

No 3: Relaxation Exercises

Most people have times when they find it hard to relax. Often when we think we are relaxed, there is still tension in some of our body muscles. When you are not relaxed it is more difficult to appreciate pleasant and enjoyable feelings. The aim of this exercise is to teach you how to deeply relax your entire body by showing the differences between tension and relaxation of the muscles. Make sure you are in a warm, fairly quiet room, where you know you will not be interrupted. Lie on the floor, with your legs out-stretched and uncrossed and your arms by your side. You may like to support your head with a pillow or cushion. The next step is to close your eyes and allow yourself to become as relaxed as you can. Now carry out the following series of exercises which will make you even more relaxed.

Start to breathe slowly and deeply, expanding your abdomen as you breath in, then raising your rib cage to let more air in, until your lungs are filled right to the top. Hold your breath for a couple of seconds and then breathe **OUT** slowly, allowing your rib cage and stomach to relax and empty your lungs completely. Do not strain – with practice it will become easier. Keep this slow, deep rhythmic breathing going throughout your relaxation session.

Muscles of the hands:

To tense these, clench the hands and make a fist. Tense up on an **IN** breath, hold your breath for 10 seconds whilst you keep your muscles tense, then relax and breathe **OUT** at the same time.

The muscles at the front of the upper arms (biceps):

To tense these, bend your arms at the elbow and try to touch your shoulder. Tense up on an **IN** breath, hold your breath for 10 seconds; relax on an **OUT** breath.

The muscles at the back of the upper arms (triceps):

You can tense these by straining your arms backwards to the floor as hard as you can.

Tense up in an **IN** breath, hold your breath for 10 seconds; relax on an **OUT** breath.

Muscles of the shoulders:

You can tense these by shrugging your shoulders, bringing your shoulders up into your neck as hard as you can. Tense up in an **IN** breath, hold your breath for 10 seconds; relax on an **OUT** breath.

Muscles of the neck:

You can tense these by pressing your head back as hard as you can. Tense up on an **IN** breath, hold your breath for 10 seconds; relax on an **OUT** breath.

Muscles of the forehead:

You can tense these by raising your eyebrows as though you were inquiring. Tense up on an **IN** breath, hold your breath for 10 seconds; relax on an **OUT** breath.

Muscles of the brow and eyes:

You can tense these by frowning as hard as you can and squeezing your eyes tightly shut. Tense up on an **IN** breath, hold your breath for 10 seconds; relax on an **OUT** breath and keep your eyeballs still and looking straight ahead.

Muscles of the jaw, tongue and throat:

You can tense these by biting your teeth together and by putting the tip of your tongue against the roof of your mouth and pushing up as hard as you can. Tense up on an **IN** breath, hold your breath for 10 seconds; relax on an **OUT** breath and part your teeth slightly so there is no pressure between them. Let your tongue drop down to the bottom of your mouth.

Muscles of the stomach:

You can tense these by tightening your stomach muscles as though you were going to receive a blow. Tense up on an **IN** breath, hold your breath for 10 seconds; relax on an **OUT** breath.

Muscles of the hips:

You can tense these by tightening your buttocks as hard as you can. Tense up on an **IN** breath, hold your breath for 10 seconds; relax on an **OUT** breath.

Muscles of the legs:

You can tense these by straightening your legs as hard as you can to tense your thighs and by pointing your toes downwards to tense your calves. Tense up on an **IN** breath, hold your breath for 10 seconds; relax on an **OUT** breath.

Remember to keep your breathing shallow and relaxed and every time you breathe **OUT**, relax a little more.

Now try to imagine some pleasant scene, some situation where you feel relaxed and at ease, such as lying in the sun or enjoying the peace of the countryside. Imagine the scene as vividly as you can – peaceful- calm- and let it relax you more and more deeply. When you want to finish, tell yourself that when you open your eyes you will be perfectly relaxed but alert. Count to three and then open your eyes.