



# 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.**

**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 us 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

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

**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 prescribes 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 of these methods and work up to at least 20 minutes per day. As you practice, it will get easier and feel better.

## Exercise\*

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

Some types of exercise are walking, riding a bike, swimming, sports, gym classes, weight training, yoga, tai chi, yard work and even house cleaning.

**\*If you have any health problems talk to your health care provider before starting any exercise program.**

## Doing Things you Enjoy

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

**Listening to music**

**Being outside in nature**

**Visiting with family or friends**

**Reading or listening to books**

**Laughing**

Laugh therapy can be done with a professional or you can watch a funny movie, have an uplifting conversation, or read a funny book.

## Relaxation Techniques

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

### Mindful Meditation

Learn to achieve a calm, focused, harmonious mind and state of being. In this calmness is a more natural way 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.

### 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, CD or video.

**Ask your health care provider about handouts on Exercise, the Relaxation Response, Mindful Meditation, Deep Breathing, Guided Imagery and the Tense & Relax method.**