**Relaxation Techniques**

Relaxation techniques involve refocusing your attention on something calming and increasing awareness of your body. Try to practice relaxation regularly to reap its benefits.

Types of relaxation techniques include:

* **Autogenic relaxation.** Autogenic means something that comes from within you. In this relaxation technique, you use both visual imagery and body awareness to reduce stress. You repeat words or suggestions in your mind that may help you relax and reduce muscle tension. For example, you may imagine a peaceful setting and then focus on controlled, relaxing breathing, slowing your heart rate, or feeling different physical sensations, such as relaxing each arm or leg one by one.
* **Progressive muscle relaxation.** In this relaxation technique, you focus on slowly tensing and then relaxing each muscle group. This can help you focus on the difference between muscle tension and relaxation. You can become more aware of physical sensations. In one method of progressive muscle relaxation, you start by tensing and relaxing the muscles in your toes and progressively working your way up to your neck and head. You can also start with your head and neck and work down to your toes. Tense your muscles for about five seconds and then relax for 30 seconds, and repeat.
* **Visualization.** In this relaxation technique, you may form mental images to take a visual journey to a peaceful, calming place or situation. To relax using visualization, try to incorporate as many senses as you can, including smell, sight, sound and touch. If you imagine relaxing at the ocean, for instance, think about the smell of salt water, the sound of crashing waves and the warmth of the sun on your body. You may want to close your eyes, sit in a quiet spot, loosen any tight clothing, and concentrate on your breathing. Aim to focus on the present and think positive thoughts.

**Other relaxation techniques may include:**

* Deep breathing
* Massage
* Meditation
* Tai chi
* Yoga
* Biofeedback
* Music and art therapy
* Aromatherapy
* Hydrotherapy

**Relaxation techniques take practice**

As you learn relaxation techniques, you can become more aware of muscle tension and other physical sensations of stress. Once you know what the stress response feels like, you can make a conscious effort to practice a relaxation technique the moment you start to feel stress symptoms. This can prevent stress from spiraling out of control. Remember that relaxation techniques are skills. As with any skill, your ability to relax improves with practice. Be patient with yourself. Don't let your effort to practice relaxation techniques become yet another stressor. If one relaxation technique doesn't work for you, try another technique. If none of your efforts at stress reduction seems to work, talk to your therapist or doctor about other options.

Also, bear in mind that some people, especially those with serious psychological issues and a history of trauma, may experience feelings of **emotional discomfort during some relaxation techniques.** Although this is rare, if you experience emotional discomfort during relaxation techniques, stop what you're doing, try a different relaxation effort, and consider talking to your doctor or therapist.