



Full Relaxation Techniques



For many, relaxation means zoning out in front of the TV at the end of a stressful day. But this does little to reduce the damaging effects of stress. To effectively combat stress, it is necessary to activate your body's natural relaxation response. One way to do this is by practicing effective relaxation techniques. Fitting these activities into your life can help reduce everyday stress, boost your energy and mood, and improve your mental and physical health.

This guide provides relaxation techniques that take longer and are best when performed in a comfortable environment, but which are extremely effective and have lasting effects.

The Stress Response

The stress or “fight-or-flight” response is a reaction to perceived danger, which causes your body to experience the following:

- Pounding and racing heartrate
- Fast and shallow breathing
- Rising blood pressure
- Tight and tensed muscles
- Anxiety and inability to think clearly

The Relaxation Response

In opposition to the stress response is the relaxation response. This response puts your body at rest and allows you to experience the following:

- Slow and steady heartrate
- Deeper and more even breaths
- Normalized and stable blood pressure
- Loose and relaxed muscles
- Increased oxygen delivery to the brain

The following relaxation techniques are designed to specifically trigger this relaxation response.

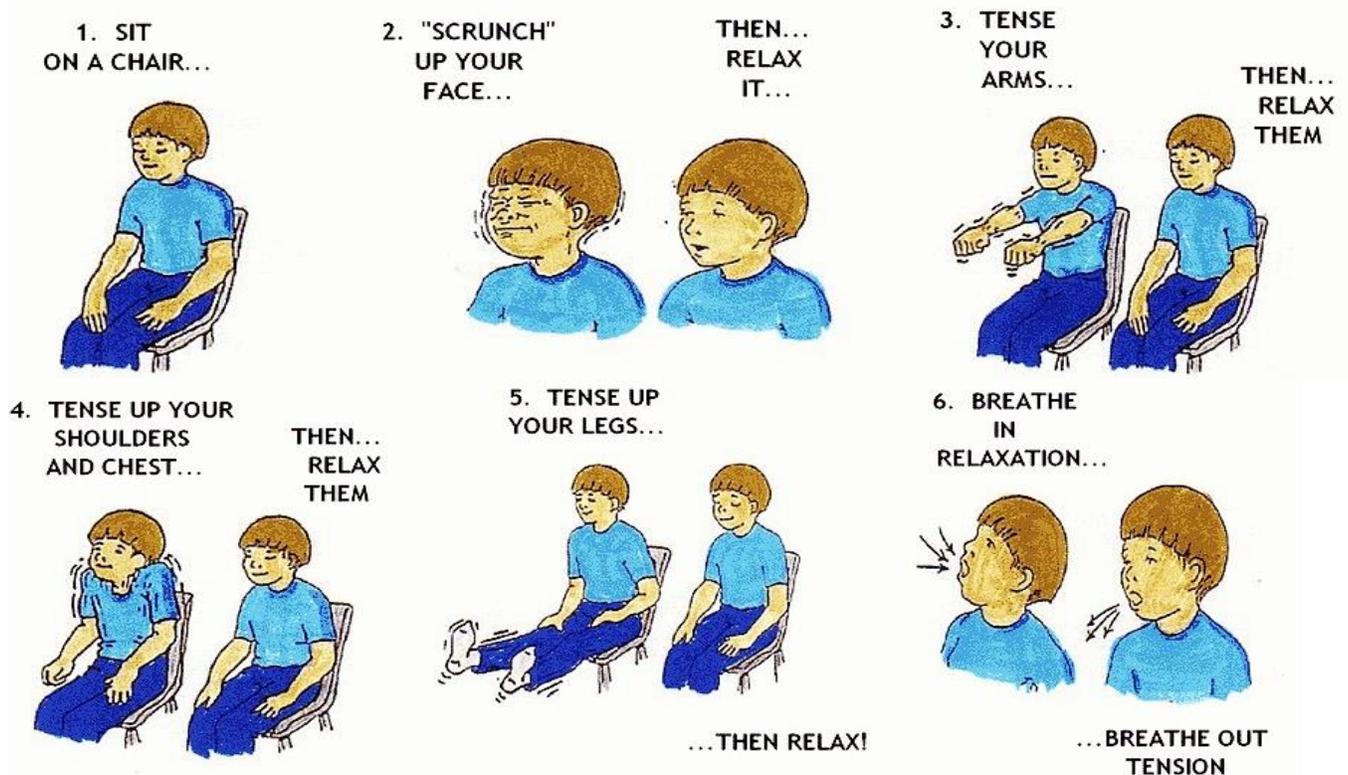
Tips for Successful Relaxation

- ❖ Wear **loose, comfortable** clothing.
- ❖ Find a **quiet space** where you won't be interrupted for at least 15 minutes.
- ❖ Turn the **lights down**.
- ❖ If there is unavoidable noise, put on some **background music** or nature sounds.
- ❖ **Turn off the phone** and give yourself permission to devote some time to self-care.
- ❖ Sit or lie down in a **comfortable position**, with legs uncrossed and extended.
- ❖ **Try each relaxation technique for a few days** to give yourself a chance to find the one that is right for you.
- ❖ **Don't feel discouraged** if you don't achieve a given result the first few times.
- ❖ **Remember that you are practicing a skill** – like playing the piano. The more you practice, the more effective your relaxation work becomes.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

This technique works by increasing your awareness of the muscle tension that occurs during stress, and then forcing yourself to release that tension.

1. **Sit back or lie down** in a comfortable position. Close your eyes. Take a few slow, deep breaths.
2. Beginning at your face, **notice how your muscles feel**. Are they tense, or relaxed?
3. **Tightly tense the muscles** in your face by squeezing your eyes shut and tightening your lips.
4. Hold this for **5-10 seconds**.
5. Now, **release the tension** from your face, allowing it to relax. Notice how relaxed they feel.
6. **Move down your body and repeat this process** with each group of muscles (*see diagram below*)



Visualization

1. Close your eyes and **imagine a restful place**--such as a dock on a quiet lake.
2. **Picture it as vividly as you can**—everything you can see, hear, smell, taste, and feel. Incorporate as many sensory details as possible:
 - **See** the sun setting over the water
 - **Hear** the birds singing
 - **Smell** the pine trees
 - **Feel** the cool water on your bare feet
 - **Taste** the fresh, clean air
3. **Enjoy the feeling of your worries drifting away** as you slowly explore your restful place.
4. When you are ready, slowly open your eyes and come back to the present.