

Relaxation and depression



Key points to remember:

- Relaxation has been shown to help reduce stress and symptoms of depression.
- Formal relaxation strategies include deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, mindfulness and visualisation
- Other relaxation strategies may include exercise, listening to music, spending time with your pets, connecting with nature or getting creative.

Relaxation can be described as a state where you feel calm and able to manage day-to-day life. Finding time or knowing how to relax can sometimes be difficult.

Research indicates that relaxation helps to reduce stress and the symptoms of many mental health conditions including depression. This may include:

- lowering your heart rate, blood pressure and breathing rate
- reducing muscle tension
- improving concentration and mood
- reducing the intensity of negative emotions including anger, frustration and anxiety

What are some relaxation strategies?

Formal relaxation strategies focus on calming your mind, relaxing your muscles, refocusing your attention, breathing or a combination.

Formal relaxation strategies include:

- slow diaphragmatic (deep) breathing.
- progressive muscle relaxation
- mindfulness or meditation
- visualisation

Which relaxation strategy will be the most effective depends on the person. Giving them all a try can help you to discover which one delivers the most stress relief.

Slow diaphragmatic (deep) breathing

Deep, slow breathing can help you relax a tense body and to think more clearly. It is best when practiced every day (like exercise), or as a way to help you manage a difficult situation. It can also be combined with meditation or mindfulness for even greater relaxation, stress relief, and focus.

Progressive muscle relaxation

Progressive muscle relaxation focuses on reducing anxiety and tension in the body by tensing and relaxing groups of muscles. This strategy helps you to notice the difference between tensed and relaxed muscles. It works best if practiced regularly. As with any skill, relaxation takes time and practice to master.

Mindfulness or meditation

Mindfulness is a relaxation strategy that can be helpful in calming your mind. The idea is based on being fully present and engaged in the moment, free from distraction or judgement and without getting caught in our thoughts or feelings. Mindfulness strategies often focus on facts and objective information about the current moment, including emotions, thoughts, memories, and sensations.

Visualisation

Guided visualisation is a strategy that uses your imagination to help you manage your daily stresses. The focus is on picturing yourself in a calming and peaceful place. You then take time to experience all the imagined sensations of this place in your mind.

Everyone's idea of relaxation is different. It doesn't matter what you do to relieve stress as long as it helps you feel better.

Other relaxation activities:

- **Exercise.** Is a great relaxation activity as it helps to release endorphins (feel-good hormone). Yoga is a particularly beneficial exercise because it focuses on meditation, balance, deep breathing, and relaxation all at the same time.
- **Spend time with a furry friend.** Cuddling and petting your furry friend is often very calming and can decrease your stress levels.
- **Surround yourself with scents.** Some people find certain pleasant aromas very relaxing. This technique can be as simple as smelling your morning coffee, lighting a scented candle, or placing a few drops of essential oil in a diffuser.

- **Get wet.** Take a warm bath or try cold therapy and take a dip in the pool or go for a swim in the ocean. Immersing yourself in water can help you to feel refreshed and relaxed.
- **Listen to music.** Music is very powerful in improving our mood. Create a playlist of songs that make you feel calm.
- **Have a warm drink.** Enjoy sipping on a mug of hot coffee, tea or cocoa.
- **Spend time in nature.** Research has linked connecting with nature to physical and mental health benefits, including slowing your heart rate, improving memory and reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety
- **Sing or dance.** Even if it is just in your lounge room (or you could join a class). Either way it is a great way to unwind and improve your mood.
- **Watch your favourite TV show or movie.** It is a great way to distract yourself.
- **Get creative.** Draw, colour-in, paint, write, sew, do a puzzle, cook. Any activity that helps you express creative flair.
- **Talk to someone.** Organise a time to catch up or phone a family member or friend that you enjoy talking with.

The most important thing is that you make time each day to do something relaxing. Try to ensure it is something that you look forward to and that will leave you feeling more hopeful as you face the rest of your day.

For more information on formal relaxation strategies:

Smiling Minds. Web and app-based meditation program developed by psychologists and educators to help bring mindfulness into your life.

www.smilingmindscom.au

Australian Psychology and Wellness Centre. phone 66993820

www.apawc.com.au



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