

Relaxation

Disclaimer: These notes are intended for information only, and should not be seen as a substitute for professional advice.

Why do you need to *take time to relax*?

There are a number of serious consequences for our modern, industrialised way of life. Many more people are developing high blood pressure and other heart problems, muscular tension and difficulty with moving comfortably as they age and high levels of anxiety and emotional stress. These problems can arise without obvious signs to the individual.

Relaxation is the voluntary release of tension, be it mental, physical or emotional. Relaxation results in improved signals to the brain which brings about a feeling of calm. Muscle relaxation has a very good effect on the entire nervous system which bring physical and psychological improvements.

Relaxation & Study

Balance is the key. Good rest and relaxation renews the emotional, mental, physical and spiritual energy that is necessary for study. Lack of relaxation and recreation is draining on all of these areas and can lead to burnt out if left unchecked.

What does ongoing stress do to the human body?

- Reduces resistance to disease.
- May increase the frequency of headaches and pain in other areas of the body.
- Causes fatigue and increases the fatty acids circulating in the bloodstream. This places great pressure on the cardio-vascular system and may increase the risk of a heart attack.
- May make existing illnesses worse.
- May reduce and disrupt sleep.
- Increase unhealthy habits such as smoking, drinking, overeating, reducing exercise.
- Other problems that may occur include diabetes, muscle pain, bone loss, loss of nutrients, anxiety, depression and advanced aging.

Why take a deep breath?

There are very good physiological reasons why breathing deeply is helpful, not only in coping with stressful situations but also for the overall well being of the human body. You can consciously strengthen your breath at any time of the day or night. However, in order to get into the practice of breathing deeply, take a set time each day (e.g. 5-10 mins) and focus solely on increasing the depth of your breath. Breathing in a controlled and deep manner enables:

- Strong lungs and a good capacity to inhale;
- More efficient transportation of oxygen throughout the body;
- Overall sense of calmness; and
- Improved capacity to thinking clearly.

HOW TO breathe for relaxation

1. Make yourself comfortable – whether sitting or lying down. Close your eyes if you are at ease with this. Allow your stomach muscles to be soft.
2. Focus your attention on your breathing. Watch your breath for a few minutes until it settles into a regular rhythm.

3. Inhale slowly and deeply, drawing your breath down **slowly** so that your diaphragm expands outwards, rather than the breath going high into your chest. You will also notice your abdomen expand as you inhale. Don't force this deep breath – allow it to deepen gradually.
4. Hold your breath for 1 second and then SLOWLY exhale. Relaxation occurs with gentle exhalation.
5. Continue this pattern. Keep your attention on your breathing. Your mind will wander and you will begin thinking about things. Once you become aware of this bring your attention back to your breathing. It takes a lot of regular practise not to think.

Additional Methods of Relaxation

Gaining control over your breath is the first step to true relaxation. There are many other ways to relax the mind and body. A few ideas are listed:

- Meditation
- Correct stretching exercises
- Laughter
- A regular exercise regime
- Participating in social events, sports & hobbies
- Good sleep
- Planning and going on holidays
- Receiving a massage
- Having fun with friends & family
- Bushwalking
- Listening to a relaxation recording (DVD, CD)
- Dancing
- Reading
- Watching a movie
- Participating in a class designed to strengthen the body, for example: yoga, tai chi, kick-boxing, tae kwon do or pilates.

Useful Links & Resources

The Curtin University Guild has a varied sport & recreation programme. Click on the following link for details:

<http://www.guild.curtin.edu.au/go/activities/-clubs-and-sport/events>

or

<http://www.guild.curtin.edu.au/go/activities/-clubs-and-sport/recreation-courses>

The University Counselling Services runs some personal development courses. Click on the following link for details:

<http://counselling.curtin.edu.au/local/docs/groupflyer0207.doc>

The national programme *Beyond Blue* is also an excellent source for a range of information for emotional health. Click on the following link:

www.beyondblue.org

Available in Curtin University Library

“The Relaxation & Stress Reduction Workbook” by M Davis, E Robbins Eshelman & M McKay

“Relaxation for Concentration, Stress Management & Pain Control: Using the Fleming Method” edited by C Horrigan & Anne Fleming

“Eliminate Stress From Your Life Forever: A Simple Program for Better Living” by William Atkinson

“Light on Meditation” and “Teach Yourself to Meditate: With over 20 Exercises for Peace, Health & Clarity of Mind” by Eric Harrison