

Quick Relaxation Exercises

These are things you can do in a minute or two to feel more relaxed. Before s you start, take a moment to check your emotional state, your thoughts, what you sense and feel in your body. Just pause to notice what is happening, without judging or expecting anything from it.s

Abdominal Breathing: the master skill

Abdominal breathing is the one of the most effective ways to relax quickly. By breathing with your diaphragm you will immediately signal your autonomic nervous system to relax. Place one hand on your belly and one on your chest. Take some slow, deep breaths into your belly. Try to to breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth. If you are doing it correctly, your lower hand should move as much or more than the hand on your chest. Continue this slow, deep breathing for a several minutes, notcing how the breath calms your body and allows your min dto start clearing.

Quick nervous system reset breath (filling the balloon)

Only do this one time in a row.

Picturing how your lungs are like balloons, take one quick, big, deep, sharp, full breath to fill them completely. You might want to make a sound when you do. This action will capture your full attention, and begin to reset your nervous system. Now, without forcing it, hold on to the breath for as long as you can without discomfort. Notice how your body feels, and, when you are ready to let go of the breath, lust let go easily, as if you were untying the ends of a balloon and letting the air gradually seep out of it. Notice the sensations in your body as you let go. Then, take a moment to look around you and orient yourslef to your enbvironment before returning to what you were doing.

Quick Tensing and Relaxing

You will get be able to do this more easily and get even more benefit from it if you leran progressive deep muscle relaxation (go to my website for a separate handout on this).

Tense your feet and lower legs and thighs and buttocks, pelvic muscles, abdomen, and lower back muscles. Hold them tightly for a few moments and notice the tension. Then release the tension completely and let all those muscles soften and become supple and relaxed.

Tense your hands, forearms, upper arms and shoulders, belly, midriff, middle and upper back, and facial muscles, and take a breath in so your rib cage is full extended. Notice how that feels, then release the breath and soften all those muscles, letting them become supple and relaxed. As you continue to breathe, focus on releasing, softening, letting go. Let the tension continue to flow out with every out-breath.

Create a symbol that signals you to relax

When you are practicing any of therelaxation techniques you use, choose a signal (an image and/or word) for yourself that cues you can associate with quickly settling in to an experience of peace, comfort, ease. This can be anything you choose, as long as it makes sense to you, and you recognize it as a signal to relax. It could be favorite spot in nature, a good memory, the face someone you love, even a pet.

Every time you do practice any of your relaxation techniques, call up that signal as you are becoming relaxed, so you learn to associate it with fthe physocal and emotional sensations of feeling relaxed. Allow the symbol to grow and fill your awareness. Let all of the qualities of that symbol come to mind, and imagine them moving through your body on the rhythm of your breath. As you practice this more, you will be able to close your eyes anywhere and relax quickly by calling up your symbol and filling your awareness with it for a few minutes.

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