

RELAXATION is more than simply having peace of mind, resting or enjoying a hobby. Deep relaxation can help you manage stress, and stay alert, energetic and productive.

You may think that taking a few minutes to unwind at the end of the day is all the relaxation you need. Unfortunately, a few minutes won't provide the stress-reducing benefits of deep relaxation.

When you truly relax, you eliminate tension from your body and your mind. And if you're experiencing a lot of stress in your life, you need to make time to relax. Otherwise, the negative effects of your body's stress response which may include headaches, insomnia or increased risk of heart disease can harm your health.

Learning to relax doesn't have to be difficult. Try some simple techniques to get started on your way to tranquillity and the health benefits it provides. **Why relax?**

With so many things to do, it's easy to put off taking time to relax each day. But in doing so, you miss out on the health benefits of relaxation. Relaxation can improve how your body responds to stress by:

- Slowing your heart rate, meaning less work for your heart
- Reducing blood pressure
- Slowing your breathing rate
- Reducing the need for oxygen
- Increasing blood flow to the major muscles
- Lessening muscle tension

After practicing relaxation skills, you may experience the following benefits:

- Fewer symptoms of illness, such as headaches, nausea, diarrhoea and pain
 - Few emotional responses such as anger, crying, anxiety, apprehension and frustration
 - More energy
 - Improved concentration
 - Greater ability to handle problems
 - More efficiency in daily activities
- As you learn to relax, you'll become



Techniques to help you Achieve Tranquillity

more aware of muscle tension and other physical sensations caused by the stress response. In time, you may even notice your body's reaction before you take mental note of your stress. Once you know what the stress response feels like, you can make a conscious effort to switch to relaxation mode the moment your muscles start to tense.

Relaxed breathing Have you ever noticed how you breathe when you're stressed? Stress typically causes rapid, shallow breathing. This kind of breathing sustains other aspects of the stress response, such as rapid heart rate and perspiration. If you can get control of your breathing, the spiralling effects of acute stress will automatically

become less intense. Relaxed breathing, also called diaphragmatic breathing, can help you.

Practice this basic technique twice a day, every day, and whenever you feel tense. Follow these steps:

- **Inhale.** With your mouth closed and your shoulders relaxed, inhale as slowly and deeply as you can to the count of six. As you do that, push your stomach out. Allow the air to fill your diaphragm.
- **Hold.** Keep the air in your lungs as you slowly count to four.
- **Exhale.** Release the air through your mouth as you slowly count to six.
- **Repeat.** Complete the inhale-hold-exhale cycle three to five times.

Progressive muscle relaxation The goal of progressive muscle relaxation is to reduce the tension in your muscles. First, find a quiet place where you'll be free from interruption. Loosen tight clothing and remove your glasses or contacts if you'd like.

Tense each muscle group for at least five seconds and then relax for at least 30 seconds. Repeat before moving to the next muscle group.

- **Upper part of your face.** Lift your eyebrows toward the ceiling, feeling the tension in your forehead and scalp. Relax. Repeat.
- **Central part of your face.** Squint your eyes tightly and wrinkle your nose and mouth, feeling the tension in the centre of your face. Relax. Repeat.
- **Lower part of your face.** Clench your teeth and pull back the corners of your mouth toward your ears. Show your teeth like a snarling dog. Relax. Repeat.
- **Neck.** Gently touch your chin to your chest. Feel the pull in the back of your neck as it spreads into your head. Relax. Repeat.
- **Shoulders.** Pull your shoulders up toward your ears, feeling the tension in your shoulders, head, neck and upper back. Relax. Repeat.
- **Upper arms.** Pull your arms back and press your elbows in toward the sides of your body. Try not to tense