

Develop the Habit of Relaxation

Objective

To develop a daily habit of relaxation to reduce stress.

What to Know

You might be so busy you forget to relax. Yet research shows relaxing for just five minutes can increase your problem-solving skills and reduce your stress. Stress is not all bad, and in fact some stress is necessary to cope with difficult situations. Stress-related physical changes in your body allows you to take action. But if you stay in a state of high stress for too long, it can negatively damage your mental and physical health.

Is a lack of relaxation affecting you? Check off any of the symptoms you are currently experiencing.

- headaches
- neck and shoulder tension
- dizziness
- fatigue, low energy, poor sleep
- worrying
- poor concentration
- difficulty making decisions
- uncontrollable thoughts
- irritability
- overwhelm
- anxiety
- low self-esteem
- depression
- aggressive or defensive behavior
- avoidance
- poor communication
- drinking too much alcohol, smoking, or abusing drugs

You cannot always avoid stress, but you can learn to manage stress by developing a habit of relaxation.

Practicing relaxation increases blood flow, giving you more energy and a calmer and clearer mind – often resulting in increased concentration, memory, and decision-making. Relaxation also slows heart rate, reduces blood pressure, relieves tension, and aids digestion.

Start developing your relaxation habit by scheduling in five minutes a few times during the day. Here are a few techniques that are quick and easy to practice.

- focus on your breathing, taking several slow, deep breaths
- relax in a warm bath
- give yourself a five-minute hand massage
- take a ten-minute walk and focus on your surroundings
- listen to music for twenty minutes
- read a book
- pet an animal
- laugh out loud
- spend five minutes alone
- spend time in the sun
- engage in a creative activity
- stretch or practice yoga

No matter how busy you are, you can create time to relax. This worksheet will help you develop a daily habit of relaxation.

What to Do

Choose to do at least 2-3 of the following activities, or one of the above activities, every day. Check off what you will do.

_____ **Breathe.** Breathing exercises can calm your body and mind anywhere and at any time. Sit or lie down in a quiet place and place one of your hands on your belly. Breathe in to a slow count of three, and then breathe out to a count of three. Feel your belly rise and fall as you breathe in and out. Repeat five times, or as long as you need to feel relaxed.

_____ **Release physical tension.** Lie down on a soft surface, such as your bed, a carpeted floor, or a yoga mat. Tense up one part of your body at a time, and then slowly release your muscles. Notice how your body sensations change. Start at your toes and work your way through the muscles all the way up your body to your head.

_____ **Write it down.** Get things off your mind by writing them down. Take a few minutes to write short notes about how you are feeling or how your day is going. Do this in a journal, notebook, or in a notes app on your smartphone. Focus on expressing yourself to release stress.

_____ **Make a list.** Experts say that when people are stressed, they tend to focus on the negative rather than the positive. Write down the positives in your life. Think of three good things that happened to you, or three things for which you are grateful.

____ **Visualize.** Sit in a quiet and safe space and think about a place in the world where you feel most calm. Close your eyes and imagine all the details associated with that place: the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile feelings.

____ **Connect to nature.** Spend a few minutes outside and go for a short walk, or simply sit in nature. Scientists have found that simply looking at images of nature with greenery for five minutes on a computer screen can help calm you down.

____ **Meditate.** Research suggests that daily meditation may alter the brain's neural pathways, making you more resilient to stress. Meditating for as little as ten minutes every day can significantly reduce your stress and anxiety. Sit down, close your eyes, and bring your attention to your breath.

____ **Scan your body.** Scanning your body for two minutes can help you understand where you are holding tension and how it affects you. Sit comfortably or lie on your back and scan your body from your toes to your scalp. As you move through each body part, notice how it feels. Breathe deeply into each body part, imagining fresh breath flowing to each part you are scanning.

____ **Try hydrotherapy.** Splash some cold water on your face and pulse points. Running cold water or putting ice on your wrists can help you calm down.

____ Other: _____

____ Other: _____

Relaxation is not just for adults. If you sense your child needs to relax, help them practice some of these exercises. This encourages self-regulation in your child.

Next, do at least 2-3 relaxation activities each day for the next two weeks. Use the following chart to record what you do. Note the date, activity, and how you felt at the end of the day after taking the time to relax.

Date	Activities	Outcome

Date	Activity	Outcome

Reflections on This Exercise

What did you learn from this exercise that you did not know before?

How motivated are you to develop a relaxation habit? Explain.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What can you do differently to make progress in this area?
