

Benefits of Relaxation

Relaxation Techniques

Body Scan Script

If you feel that you are getting increasingly stressed, you can't think straight, your body feels tense and you can't concentrate any more, it may be time to take a break to practise relaxation.

Relaxation techniques can help alleviate stress symptoms. You can practise progressive muscle relaxation, body scan, guided visualisation or mindfulness meditation. You can experiment with all these techniques or just choose the one that suits you the most. Simply allow yourself 5–10 minutes each day to practise, and notice the health benefits that follow.

It is simple and effective; all you need is a space where you will not be interrupted for 10–15 minutes and a comfortable chair. Recent studies reported some of the benefits of relaxation:

- Decreased anxiety
- Improved social relationships
- Improved learning
- Improved performance at work
- Better control over urges and cravings
- Improved ability to control aggressive behaviour... and many more.¹

¹ Beauchemin, J., Hutchins, T. L., & Patterson, F. (2008). 'Mindfulness meditation may lessen anxiety, promote social skills, and improve academic performance among adolescents with learning disabilities'. *Complementary Health Practice Review*, 13(1), pp. 34-45.

Drach-Zahavy, A., & Marzuq, N. (2013). 'The weekend matters: Exploring when and how nurses best recover from work stress.' *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 69(3), pp. 578-589. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2012.06033.x>

Flemons, D. (2013). Using hypnosis to invite relaxation *Psychologists' desk reference* (3rd ed., pp. 271-276). Oxford University Press, New York

It might sound too simple to be effective, but try it anyway. Your practice does not have to be overly long, it is more beneficial to have a shorter practice every day, rather than having long sessions that you only do a few times a week.

Sometimes people try very hard to 'relax'. This rarely works and can lead to frustration. Instead, it might be better to simply pay attention to your body just as it is, bringing a sense of curiosity without any expectation. When your mind settles, the body lets go of all the tension and stress. Scan your body slowly from top to bottom and back again. Follow these instructions for body scan:

First, sit comfortably and shake your body loose, releasing any obvious tension. If you like you can close your eyes or lower your gaze, whichever one is more comfortable for you.

Take a couple of deep breaths and let go of any tensions completely as you breathe out... Now pay attention to your

Scalp and forehead (notice tingling, pulsing, pressure...) Stay with these sensations for a moment before moving to your

Face and lower part of the head (soften your **eyes**, let your **mouth** and **jaw** go slack)... And then your

Neck, throat, shoulders, arms and hands (like stroking or massaging your body with your mind) ... And now pay attention to your

Chest and upper back (feel the lungs expand and contract)... And next your

Diaphragm and solar plexus (feel the movement of lower ribs)... Now your

Belly and lower back (feel the soft organs move slightly as you breathe)... Then your

Hips, legs and feet (feel or imagine the breath dropping through your body)

And now pay attention to your body as a whole. Take a couple of deep breaths. If your eyes were closed you can gently open your eyes.

If at first you experience difficulties remembering what to do, you might find it easier to listen to guided relaxation. Try our guided relaxation [*A Moment of Relaxation*](#) by Andrew Johnson, who has been working with individuals for more than 16 year teaching them relaxation skills. It is not very long and many people have found it quite helpful. You don't really have anything to lose and you do have everything to gain. Just give it a go.