

# Relaxation Techniques

*Imagine being able to rest and re-charge on a regular basis.*

CONSTANT  
STRESS  
takes its toll.

Stress is a natural part of life, and how we choose to manage it is critical to our wellbeing.

Your body is built to handle short-term stressors, but having a constant or hyperactive stress response to life can lead to physical and mental health problems. Balancing our alertness to life and its challenges with activities of relaxation can improve our health and our minds.

## STRESS SYMPTOMS AND RELAXATION BENEFITS

When the stress response is constantly activated in our bodies, a number of medical issues can occur. Stress is a contributing factor to high blood pressure, irritable bowel conditions, hypertension, and even strokes, so working on reducing stress is a valuable investment to your future health.

Engaging and practicing our relaxation response results in limitless advantages. Some measurable benefits include better concentration, lower heart and breathing rates, and reduction in chronic pain. You also might experience less fatigue, irritability, and muscle tension.

## RELAXATION EXERCISES

Relaxation techniques are intentional practices used to produce the body's natural relaxation response. If you're ready to practice a relaxation technique, you can start alone or ask for help. Programs and classes in your community may offer activities that practice many of these techniques, such as yoga, meditation, and art therapy. You can also consider downloading an app or searching for guided exercises online.

Different exercises work for different people, so keep trying until you find a technique that works best for you. Relaxation techniques are most effective when they are combined with other tools for healthy living. Proper rest, a healthy diet, and exercise can all contribute to reducing stress.

## ACTION STEPS

Practicing the following healthy habits will help you develop resilience and cope with life's stressors:

✓ **Be mindful** – Paying attention to your body is a great way to reduce stress. Focus on peaceful images or a guided exercise while tuning into

your breathing, heart rate, and other physical sensations.

- ✓ **Relax your muscles** – Slowly tense and relax individual muscles. Start with your feet and work up to your head. This practice teaches awareness of muscle tension when you are stressed.
- ✓ **Listen to music** – Believe it or not, listening to music can lower your heart rate and blood pressure. Focus on the music and sing out loud if possible.
- ✓ **Laugh** – Watch your favorite funny movie or catch up with a witty friend. Laughter lowers cortisol, your body's stress hormone, and promotes brain chemicals called endorphins to lift your mood.
- ✓ **Be present** – Focus on what's in front of you by using your senses. Practice being present in your relationships, at work, and by yourself. Push aside thoughts about the past and future, and focus on the here-and-now.

## KEEP IN MIND

Though relaxation techniques won't eliminate the stress in your life, they will aid in managing your stress-load. Relaxation techniques are low-cost, low-risk for injury, and can be performed almost anywhere. There is nothing to lose and everything to gain.

***What steps will you take today to help your mind and body relax?***