

Tense – relax: physical relaxation technique

Find a place where you won't be disturbed for at least ten minutes.

Think about your environment; make sure the lighting is not too bright. You may choose to close your eyes and play some quiet, soothing music, particularly if there are any distracting sounds. Make sure that you are warm as it is normal to cool down during relaxation.

Sit, well supported, in a chair, with both feet flat on the floor. Alternatively, lie down on a rug or blanket on the floor. Use a cushion under your knees if your back is uncomfortable.

Work your way methodically around the body, first tensing muscle groups and then relaxing them. You may choose to breathe in whilst you tense and out whilst you relax. Try pausing for a second breath without tensing but breathing out and letting go, to relax that area even more.

You may wish to record the following or get a friend to read it to you or you may find your own system which suits you better.

Take your thoughts down to your feet and your toes. As you breathe in, point your toes and fill your feet with tension. As you breathe out, stop and let your feet go. Take another breath in and as you breathe out, let go a little more in your feet and your toes.

Now take your thoughts up to your calves, knees and thighs. As you next breathe in, tense the muscles of your legs, fill them with tension for a moment and as you breathe out, let go. Take another breath in and as you breathe out, let the legs relax even more.

Take your thoughts up to your pelvis. As you breathe in tighten your buttock muscles, hold for a moment and as you breathe out, let go. Have another deep breath in and as you breathe out let go even more in the buttocks.

Now think about your belly and your lower back. As you next breathe in, pull your navel back towards your spine, as you breathe out, let go. Draw a deep breath right down towards the belly and let go.

Think about your rib cage. Watch as the ribs gently rise on the in breath and slowly subside on the out breath.

Now take your thought to your shoulders. This is a very common area to store tension. As you next breathe in, lift your shoulders up towards your ears, hold them there as you hold your breath and as you breathe out let them go. Take another deep breath in and as you breathe out feel your shoulders drop down and away from your ears.

Think about your arms and your hands. As you breathe in, make a fist with your hands and fill your arms with tension. As you breathe out, spread your fingers and then let go. Take another breath in and as you breathe out, let your arms let go and your hands rest comfortably in your lap if you are sitting or by your sides if you are lying.

Take your thoughts to your head and your neck. As you breathe out, gently turn your head to one side and as the breath comes in, bring it back to the centre, breathing out, take the head to the other side and as your breath comes in, bring it slowly back to the centre.

Now take your thoughts to your face. As you next breathe in, screw all the features of your face into a tight little ball. Screw up your eyes, clench your jaw, and furrow your brow. As you breathe out, let go. Take another breath in, and as you breathe out soften your jaw line and let your tongue rest behind your lower set of teeth with your lips barely touching. Feel that your eyes are lightly closed and the space between your eyebrows is wide and smooth. Your forehead is smooth and free from frown lines. Feel that smoothness goes over your hairline, over the top of your head and down to the back of the neck.

Take a nice deep breath in and as you breathe out let the whole body relax.

Remain like this for a few moments if possible, up to 15 minutes if you are really treating yourself! Some quiet music may be helpful.

Gently bring your thoughts back to your body. Become aware of the points of contact with the chair or floor.

Deepen your breath, focusing on the in breath.

Begin to wiggle your fingers, wiggle your toes and then take a deep breath in and have a good stretch! Another breath in and stretch through the hands and feet and a yawn as you breathe out.

Give yourself a moment to wake up, stamping the feet may help, then return to your day with renewed energy levels and a calm mind!