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Relaxation Tape 1: Deep Breathing Relaxation

Relaxation exercises can help you learn to calm yourself quickly. They are particularly helpful when you need to recover from a stressful experience, such as if you just jumped out of the way from an oncoming automobile. But they are also helpful if you anticipate a certain situation that you think will be stressful, such as if you are about to give a public presentation and want to calm yourself before going "on stage."

There are a wide variety of relaxation techniques that are simple to learn and can be practiced most anywhere. This demonstration will deal with deep breathing. Deep breathing is a fundamental part of all relaxation techniques and, as such, is a good place for you to begin. By slowing your breathing down, you will also become more calm. Other common techniques include progressive muscle relaxation and visualization. All of the techniques are simple to learn and can be practiced almost anytime you feel stressed. You're encouraged to learn and try all three exercises. You may prefer one or two techniques over the others, and you may wish to modify some aspects of them to meet your needs. What's most important is for you to have some easy way that will make you feel more in control of the stress in your life. At the end of the demonstration, you'll learn more about how to find out about the other relaxation techniques.

Typically, when we're tense, we tend to breathe in a more rapid and shallow way. This usually involves just the upper part of our lungs and is often referred to as "chest breathing." In order to consciously feel more relaxed, we'll need to reverse this way of breathing by taking slower, deeper breathes. This slower, deeper sort of breathing uses the diaphragm to inhale air all the way to the lower parts of the lungs and is known as "diaphragmatic breathing," or "belly breathing." Slowing your breathing down, therefore, by switching from chest breathing to diaphragmatic breathing is one way to go from feeling tense to feeling relaxed. This technique can be used alone or in combination with other techniques, such as progressive muscle relaxation or visualization.

It's important to note that, if you are chronically tense and tend to chest breathe, diaphragmatic breathing may feel strange at first. You may even feel that you aren't getting enough air. In reality, however, this is actually a sign that diaphragmatic breathing will help you a great deal. As you keep practicing, it will become more comfortable. On the other hand, if you are suffering from a respiratory illness or have chronic back pain, you may need to be careful here. If you have any concerns about this, please check with your doctor or health care professional.

Basically, the object is to work up to taking seven full seconds to inhale and then taking an additional eight full seconds to exhale. For this demonstration, I will lead you through it, but

later you can count to yourself. For the first couple of breaths during the demonstration, we will gradually work our way up to taking the full seven second inhale and eight second exhale. We'll start with a four second inhale and a five second exhale and then increase by one second each time. Remember: The idea is not to strain but to be relaxed and in control. Therefore, if, at any time, you cannot maintain the long inhale or even longer exhale, alter your breathing so you are comfortable. Then gradually try to work up to the 15-second pace of four breaths per minute.

Now that you have the basic idea, let's begin a two minute slow breathing demonstration. First, get comfortable by sitting in a chair with both of your feet on the floor. (Make sure that your feet and hands are not crossed.) Close your eyes, if you wish, and concentrate on your breathing as you listen to me. To get the idea of what diaphragmatic breathing is all about, try putting one hand on your stomach with the little finger about one inch above your belly button. Put the other hand on your chest. Notice the movement of your hands. Your goal is to have the hand on your stomach move quite obviously, while the hand on your chest moves barely at all. Breathe in so that the incoming air expands the belly area and gently pushes against your hand. The hand on your belly should move out when you breathe in. Then, as you exhale slowly, your hand and your belly will move back in.

Breathe in ... and out.

Breathe smoothly and rhythmically without gasping or gulping air. It may help to breathe through your nose.

Breathe in ... and out.

As you breathe in, your diaphragm contracts and moves down, drawing air into your lungs and pushing your belly out. This allows for deep breathing. Then, as you breath out, your diaphragm relaxes and moves upward, helping to pull your belly in. This allows for the air to be exhaled out of the lungs.

Breathe in ... and out.

We'll increase the interval shortly and start counting, but for now, just think about breathing using your diaphragm.

Breathe in ... and out.

Focus on relaxing your chest, using your diaphragm, feeling your belly muscles expanding as the diaphragm pushes out, filling your lungs with air. Then slowly exhale, taking slightly longer than when you were breathing in.

Breathe in ... and out.

Some people find it helpful to imagine all of their tension "flowing out" as they exhale.

Now let's try to increase the breathing intervals. Remember, we want to try to inhale for four full seconds to start. Ready. And inhale (slowly): one, two, three, four. And exhale (very slowly): two, three, four, five.

Let's increase the interval if you can. Inhale: one, two, three, four, five. Exhale: two, three, four,

five, six.

And again slowly inhale: one, two, three, four, five, six. Slowly Exhale: two, three, four, five, six, seven.

And again inhale: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven. Exhale: two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight ... and blow out all of your tension and stress.

Again, inhale: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven. And slowly Exhale: two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight ... and you are starting to feel very relaxed.

And inhale: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven. Exhale slowly: two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight ... and think to yourself, I am relaxed.

Inhale: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven. Exhale: two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight ... blow out all your tension and stress.

And the last time, inhale: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven. And Exhale: two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight.

You are relaxed. You are refreshed. Slowly, open your eyes whenever you feel like it. Feel how relaxed you are. Feel how refreshed your entire body is. You are totally calm and relaxed. You can retain a feeling of calm as you become alert for whatever you wish to do next. Practice every day, either ten minutes twice a day or four minutes, four times a day.



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