

# RELAXATION

## *A Simple Plan:*

- Practice one of the *breathing exercises* (below) 5 - 10 minutes daily for at least 2 weeks in a row
- Practice *progressive muscle relaxation* (below) for 15 - 20 minutes daily for at least 2 weeks in a row (once in the morning and once in the evening can provide additional benefit if it works in your schedule)
- Visualize your *peaceful scene* (below) for a few minutes after each muscle relaxation exercise and combine it with abdominal breathing (the visualization/abdominal breathing exercise is also especially useful during the day when unexpected anxiety arises)

## *Abdominal Breathing*

Often in our culture we inadvertently train ourselves to breathe with our chest so that our belly doesn't expand. As infants, we naturally breathe with our belly. Returning to this practice can be soothing and relaxing...

- Place one hand on your belly just beneath your rib cage
- Breathe in deeply through your nose, pulling air to the very bottom of your lungs while your diaphragm pushes down into your abdomen

- If you breath "abdominally" then your hand should rise with your inhalation and your chest should only move a little
- Pause for a moment and then exhale fully while physically allowing the rest of your body to "let go"
- Count 1 - 2 - 3 as you inhale and then again as your exhale, keeping the breaths paced, regular, and comfortably controlled
- Try to do the exercise for a full 5 minutes. If feeling lightheaded at any point, pause and breath normally for 20 seconds, and then resume the abdominal breathing

### *Calming Breath*

- Breathe in abdominally through your nose while counting 1 -2 - 3 - 4 - 5
- Hold the breath while counting 1 -2 - 3 - 4 - 5
- Exhale slowly through your mouth while counting 1 -2 - 3 - 4 - 5
- Consider mentally saying to yourself a calming word or positive mantra each time you exhale, such as "relax," "calm," or "letting go"...
- Now take 2 normal breaths
- Repeat this cycle for 5 minutes...

## *Progressive Relaxation*

- Do the following for at least 15-20 minutes each day...
- Find a quiet place to sit or lie down with no distraction (put phone on silent, run a fan to block out ambient noise)
- If possible, practice this at a regular time(s) each day
- Best if stomach is relatively empty
- Remove/loosen tight apparel (watch, belt, shoes...)
- Consciously instruct yourself that you are not to worry about anything for the next 20 minutes...the focus is on your body - allow yourself to become passive and detached
- With each of the following muscle groups, you will tense them up for 7 seconds, and then suddenly let them melt into a limp state, and indulge in the relaxed state for 15 seconds
- To begin...
- Take 3 abdominal breaths...then...
- Clench your fists as tight as you can 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7  
Next let your hands and fingers relax like they are melting and enjoy this feeling for 15 seconds
- Now do the same process for your biceps...
- Triceps...

- Forehead...
- Ocular (eyelid) muscles...
- Jaw...
- Neck and shoulders... (this is where many people hold most of their tension)
- Take a moment to note the heaviness of your body on the surface of where you are sitting or lying, and the safety in feeling the earth supporting you
- Abdomen...
- Lower back (arch it upward)...
- Butt...
- Thighs..
- Calves..
- Feet and toes...
- Now imagine that as you have progressed through this, the tension has melted and flowed down to your feet, and has now been pushed out through your feet and into the earth

## *Visualize a Peaceful Place*

- Imagine a "place" that comes to mind when you think of a peaceful, safe environment - this "place" can be real or imaginary
- Think consciously about the following:
- What colors are there?
- What sounds do you hear?
- What aromas are in the air?
- What does physical contact with the environment feel like there?
- What is the temperature?
- Are you alone or with someone who is comforting to you?
- What are you doing while in this place?
- Now either write down a detailed description of this scene or record it (often can be recorded easily in your own voice on a computer or cell phone)
- Use this detailed description to take yourself into this place you have created and use it as a transient escape from the stresses, tensions, and anxieties you find in daily life

- As you take yourself into this calming, safe place, just for yourself, incorporate slow, deep abdominal breathing techniques to help your mind and body flow out of the real world for a few minutes
- Try to keep yourself in this place for at least 5 minutes...then come back to the "real world" with a greater sense of calm and empowered to break away again if needed