

Relaxation and Stress Management

Brought to you by the Counselling Service

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What to expect today

- Understanding the connection between stress and the fight/flight response
- Learn techniques for mindfulness meditation
- Understand the connection between thinking, feelings and stress
- Thoughts and challenges

Relaxation Techniques

- Breathing Techniques
- Muscle Relaxation
- Guided Imagery
- Mindfulness/ Meditation
- Biofeedback

Stress

- Fight or Flight Response
- Muscular tension
- Heart rate, blood pressure
- Breathing increases
- Raised cholesterol levels
- Disturb intestinal activities
- Depress the immune system

Physical Symptoms

- Sweaty palms
- Restlessness
- Trouble sleeping
- Tiredness
- Dizziness
- Ringing in ears
- Headaches
- Back pain
- Indigestion
- Stomach aches
- Racing heart
- Tight neck,
• shoulders

Some Behavioural Sxs

- Smoke excessively
- Grind teeth at night
- Trouble thinking clearly
- Too much alcohol
- Forgetful
- Can't make decisions
- Bossiness
- Compulsive eating
- Thoughts of running away
- Critical of others
- Can't seem to get things done
- Compulsive gum chewing

Emotional Symptoms

- Nervous, anxious
- Angry
- Crying
- Lonely
- Can't stop worrying
- On edge-ready to explode
- Can't laugh
- Unhappy for no reason
- Powerless to change things
- Easily upset
- Bored- no meaning to things
- Overwhelmed with pressure

Relaxation Techniques

- *Relief of stress related physical symptoms*
- *Relief of anxiety*
- *Freedom from compulsive worrying, self-criticism and negative thought*
- *Increase in concentration, awareness, energy, self-acceptance and inner peace*
- *Enhancement of healing processes*
- *Increased feeling of well being*
- *Increased feeling in control*
- *Regular practise*
- *Greater state of alertness*

Body's Physiological Responses

Psychological Changes	With the Fight/Flight Response	With Relaxation Response
Metabolism	Increases	Decreases
Heart Rate	Increases	Decreases
Blood Pressure	Increases	Decreases
Breathing Rate	Increases	Decreases
Muscle Tension	Increases	Decreases

Breathing Techniques

- Comfortable environment
- Breath in through nose, 4 count
- Hold breathe for 2
- Release breathe to the count of 6
- Repeat-aim 10 minutes a day, 2x a day
- Slowly transfer concentrating on outside noises to inside noises

The Relaxing Breath

- Sit comfortably with arms and legs uncrossed or lay comfortably on the floor with arms relaxed palms up or down and feet let to drop to open. Inhaling: place the tip of your tongue against the bony ridge near your upper front teeth; Exhaling slightly part your lips and drop your tongue. Practice this throughout the exercise.
- Exhale with a **whoosh** through your mouth
- Now close your mouth and breathe in quietly through your nose to a slow count of four
- Hold your breath easily to the count of four. Then exhale through your mouth with a **whoosh** to the count of four
- You have now completed one breath. Repeat the cycle three more times for a total of four breaths and increase the counts until you reach a count of 8 for each (8 inhale, 8 hold, 8 exhale.)
- Do not do more than four breaths at one time for the first week of practice. Over time, you can work up to eight breaths. While you may notice only a subtle effect at first, breathwork gains power through repetition and practice. Make a point to practice twice a day.

Muscle Relaxation

- Progressive
- Slowly tensing and then releasing each muscle group
- Starting with the muscles in the toes
- Finishing with those in the head
- Explain how it will help your client
- E.g. reduce anxiety, sleep at night etc
- Build trust, clients may feel 'silly'
- Explain to them what you will do
- Discuss it as being an important life skill
- Encourage them to go with the process however emphasize that they are in control

Guided Imagery (Autogenic Training)

- This technique uses both visual imagery and body awareness to move a person into a deep state of relaxation. The person imagines a peaceful place and then focuses on different physical sensations, moving from the feet to the head. For example, one might focus on warmth and heaviness in the limbs, easy, natural breathing, or a calm heartbeat.

Guided Imagery

- Some people find it easy to become absorbed in their inner world
- adopt a passive relaxed attitude
- Assess what are the person's favourite images
- choose a pleasant peaceful scene
- Engage the person in describing the scene vividly and extending the plot (use 5 senses)
- allow changes in bodily process to evolve naturally

Meditation

The two most popular forms of meditation include:

- Transcendental Meditation (students repeat a *mantra* [a single word or phrase],)
- mindfulness meditation (students focus their attention on their moment-by-moment thoughts and sensations).

Focused Relaxation

Based on two important things:

- First, that you have a focus word or image. If you are religious, you could choose a word or phrase that reflects your religion or you may choose a word that has meaning to you like Love, Peace, tranquil, calm, or relax, etc.
 - Instead of a word you may choose an image. For this exercise, choose an image that you are familiar with and that slightly increases your relaxation; like a candle flame; a sea shell, a steaming cup of coffee or tea, etc.
- The second important thing is that when your mind wanders, you then non-judgmentally notice these thoughts or noises and then return right back to your focus word.
- Relax the body
- Focus on the breath. And on the outbreath, say your focus word to yourself. Or if you have a focus image, see the image form in your mind. as you breath in, the image becomes brighter; as you exhale, the image dims slightly.
- As you do this for a while, you will notice that other thoughts will come or other noises may be noticeable. Just say “oh well”, let them go, and bring your attention back to your focus word or image.
- *Practice this for 7-10 minutes.*
- Keep your eyes closed and let your usual thoughts come back in. When you are ready, open your eyes.

Mindfulness

- “Awareness without judgement of what is, via direct and immediate experience”
- Skill that can be learned
- The practice of mindfulness is:
 - “The repetitive act of directing attention to only one thing in this moment”.
- Purpose -to gain control of your attention

Biofeedback

- A way of learning to change the bodies responses in a way that improves health using electronic instruments
- Used to help tense and anxious clients learn to relax
- E.g. Taking ones temperature, using scales
- Muscle biofeedback
 - EMG (electromyography)
- Skin conductance biofeedback
- Temperature
- Brain wave biofeedback (EEG)

The greatest revolution of our time is the knowledge that human beings, by changing the inner attitudes of their minds, can transform the outer aspects of their lives.

William James

Process of Cognitive Restructuring

- Uncover underlying, negative automatic thoughts
- Identify the distorted attitudes, assumptions and beliefs that underlie those thoughts
- Challenge the distorted attitudes, assumptions and beliefs
- Choose the effective way to cope with the situation

Challenging Unhelpful Thoughts

- All or nothing thinking
- Overgeneralization
- Mental filter
- Disqualifying the positive
- Jumping to conclusions
- Magnification and minimization
- Emotional reasoning
- Labeling and mislabeling
- Should statements

<u>Situation</u>	<u>Emotions</u>	<u>Automatic Thoughts</u>	<u>Cognitive Distortions</u>	<u>Rational Response</u>
Event leading to the unpleasant emotion	Specify: sad, anxious, angry, etc.	Thoughts accompanying the emotion	Distortions present in each thought	Rational response to the automatic thought

Creating Affirmations

- Select a part of your life that is causing you stress
- Decide what you want to happen or how you would like to feel in that situation
- Make up a first person statement that articulates this goal. “I have a relaxed body and focused mind” or “I can feel confident in my work”
- Repeat this saying often during the day, perhaps before or after meditation

What can you do to enhance your happiness?

- **Work on enhancing the relationships in your life.** Think about small ways that you can show your love and appreciation to the people you value in your life and you are much more likely to receive love and appreciation in return. Think about the relationships in your life in the past that enhanced the quality of life and impress upon yourself the value of nurturing positive relationships.
- **Work on valuing yourself more.** Think about who you are, what you are good at, get to know yourself and appreciate the qualities of that person rather than just focussing on what is “wrong” with you. Also – think about the possible joy that life can bring. This alone can enhance happiness.
- **Think about where you are going and want to go in life.** Having a sense of purpose, a reason for living is so important to create the motivation and energy to get on with life. Even if you don’t have a direction, simply engaging in the exercise of searching for meaning will have a positive impact on your happiness.
- **Think about your personal sense of spirituality.** This doesn’t have to be about religion, spirituality means having a sense of things bigger than ourselves, the interconnectedness of life on our planet. In other words – having a broader sense of perspective about life and the world.

Useful Resources

Websites for information on relaxation techniques

- www.utexas.edu/student/cmhc/RelaxationTape/index.html
- http://www.liv.ac.uk/counserv/self_help/relaxation/relaxation.htm
- www.umm.edu/altmed/ConsModalities/Print/RelaxationTechiquescm.html