

Relaxation



There is no exact definition of stress because it is different for everyone, but most people view stress as how they feel in reaction to life pressures or demands.

Too much stress can cause a variety of physical, emotional, and behavioral health symptoms or problems. Chronic stress can lead to chronic pain, and chronic pain can worsen stress. Practicing relaxation methods can relieve stress and can lead to improved health and well-being.

The Relaxation Response

Too much stress can hurt your health, but what is the alternative? How can you meet all the demands in your life without being stressed? Your body's solution to excess stress is the Stress Response which puts you in the "fight or flight" mode. You can help to relieve the Stress Response by bringing on the Relaxation Response which puts the body into "rest and digest" mode. Because the Stress Response can wear your body down, it is important to engage the Relaxation Response to keep your body working properly.

Benefits of Relaxation

- Better sleep
- Boosts confidence and feelings of resilience
- Improves concentration and problem solving skills
- Increases blood flow to muscles and tissues
- Lowers blood pressure
- Reduces anger, anxiety, and depression
- Reduces muscle tension which can reduce pain
- Slows down breathing and heart rate

Relaxation can help to reduce the symptoms of many diseases and conditions such as heart conditions, diabetes, chronic pain, sleeping disorders, anxiety, and depression. Using relaxation methods in addition to the other treatments your health care provider recommends can help you manage your health even better.

Relaxation Methods

Relaxing is a skill, and it may take time to get good at it. Start with 5-15 minutes per day of any method and work up to at least 20 minutes per day. As you practice, it will get easier and feel better.

Doing Things you Enjoy

Relaxing can be as simple as doing something you enjoy such as:

- Being outside in nature
- Crafts and other hobbies
- Laughing by watching a movie, having an uplifting conversation, and/or reading a funny book
- Listening to music
- Reading or listening to books
- Visiting with family or friends

Physical Activity

Any form of physical activity can help reduce stress when it is done in a way that is fun and enjoyable. Physical activity releases endorphins which help improve your mood. It can also be a healthy distraction.

If you have any health problems, talk to your health care team before starting any exercise program.

Relaxation Techniques

These techniques are designed specifically to help you learn how to relax.

- **Deep Breathing** - This can help with chronic pain, stress, muscle tension, anxiety, sleep disorders, and other conditions like high blood pressure.
- **Guided Imagery** - This method uses relaxation, mental visualization, and imagination to improve physical well-being, health, and mood. It can be self-directed or it can be done with a therapist or video.
- **Mindful Meditation** - Learn to achieve a calm, focused, harmonious mind and state of being. Mindful meditation helps create a calm state of being that can help to reduce pain and discomfort.
- **Tense & Relax Method** - This method can help to relieve muscle tension and help reduce chronic pain. With regular practice, Tense & Relax helps you become familiar with what tension feels like and how to let it go.