

Relaxation Techniques

There are many effective ways to practice relaxation, so you might want to try several to see what works best for you. Among the more common methods of relaxation are:

- **Deep breathing** – One of the simplest relaxation exercises, deep breathing can be used in almost any situation, and no one will know but you. It involves taking slow, deep breaths, breathing from the diaphragm, and exhaling slowly to let the whole body relax a little more with each breath. Most of the relaxation methods below include deep breathing.
- **Progressive (deep) muscle relaxation** – This type of relaxation exercise involves alternately tensing, and then releasing, groups of muscles throughout the body. It's especially useful for those who say they feel tense everywhere, or for those who have trouble telling the difference between what's tense and what's relaxed.
- **Passive muscle relaxation** – This is like progressive muscle relaxation, except that the muscles aren't tensed first. You move through each part of your body in turn, focusing on feelings of comfort and relaxation in all the muscles of that area. As you move from head to toe (or vice versa), you allow those feelings of relaxation to deepen and spread.
- **Meditation** – This is a form of relaxation that has been practiced in many cultures for centuries. It involves resting in a comfortable position in a relatively distraction-free environment and focusing your attention on only one thing. This can be a mantra (a word or phrase that you repeat to yourself), a sound (wind, running water), or something visual (a candle flame, a spot on the wall, a pleasing photograph). The goal is to learn to refocus your attention each time you become distracted.
- **Imagery or visualization** – This involves relaxing while using your imagination to create a visual image of a relaxing, soothing or healing place or thing. Every element in this image – sight, sound, taste, action and texture – is imagined to make it as real as possible.
- **Autogenics** – This technique uses verbal commands to lead your body to a more relaxed state. Repeated words or phrases focus on the specific physical responses associated with relaxation. Phrases may refer to feelings of heaviness, warmth, regular heart rhythm or muscle relaxation. Likewise, the phrases may focus on positive psychological concepts or images.
- **Self-hypnosis** – Hypnosis is a deep state of relaxation in which thoughts, suggestions and images can be experienced as real. During self-hypnosis, the body is deeply relaxed and the mind is narrowly focused. It's possible to use hypnosis to alter physiological processes such as pain perception, blood flow, brain wave activity and organ functioning, as well as thoughts, emotions and behaviors.
- **Biofeedback** – This uses instruments to monitor and give feedback on physiological responses during relaxation. This is especially helpful in demonstrating the effects of

thoughts and actions on physical processes such as heart rate, muscle tension, brain wave activity, blood pressure, respiration or perspiration. Biofeedback does not make you relax – it simply helps provide information about what your body is doing. With this feedback, you can learn to modify your responses through a variety of relaxation strategies.

(Source: Impact Solutions, EAP)