

# Using imagery to relax (seaside)

**The aim of this information sheet is to remind you about how using imagery can help you manage your stress. 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.

Using your imagination to visualise relaxing scenes, such as a beach, can help 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?**

This visualisation lasts about 15–20 minutes, so make sure you will not be disturbed – unplug the phone, let other people at home know that you are not to be disturbed. Make sure that you are warm, and that the room is as quiet as is possible. It is also easier to relax with the lights either off or dimmed. Then find a position which is most comfortable for you, either sitting in a chair or lying on your back. Loosen any tight clothing and remove your shoes. If you are sitting in a chair, make sure that your back is straight and your feet are in contact with the floor. If your feet do not reach the floor, you could place a cushion or some books underneath them. If you are lying down, you may find that you need a cushion under your head or that you need to raise your knees.

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

## **What do I need to do?**

When you are ready, gently close your eyes and become aware of any sounds in the room. Perhaps you can hear the noise of people in other parts of the building. Let those sounds go and just listen to the sound of my voice. Focus your attention on your body and become aware of any areas which are particularly tight and in need of relaxation. If you are feeling uncomfortable, you may wish to adjust your position. Feel the contact of your body with the chair or with the floor. Imagine that your weight is draining away through your body, down through the chair and into the floor, like water draining away into the sand.

Now take your attention to your breathing, and without changing it just notice whether your breath is fast or slow, deep or shallow. Take a few moments to allow your breathing to become gentle and relaxed.

And now, I would like you to allow a scene to appear in your imagination, in your mind's eye. Imagine that you are standing on a quiet beach, looking out to sea. The place feels familiar, the sea is far enough away so that you are perfectly safe. The beach can either be one that you know or an imaginary one, or it may be part real and part fantasy. What can you see around you on the beach? You will be able to see the sea breaking gently against the shore. What colour is the sea? What colour is the sky? What else can you see around on the beach? You may be able to see sand or pebbles. Perhaps there are trees nearby, or fields, or hills. What are the sounds of the beach? You will be able to hear the sound of the sea softly breaking against the shore. What else can you hear? Perhaps you can hear the movement of the wind, or the sound of birds singing. What can you feel on the beach? Are you standing on rock or sand or shingle? Is the ground hard or soft? Perhaps you can feel the warmth of the sun on your skin and the gentle breeze of the wind.

Now I would like you to look once again towards the sea. Watch the sea breaking against the shore and then draining away again. The sea is continually moving in and out, in perfect rhythm. I would like you to imagine that the sea is moving in and out in time with your breathing. As you breathe in, the sea also gradually moves inwards and breaks gently on the beach. And as you breathe out, the sea drains away again.

In...and...out. In...and...out. You are breathing in time with the sea. The movement of the sea is one long continuous, never-ending cycle of in and out. So it is with your breathing; a continuous, regular cycle of in and out, with no gaps, no breaks, and no pauses. You are breathing in time with the sea.

Soon it will be time to leave this beach you have created for yourself. But before you go, remind yourself of all the sights and sounds, and all the things that you can feel on the beach. And also remember this place of peace and quiet and tranquillity. It will always be there and whenever you choose to, you can return here.

## How do I end the relaxation session?

Allow the image of the beach to gradually fade from your mind, becoming fainter and fainter, and smaller and smaller. Once again, become aware of your breathing, and notice whether your breath is fast or slow, deep or shallow. And now become aware of your body once again. Notice the contact between your body and the chair or the floor. Gradually allow your awareness to expand to include any sounds that you may be able to hear in the room or from outside, and then very gradually when you feel ready, begin to open your eyes. If you are lying down, roll over on to one side before sitting up, and sit quietly for a few moments before standing up.

## 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.

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