



Relaxation Techniques to Manage Stress

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It is inevitable that almost everyone has to deal with stress. The fight or flight stress response is normal and healthy in alerting our senses to perceived threat or danger. But chronic stress can release high levels of the hormones cortisol and adrenalin into the body creating increased blood pressure, muscle tension, decreased immune system function and depression.

You can't avoid all stress, but it is important to learn relaxation techniques to prevent chronic stress. Some examples include:

1) Deep Breathing

- Focus on taking deep breaths from the lower abdomen rather than shallow breaths from the upper chest. Place one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach. Breathe in through your nose. The hand on your stomach should rise. The hand on your chest should move very little. Exhale through your mouth, pushing out as much air as you can while contracting your abdominal muscles. The hand on your stomach should move in as you exhale.

2) Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- A two-step process in which you systematically tense and relax different muscle groups in the body. When you're relaxed and ready to start, shift your attention to your right foot. Take a moment to focus on the way it feels. Slowly tense the muscles in your right foot, squeezing as tightly as you can. Relax your right foot. Focus on the tension flowing away and the way your foot feels as it becomes limp and loose. Stay in this relaxed state for a moment, breathing deeply and slowly. When you're ready, shift your attention to your left foot. Follow the same sequence of muscle tension and release. Move slowly up through your body — legs, abdomen, back, neck, face — contracting and relaxing the muscle groups as you go.

3) Mindfulness Meditation

- Mindfulness is the quality of being fully engaged in the present moment, without analyzing or otherwise “over-thinking” the experience. Rather than worrying about the future or dwelling on the past, mindfulness meditation switches the focus to what's happening right now.

4) Massage Therapy

- Getting a massage provides deep relaxation, and as the muscles in your body relax, so does your overstressed mind.