STOP! to yourself (out loud if the situation permits)
Breathe in, and hold it briefly
Breathe out slowly, relaxing SHOULDERs AND HANDS
Pause
Breathe in again
Breathe out slowly, relaxing FOREHEAD AND JAW
Stay quiet for a few seconds
Carry on with whatever you were doing. (If you have to talk, speak a little more slowly and with your voice a little lower than usual).

This STOP! relaxation can usually be done, without anyone noticing. You will find that, in spite of your feelings, the tension will lessen.

COLOUR VISUALISATION

Lie or sit comfortably. Allow your eyes to close. Notice any sounds that you can hear from outside the room and sounds inside the room… Scan through your body, noticing any areas of tension or discomfort…… Breathe gently, and with each exhalation feel yourself letting go of tension. Just let it drain out of you into the ground…..

As with all relaxation exercises, don’t push yourself to do anything that feels uncomfortable for you. Trust your own wisdom…….
Let your eyelids feel heavy, and imagine that you are looking at a piece of black velvet…….
Using your inner eye, imagine that you are standing outside a shop, a shop where you can get all the colours of the rainbow. You don’t have to pay for anything you get there. For some people inner pictures will be very vivid. For others, less so. That doesn’t matter……. There’s no right or wrong way of doing the exercise…….

Go into the shop and notice all the colours surrounding you. You may see the colours vividly, or you may notice feeling that you associate with the different colours……red……orange……yellow……green……blue……indigo……violet…… Now allow a colour to choose you. Whichever colour comes first is the right one for you just now. Each colour has its own healing, nurturing qualities…. Imagine yourself breathing in your colour, so that it circulates through your body, feeding every cell…………………………

Imagine yourself breathing in your colour, so that it circulates through your body, feeding every cell……………….
Imagine yourself surrounded and bathed by your colour, by its healing energy…….
When you are ready, leave the shop knowing you are taking your colour with you.

When you return to an alert state, you may be particularly aware of your colour in the environment…….
So now, become aware of your body supported by the chair or the floor. Take a couple of deeper breaths, feeling the breath energising you. Notice sounds from inside and outside the room. You may picture the room in your mind’s eye, the room and the people in it. Begin to gently move and stretch, and when you feel ready, open your eyes.

DEEP RELAXATION

Choose a time and place when you won’t be disturbed. Make sure that the room is warm enough and use a pillow and blankets, if you find them helpful. Choose a comfortable position, sitting or lying. You can experience deep relaxation sitting in a chair, back well supported, arms placed comfortably on your lap, feet flat on the floor. Another method is to lie on your back, body in a straight line, arms out to your sides, palms up. Have your legs slightly apart, and let your feet flop out to each side.

Allow yourself to settle and notice your breathing, without trying to control it. Let the breath enter and leave your body easily and effortlessly. Imagine that with each out breath, you can let tension drain out of your body. As you relax the different parts of your body, you may notice sensations of warmth and heaviness.

Scan through your body from your toes right up to your head, and just notice how you feel in different parts of you – feet, legs, pelvis, chest, back, shoulders, arms, hands, neck, face. At this stage just notice tension, without trying to force yourself to let it go.

Now take your attention to your arms and imagine that both arms are very relaxed. Feel the relaxation spreading from your upper arms, through your elbows, forearms, wrists and hands. Now your legs. Let your thighs relax, and feel the relaxation spreading like a wave settling and releasing, breathing easily, and comfortably. Take your attention to your pelvis and feel your belly and buttock muscles softening and spreading. Let your face relax, forehead becoming smooth, eyes feeling as though they sink back a little into your head, jaw and muscles round your mouth becoming soft. Let your neck and shoulders relax, allowing your shoulders to drop.

With each breath, feel yourself becoming more and more relaxed. Let your weight sink into the floor or chair. And give yourself a few minutes to enjoy this pleasant, natural state of relaxation.

When you feel ready, gently prepare yourself to return to a state of alertness. Take a couple of deeper breaths, begin to move fingers and toes, do any stretching that feels good and open your eyes. If you are lying on the floor, roll on to your side for a few minutes, keeping your head supported, and then slowly get up.

The ideas behind this exercise come from an approach to relaxation known as Autogenic Training. If you find this exercise helpful, you may be interested in attending a course of Autogenic Training.

MEDITATION

Meditation has well-established roots in Eastern religion and in the Christian tradition of contemplative prayer. In meditation, we become aware of how our minds dart from one thought to another (a bit like using a remote controller to change television channels), and seek to reach a calmer, more focussed state. There are many different techniques, for instance meditation on an object or a sound. The breath can provide a useful focus for meditation.

- Choose a time and place when you won’t be disturbed.
• Sit comfortably, spine erect, well supported by the chair and the floor. Let your shoulders drop and the crown of your head lift.

• Allow your eyes to close and become aware of your breathing. Don’t try to alter it or control it, just notice the breath entering and leaving your body.

• Begin to count the breaths. After the out breath **ONE**, after the next out breath **TWO** and so on up to **FOUR**. When you reach **FOUR**, go back to **ONE**.

• Notice your mind wandering, and just gently bring it back to the task of counting your breaths. You will probably need to do this over and over again.

• After a few minutes, drop the counting and just observe you breath.

• When you feel ready, open your eyes gradually, come back to full alertness.

**SPECIAL PLACE**

• Settle yourself comfortably in a chair. Notice any sounds that you can hear round about you, and then take your attention inwards to yourself. Feel the support of the chair and the floor. Breathe easily and gently. scan through your body, noticing and releasing any areas of tension. With each out breath, allow yourself to relax a bit more.

• Imagine yourself in your own special place, a place that is healing and nourishing for you. This may be a place that you remember, or a place that you create for yourself. It may be out of doors or indoors.

• Notice any sounds that you can hear round about you. Notice what you can see, different colours and shapes, light and shade. Notice any smell and tastes. You may wish to touch things in your special place. Feel the different textures, notice how warm or cool things are. You may be sitting quietly in your special place, or you may be moving about.

• You know that this is a good place for you, where you feel safe and comfortable. Enjoy the feelings of safety and comfort.

• When you are ready, gently begin to prepare yourself to leave your special place. You know that you can return whenever you wish.

• Notice your breathing, and begin to pay more attention to the in breath, taking in energy to help you return to a more alert state. Feel your body in contact with the chair and feel your feet on the floor. Notice sounds round about you. Begin to move and stretch. Have a look round about you. Sit quietly for a few minutes before you get up.

**PROGRESSIVE MUSCULAR RELAXATION**

Like any other skill, learning to relax takes practice.

• Choose a time and a place where you won’t be disturbed. Make sure that the room is warm, and loosen any tight clothing. You may like to cover yourself with a blanket. Lie down on your back on the floor or a firm surface, supporting your head with a pillow, if you wish. (You may prefer sometimes to practise relaxation lying on your side, or sitting in a chair).
- Be aware of the sounds that you can hear from outside the room, then the sounds from inside the room. Now be aware of the sounds inside your own body – breathing, heartbeat etc.

- Begin to work round the different muscle groups of your body, tightening and releasing. Tighten enough to feel the difference between tension and relaxation, but not so that you cause cramp. Avoid tensing stomach muscles if you are pregnant. If you have any sprains or injuries, don’t tighten nearby muscles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part</th>
<th>Move/Action</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RIGHT FOOT</td>
<td>Clench your toes. Let go.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RIGHT LEG</td>
<td>Pull your toes towards your face. Let go.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Raise your leg keeping your knoe straight. Let go.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEFT FOOT</td>
<td>Clench your toes. Let go.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEFT LEG</td>
<td>Pull your toes towards your face. Let go.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Raise your leg keeping your know straight. Let go.</td>
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<tr>
<td>PELVIS</td>
<td>Tighten your abdomen (as if someone is about to punch you) and clench your</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>buttock muscles. Let go.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SHOULDERS, BACK</td>
<td>Pull your should blades together. Let go.</td>
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<tr>
<td>AND CHEST</td>
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<tr>
<td>RIGHT HAND</td>
<td>Make a fist. Let go.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RIGHT ARM</td>
<td>Press your elbow into the floor. Let go.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEFT HAND</td>
<td>Make a fist. Let go.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEFT ARM</td>
<td>Press your elbow into the floor. Let go.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHOULDERS</td>
<td>Pull your shoulders up towards your ears. Let go.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BACK OF NECK</td>
<td>Press your head into the floor. Let go.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FACE</td>
<td>Raise your eyebrows. Let go. Clench your jaw. Let go.</td>
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- Be aware of your breathing, without trying to alter it. Just feel the breath entering and leaving your body. Feel how heavy and soft and relaxed your body is. After a few minutes, turn over on to your side and slowly get up.