

Unwind's Top Ten Relaxation Tips

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Meditate

Find a quiet place, away from family and friends, gently close your eyes and focus on the sensation of your breath, or another part of your body. Even just ten minutes a day can help to calm the mind and relax the body. Regular meditation is excellent for your long term health. Don't know where to start? If you haven't already learnt how, borrow or buy a book, or look at the many resources online.

Exercise

Exercise helps to physically remove you from the source of your stress and causes the release of endorphins into the bloodstream, which help to make you feel calm and happy. No time? Just a five minute brisk walk around the block will help, but we encourage you to try for at least 30 minutes five times a week to improve your physical and emotional health.

Practise Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the ability to be fully aware of the present moment. It is a skill that helps to reduce stress and depression. It can be difficult to begin, but meditation and breathing exercises can help. Sit quietly with no distractions and notice the subtle sights, sounds and bodily sensations that you are experiencing. To begin with it might be easy to choose one part of the body to focus on, exploring the sense of heaviness or lightness, solidness or fluidity, cold, warmth or heat And move to different parts of the body, or the body as a whole when you feel you have mastered it.

Music

Choose music that you find relaxing and soothing, and you will notice that it quickly induces deep breathing and also increases the release of serotonin (a feel good hormone). Why not try leaving the television off and listening to music in the evening? Playing music in the background whilst you are working also helps to reduce your overall levels of stress. Focus on aligning your heartbeat with the slow tempo of the music.

Massage

Massage has been proven to lower cortisol, (a stress hormone) and induce a relaxed state. It also reduces blood pressure and helps to improve the quality of sleep. Massage helps to combat the muscle tightness that is commonly associated with stress, and releases endorphins which promotes a feeling of wellbeing. Aromatherapy massage is even more effective, as it uses the power of essential oils combined with the massage to promote tension release and to soothe the nervous system. Enjoy the massage as an active meditation by focusing on the varying sensations the massage produces in your body, and allowing yourself to be hypnotised by the rhythm of the soothing strokes.

Breathing

Deep and controlled breathing is essential to reducing stress and tension in your day to day life. Feeling stressed evokes tense, shallow breathing, whilst breathing slows and relaxes with the body as it relaxes. Make breathing exercises a part of your everyday routine and you will be well on your way to maintaining a healthy body and a calm, clear mind. A simple technique is: As you breathe in, keep your chest still and push out your abdomen – as if you were blowing up a balloon in your stomach. As you breathe out, drop your shoulders and imagine yourself squeezing out air, as though pressing water out of a sponge. Repeat this for ten complete breaths.

Aromatherapy

Many essential oils or plant essences are known for their stress relief qualities. Lavender, geranium and chamomile are a few popular choices. Place them in an oil burner where you are living or working and let them work their magic! If you are unsure as to how to mix the oils, there are many pre-blended ones on the market, or you can consult an aromatherapist for a personalised blend. You can mix the oils with water in a spray bottle and use as a general air freshener. A few drops of oil can also be placed on a tissue, or on pulse points. A warm bath can also be enhanced with the addition of oils (mix with a little oil or milk before adding to the bath).

Laugh

Laughter is a very effective therapy for stress relief and anxiety. Laughing decreases the levels of stress hormones (cortisol and adrenaline) and results in an increase in the release of endorphins and has a strengthening effect on our immune system. It helps to increase the intake of oxygen, stimulates the heart and lungs, stimulates general blood circulation and exercises the muscles of the stomach. Psychologically it helps you to take things more light heartedly, and helps to break stress producing thoughts. Spend more time with friends and family that make you laugh, hire out some comedy movies or join a laughing club!

Hot Bath or Shower

Soaking in a warm bath filled with 1 cup of Epsom salts and aromatherapy oils, will help to reduce the tension in the muscle and connective tissues of the body. A shower will have a similar effect, use aromatherapy body products to enhance the experience.

Keep things in perspective

Ask yourself, "Is this really important?", "How important will it be in a year from now?" "How important will it be 10 years from now?" many of the things which cause stress are not that important when we look at the bigger picture.