

## Relaxation

Relaxation isn't just flopping in a chair and watching TV – it is the physical, mental and emotional 'letting go' of stress and tension.

- > Relaxation is a skill that, like any skill, takes time to learn and practice to improve. Trying too hard to relax can actually make relaxing more difficult – relaxing is about 'letting go' and allowing the relaxation to happen.
- > When relaxing, accept that it happens more easily at some times than others – don't give up because it isn't working as well as you would like it to.
- > Relaxation doesn't make problems go away but it might give you a break and a chance to recharge your batteries and face up to your problems again.
- > Relaxation works best if you can build it into your day-to-day life and not just use it for 'fire-fighting' when you are under pressure. Relaxation is like a bucket of water – if you throw it on the fire when it is already burning, it might not make much difference, but if you throw the water on regularly before the fire really starts then it might stop the fire from spreading, or even from breaking out in the first place.
- > Relaxation comes from inside you and doesn't depend on having tapes or CD's to listen to, though these can be helpful to some people – ask your guide if you would like to try one.
- > Relaxation can last from a few minutes to a few hours or even days, such as when you are on holiday – it depends on how much time you have got. Busy people often say 'I haven't got time to relax,' but in the long term not relaxing sufficiently can lower your efficiency and trigger anxiety and depression. Some people feel guilty about relaxing so it's important you give yourself permission to relax on a regular basis. At the same time, don't beat yourself up if you find that you have missed out on your relaxation practice for a few days – just start again and notice the difference that regular

relaxation can make. Use the '5 out of 7' rule – if you remember to practice your relaxation on 5 days in a week then you are doing well!

Below is a simple to learn and practice relaxation method. If you want to try something different, talk to your guide – there are hundreds of ways to relax, it is just a case of finding the right method for you.

1. Find somewhere quiet where you will not be disturbed. Lie down or sit in a position where you will be comfortable and warm for a few minutes. Avoid trying to relax too soon after a heavy meal – leave at least an hour if you can.
2. Take a few moments to mentally and physically get comfortable. Let your body go loose and heavy and let the chair, bed or floor support your body completely
3. Close your eyes if you can. Breathe easily and normally, don't try to alter your breathing, just let it settle down to a comfortable rhythm. Concentrate on your breathing for a few moments and allow your mind to clear as much as possible. (If you think that your breathing pattern is too uneven or shallow, ask your *guide* for the leaflet on 'Relaxed Breathing?')
4. Think of one word that you associate with being relaxed and keep that word in your mind. Any word will do. Don't worry or give up if other words or thoughts come into your mind, just gently bring back your 'relax word' into your mind
5. Say your word to yourself, out loud if you wish, each time that you breathe out, letting go of as much tension as you can with each breath out
6. Keep breathing in and breathing out slowly and saying your word to yourself. Keep going for 5 to 15 minutes.
7. If you are worried about falling asleep, use a (quiet!) alarm or ask someone to gently knock on the door.



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Contd.

- 8. When you have finished, allow yourself to gently come round rather than jumping up and starting to rush around again.
  - 9. Try to practice your relaxation at least once a day, but if you miss a few days don't give up or beat yourself up – just start practicing again. Keep practicing for at least 2 weeks and keep a record of your practice on the diary below to show to your guide.
  - 10. If you do not find your relaxation practice helpful, talk to your guide – they cannot make you relax any better but might be able to offer helpful suggestions or help you to work out what is preventing you from relaxing.
- Use this relaxation diary to record your efforts – it may help to encourage you to keep trying and to learn about what makes you stressed and what relaxation method suits you best.

RELAXATION DIARY		
Day / Date	Anxiety level BEFORE relaxation (Rate 0 to 10) and any reasons for this Eg: busy day at work, argument with boss	Anxiety level AFTER relaxation (Rate 0 to 10) & relaxation method used

Related leaflets include:  
> Relaxed Breathing  
> Stress – A 5 Areas Model

