

## **"Mini" Relaxation Exercises**

Mini relaxation exercises are focused breathing techniques which help reduce anxiety and tension immediately! You can do them with your eyes open or closed (but make sure that your eyes are open when you are driving!). You can do them any place, at any time, no one will know that you are doing them.

### **Ways to "do a mini"...**

Switch over to diaphragmatic breathing; if you are having trouble, try breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth, or take a deep breath. You should feel your stomach rising about an inch as you breathe in, and falling about an inch as you breathe out. If this is still difficult for you, lie on your back or on your stomach; you will be more aware of your breathing pattern. Remember, it is impossible to breathe diaphragmatically if you are holding your stomach in! So... relax your stomach muscles.

### **Mini Version 1**

Count very slowly to yourself from ten down to zero, one number for each breath. Thus, with the first diaphragmatic breath, you say "ten" to yourself, with the next breath, you say "nine", etc. If you start feeling light-headed or dizzy, slow down the counting. When you get to "zero", see how you are feeling. If you are feeling better, great! If not, try doing it again.

### **Mini Version 2**

As you inhale, count very slowly up to four; as you exhale, count slowly back down to one. Thus, as you inhale, you say to yourself "one, two, three, four," as you exhale, you say to yourself "four, three, two, one." Do this several times.

### **Mini Version 3**

After each inhalation, pause for a few seconds, after your exhale, pause again for a few seconds. Do this for several breaths.

### **Good times to "do a mini"...**

While being stuck in traffic... when put on "hold" during an important phone call... while waiting in your doctor's waiting room... when someone says something which bothers you... at all red lights... when waiting for a phone call... in the dentist's chair... when you feel overwhelmed by what you need to accomplish in the near future... while standing in line... when in pain... etc., etc. The only time that mini's do not work is when you forget to do them!!! so go do a mini...

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## **Relaxation Exercises for Improved Sleep**

Many relaxation techniques can be used to help you fall asleep and to get a more restful sleep. Try the following exercises and determine which one works best for you. If neither of the exercises seem to work well in the beginning, practice the one that you like best on a daily basis for a couple of weeks before you give up!

### **EXERCISE 1: BODY SEARCH FOR SENSATIONS**

- Assume your desired sleeping position. Focus on the exhalation phase of each breath, and relax as you exhale.
- For two or three exhalations, focus on your supporting environment (usually your bed) and allow that environment to support your total body as you continue to exhale, and r-e-l-a-x.
- Following these exhalations, allow your attention to wander through your body. There is no set sequence, nor should you be in a hurry. As you "move" through the body, identify any sensations that you may feel (heaviness, warmth, coolness, heartbeat, twitching, pressure, gurgling in the stomach or intestines, tension, stillness, etc.).
- Upon identifying a sensation, mentally acknowledge the sensation in your mind and continue to wander through the body and passively search for others. You will notice that the number of sensations diminishes after a few minutes. As the mind continues to focus inward on the body, it will become quiet and sleep will result.

### **EXERCISE 2: COUNTING TEAMED WITH BREATHING**

- Assume your desired sleeping position. Focus on the exhalation phase of each breath, and relax as you exhale.
- For two or three exhalations, focus on your supporting environment (usually your bed) and allow that environment to support your total body as you continue to exhale, and r-e-l-a-x.
- As you continue to focus on the exhalation phase of every breath, count in sequence from one to ten and then back from ten to one. Count one number per exhalation and repeat this sequence until you fall asleep.
- Variation: Count backward from ninety-nine, counting each number with an exhalation until you fall asleep.

## **Relaxation Exercises**

For all of these exercises, it is best to be seated, eyes closed, feet flat on the floor or crossed at the ankles and hands resting comfortably in the lap. Begin each exercise with a deep breath that you let out gently. As you let it out, feel yourself beginning to relax already.

Gentle Arousal: After the exercise, slowly and gently activate by breathing a little more deeply, wiggling your fingers and toes, and opening your eyes at your own rate.

### **Exercise I**

Tense-Relax. (Give general directions). Clench your fists. While keeping them clenched, pull your forearms tightly up against your upper arms. While keeping those muscles tense, tense all the muscles in your legs. While keeping all those tense, clench your jaws and shut your eyes fairly tight -- not too tightly. Now, while holding all those tense, take a deep breath and hold it for 5 seconds . . . . Then, let everything go all at once. Feel yourself letting go of all your tensions. Just enjoy that feeling for a minute, as your muscles let go more and more. Actually, if we had a finely-tuned electromyograph hooked up to you measuring the level of tension in your muscles, it would show that you relax more and more and more for up to 20 minutes. Just enjoy focusing, gently, on the letting go (Arouse gently).

### **Exercise II**

Heaviness and Warmth. (Give general directions first). Just imagine that your feet and legs are getting heavier and heavier and warmer and warmer. It's almost as if you are wearing some lead boots. Feet and legs, heavy and warm, heavy and warm. Now, imagine your stomach and the whole central portion of your body getting warm. . . warm and relaxed. My forehead is cool. . . cool. . . relaxed and cool. And my breathing is regular. . . easy and regular. Just feel the warm and heaviness spread all over the body. (Arouse gently).

### **Exercise III**

Breathing Your Body Away. (General directions first). Gently focus your attention on your feet and legs. Be aware of all the sensations from your feet and legs. Now, inhale a long, slow breath, and as you do, breathe in all the sensations from your feet and legs. In your mind's eye, imagine that you are erasing this part of your body. Now, as you exhale, breathe out all those sensations. Once again, breathe in your feet and legs, and exhale it from your body, so that, in your mind, you can see only from your hips up. Now, with another long breath, breathe in all the parts of your body to your neck, and, as you exhale, breathe it away. . . . Now, beginning with your fingers, breathe in your fingers, hands, wrists and arms, and exhale them away. . . . Now, your neck and head. . . as you breathe in, imagine your neck and head being erased, and now breathe them away. Let's go back over the whole body in one breath, beginning with the feet. A long slow breath in, and as you do, erase any little parts that still remain. Now, a long slow breath out, as you exhale

all the remaining parts. Now, just sit quietly for a minute and enjoy feeling yourself relax deeper and deeper. (Gently arouse).

#### **Exercise IV**

A Favorite Scene, Place, or Person. (General directions first). As you're sitting quietly, recall, in your mind, the most relaxing thought you can. Perhaps it's a favorite place (a vacation spot or favorite retreat of some sort; or it might be a person with whom you feel at peace, or some scene -- a meadow, or whatever works for you). Take a few seconds to get that in mind... Now, see or imagine that in your mind. Be sure to feel those good feelings you have when you are in that place. Just let them take over your whole awareness... If your thoughts wander, just take them gently back to that peaceful, relaxing place. (Arouse Gently).

#### **Exercise V**

Ideal Relaxation. (General directions first). With your eyes closed, take a moment to create, in mind's eye, an ideal spot for relaxation. You can make it any place real or imagined and furnish it any way that you want. Wear the clothes you are most comfortable in. Enjoy, now, in your own mind, going there. You'll want to feel at ease and mellow as you lounge in your ideal place for relaxation. Just enjoy it for a minute... (Gentle arousal).

#### **Exercise VI**

Cool Air In, Warm Air Out. (General directions). With your eyes closed, and while relaxing quietly, gently focus on the end of your nose. As you breathe in, feel the air coming in the tip of your nose. As you breathe out, feel the air coming out of the tip of your nose.... Notice that the air coming in is cooler than the air going out... Gently focus on the cool air coming in, and the warm air going out. As your attention wanders, just gently bring it back to the tip of your nose... (Gentle arousal).

#### **Exercise VII**

Focus on a Word. (General directions). Pick some word which has "good" vibrations associated with it for you -- a word which you associate with relaxation, comfort, peace. It could be a word such as "serenity" or "cool, peaceful, joy, free", etc. ... Now, just let that word hold the center of your thoughts. As your mind wanders to more stressful thoughts, gently bring it back to that word... After awhile, perhaps your mind will drift to other gentling, restful thoughts. If so, just let it wander... When it does drift to stressful thoughts, back to your original word. (Gentle arousal).

#### **Exercise VIII**

Something for Use Anywhere. (General directions). With practice, you will become more adept at relaxing while awake, anywhere. As you do, here's a way to let yourself relax while going about your day. You can do it while walking, sitting in class, taking a test, on a date, etc. First, smile. Yes, smile, to remind yourself that you don't actually have all the

cares of the world on your shoulders-- only a few of them. Then, take a long deep breath, and let it out. Now, take a second long deep breath and as you let it out, feel yourself releasing the tensions in your mind and in your body. Just let yourself relax more and more, as you continue whatever you were doing. (Gentle arousal).

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## **Progressive Muscle Relaxation**

### **Basic Instructions**

Relaxation is the opposite of tension. The following exercise can be a tool for you to use to control tension and enhance relaxation in both your body and your mind. It will probably be most useful to you if you or a friend would

tape record the following exercise and listen to it rather than to just try to read and remember the various parts of the exercise. Read the exercise slowly with pauses to allow the relaxation to occur. If you do make a tape for yourself, please remember to use it only when you are sitting or lying comfortably at home or where you are not needing to be involved in an activity requiring you to be fully alert. Do not use the tape while operating any kind of machinery, including cars. One of the main activities suggested in this exercise involves alternatively tensing and relaxing muscle groups. Put enough tension into the muscles to make them tense, but not enough to cause pain. Feeling pain means that you are tensing too much.

### **Tension Reducing Exercise**

Settle back and get as comfortable as you possibly can. Close your eyes gently. Tune in to your breathing. *(Pause)* Notice it's pace and rhythm. *(Pause)* take another breath, a little deeper this time, letting yourself feel completely calm, peaceful, comfortable and relaxed. *(Pause)* Now, with the rest of your body feeling more and more comfortable and relaxed, slowly clench your right fist. Clench it tighter and tighter and study the tension. Keep it clenched and feel the tension in your fist, hand, and forearm. *(Short Pause)* Now let your hand relax and go limp, allowing your fingers to become loose. Notice the contrast between the feeling of tension and now the feeling of relaxation. *(Short Pause)* Let your whole body go and relax even more completely. *(Short Pause)* Now bend both of your elbows and tense your biceps. Tense them hard until they almost quiver. Hold them tight and study the tension. *(Short Pause)* Now let your arms straighten out and drop gently to your sides. go limp, feeling heavy and relaxed. Notice the tension leave your muscles and experience relaxation that replaces the tension. Let the feeling flow and spread into the rest of your body so that you feel peaceful and calm. Feel yourself becoming more and more relaxed. *(Pause)* *(From this point onward, pause where it seems appropriate to allow enough time for the tensing and relaxing to occur.)*

Focus all your attention on your neck, your shoulders, and your upper back. As you breathe, imagine that you are releasing tension from your neck, shoulders, and upper back. With each breath you take, feel your neck, shoulders, and upper back grow heavier and more and more relaxed. As you release tension in your arms, neck, shoulders, and upper back, feel the wave of relaxation moving downwards through your torso, lower back and stomach. With each breath, you become more and more relaxed.

Now tighten and flex the muscles in your buttocks and thighs. You can flex your thighs by pressing down on your heels with your toes in the air. Hold the tension. Keep the muscles tight and tense. now let go. Relax and notice the difference as you let your hips and thighs relax and allow that feeling to proceed on its own until you feel completely and deeply relaxed.

Now press your toes straight out away from your body as if you were on tiptoes. Feel the muscles in your calves become taught and tense. Hold the tension. Study the tension and now relax. Feel the difference between the tension and the delightful, calm, peaceful feeling of being deeply relaxed. Feel the heaviness of your entire lower body as you relax further still.

If you wish, you can become even more deeply relaxed by merely taking a deep breath and slowly exhaling. As you breath deeply, feel your entire body become heavy, comfortable and relaxed. Think the following thoughts to yourself: "I feel quiet. I am feeling deeply relaxed. My body feels calm and quiet. My neck, my jaws, my forehead are all calm and smooth. My whole body is heavy, comfortable, relaxed, and quiet. My arms and hands are heavy and warm. I am at peace." (At this point, give yourself a few more minutes of deep relaxation before moving on toward ending the relaxation session.)

### **Enhancing the Experience**

You can practice deepening this feeling of relaxation by taking deep breaths and releasing tension with each exhalation and imagining a wave of relaxation moving from the top of your head to the ends of your toes. As you become aware, through this exercise, of different muscle groups and how deliberately you can control the experience of tension and relaxation in your muscles, you increase your capacity to relax. In similar fashion, each time you practice this relaxation exercise you will find it more familiar and easier to use.