

# Deep relaxation technique

The aim of this information sheet is to remind you about how you can manage your stress using the deep relaxation technique. This is a technique that encourages you to release body tension through two different parts of your body. You should have already practised this technique with your occupational therapist or as part of the cardiovascular rehab programme. You may want to ask a family member or friend to read it out to help you relax. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to your occupational therapist or a member of the cardiovascular rehabilitation team.

## What is the purpose of the technique?

Relaxation can help to relieve the symptoms of stress. Although the cause of the anxiety will not disappear, you will probably feel more able to deal with it once you have released the tension in your body and cleared your thoughts. The deep relaxation technique involves the release of body tension through two different parts of your body allowing you to relax the muscles to make you feel calmer. Don't worry if you find it difficult to relax at first. It is a skill that needs to be learned and it will come with practice.

## How do I prepare to relax?

Allow yourself 15–20 minutes for this relaxation technique. Find a place that is warm, quiet and free from disturbances. If possible dim the lights and tell people that you should not be disturbed – you may want to switch off any phones. Find a comfortable position, either lying down on the floor (or on the bed) or sitting in a chair. Snuggle down and settle your body so that it feels limp.

If you can, ask a friend or family member to read the next sections to you.

## What do I need to do?

Close your eyes. Just allow all tension to go. Just be aware of your body. Be aware that there is no effort required, your body is fully supported, and give attention to the body alone.

Tension in the body can arise in two places; imagine there are two gates to the body. The first gate is where neck and shoulders meet. So give attention to this point where neck and shoulders meet, and imagine opening the gate. Let all tension go, relax all of the muscles in the shoulders. Allow the shoulders to drop to their natural position, and as you do so, imagine that the circulation free to flow all the way through your arms, right down to your hands, right down to your fingers. Feel the circulation run up your neck, over your scalp and down into your face. Let all the tension go from around the face. Relax your jaw, around your eyes, around the forehead. Pay attention again to that point where neck and shoulders meet. Just let all tension go, as you allow the gate to open fully.

Now give your attention to your breathing. Allow the breath to come quite naturally – don't try to make it deeper or shallower. Relax all the muscles around the chest, so there is no obstruction. Let your breathing come quite naturally. Now with each exhale, imagine the gate where neck and shoulders meet opening a bit more. Let all tension go.

Now give your attention to your stomach – this is where tension can arise first in the body. Relax your stomach muscles fully. Allow your stomach to rise and fall with your breathing quite naturally.

Now give your attention to the second gate in the body – the pelvis. Tense up the muscles in the pelvis first and then let them go. As you let them go, imagine the gate opening, and as the gate opens, imagine that the circulation is free to flow all the way through your legs, right down to your feet, right down to your toes. You may feel it as warmth in the body. Be aware that as you become relaxed, it is like opening valves, and suddenly the circulation is free to flow right through your legs, right down to your feet.

Give your attention again to the first gate where neck and shoulders meet. As you imagine opening the gate, feel the circulation going up the neck, up over the scalp, and down into your forehead, down into all the muscles in your face, around the mouth, around the eyes and then the jaw. Let all the tension dissolve. Again, you may feel it as warmth as the circulation passes up over your scalp and all the way down into your face – and relax.

Give attention again to the second gate in the pelvis. Tense up the muscles there again and then let go. Tense up the muscles just slightly in your legs and let go. As you let go fully, and imagine opening the gate completely, feel the circulation running right through your legs, right down to your toes. Be aware of all the small muscles in the toes and in the feet. Let that go.

Now give your attention to the two gates of the body at once. Imagine opening them both fully, and allow the circulation to flow quite freely from the centre out through the two gates, down through the arms right down to your hands and fingers. Allow your neck to become fully relaxed, allow all the tension to dissolve. Feel all the tension go from your face and jaw with no effort. Feel the whole of the pelvis relax completely as the gate opens. Be aware of the tension flowing away and out of the body. Let it all dissolve. Just come fully to rest. Any thoughts or ideas which come into your mind, let them go by giving your attention again to your body. Your body is now light and completely free of tension. Be aware of your body as a whole, quite still, quite relaxed. Just rest. Be aware that there is no movement and no tension. With each breath, allow the relaxation to deepen just that little bit more, as you let everything go.

## How do I end the relaxation session?

Let yourself come to slowly. When you are ready, you may open your eyes. When you are ready to get up, get up slowly, feeling comfortable and relaxed.

### Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about this relaxation technique, contact **occupational therapy** on 020 7188 4180, Monday to Friday 8.30am to 4.30pm or the **cardiovascular rehabilitation team** on 020 7188 0946, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

**Leaflet number: 2923/VER3**

Date published: January 2016

Review date: January 2019

© 2016 Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust