

Relaxing at bedtime

Relaxation exercises can help you to feel calm and ready for sleep when you go to bed.

Like all new skills, relaxation takes practice and you may not feel the benefits straight away.

Keep an open mind, practice and see if relaxation can help you.

Relaxation exercises

Relaxation involves tensing each of the major muscle groups in your body and then releasing the tension. **Tensing the muscles helps them to relax.**

There are a number of audio guides that will take you through the process of tensing and relaxing your muscles. If you don't have one you can follow the instructions below.

- ✓ Try this half an hour before you go to bed. Find a quiet, warm place where you won't be disturbed and turn your phone off. Lie down or sit comfortably. You may want to shut your eyes but if you want to keep them open that's fine.
- ✓ Tense each muscle group twice. Tense it enough so that it feels tight but don't hurt yourself.
- ✓ Start by taking 5 deep breaths. Slowly breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth
- ✓ Now turn your attention to your feet and curl up your toes. Scrunch them up, count to 5 and release them. **Notice the difference between tension and relaxation.** Tense them again
- ✓ Move your attention to your legs and tense your calves by pointing your toes towards your knees. Count to 5, release the tension and notice the difference between tension and relaxation.

- ✓ Tense your thighs by pushing the back of your legs against the chair or bed.
- ✓ Move to your stomach and tense this by sucking in your stomach and pushing your belly button towards your spine.
- ✓ Focus on your arms and hands and tense them by making a tight fist and curling your arms up towards your shoulders.
- ✓ Now tense your back by arching your spine and pushing your shoulder blades together. Count to 5, relax and notice the difference between tension and relaxation.
- ✓ Focus on your neck and shoulders and push your shoulders up towards your ears.
- ✓ Shift your attention to your face and tense your chin and jaw by clenching your teeth and pushing your chin down towards your chest
- ✓ Finally, tense the rest of the muscles in your face by closing your eyes and pressing your lips together tightly and screw up your face
- ✓ As you release each muscle notice the tension fade away
- ✓ Return your attention to your breathing and enjoy this relaxed feeling for a few minutes.

Quick relaxation

A quicker way of doing this is to **tense each of the major muscle groups together.**

Tense your muscles, hold them for 5 seconds and as you breathe out let them go and notice the tension fade away. Repeat this and enjoy that nice calm feeling for a couple of minutes.

- ✓ Arms and hands: Clench your fists and push your arms towards your shoulders
- ✓ Legs and feet: Push your toes towards your knees, gently raise your legs and stretch them out in front of you

- ✓ Stomach: Suck your tummy in
- ✓ Shoulders and neck: Push your shoulders up towards your ears and pull your shoulders blades together
- ✓ Face: Screw up your face, squeeze your eyes and jaw tightly, and push your lips together.
- ✓ The more you practice the easier you will find this.

Calming images

We can use our **imagination to create a special calming place** which can help us to feel relaxed, peaceful and happy.

Like relaxation, developing a helpful calming image will take time and will need practice.

- ✓ Your calming place should be somewhere that feels very special to you. It could be somewhere that you have been which has good memories or an imaginary place like floating in space.
- ✓ To help you create a good image find a photograph or draw a picture of your calming place.
- ✓ Practice creating this image in your mind and try to make it as real as possible by describing:
 - **what you see** – the colours of the sky and sand and the shapes of the rocks
 - **what you hear** – the sound of waves crashing on the beach and the noise of seagulls shrieking
 - **what you feel** – the wind blowing through your hair and the sun warming your face
 - **what you smell** – the smell of sun screen and the smoky BBQ
 - **what you taste** - the salty water in your mouth

- ✓ Practice imaging your calming place before you go to bed. If you notice yourself feeling anxious or stressed in bed, then create your calming image and imagine you are there.