

# Relaxation Techniques:

*“Take rest; a field that has rested gives a bountiful crop.” ~ Ovid*

By Liggy Webb

**B**uilding relaxation time into our lives is so important as it can help to keep our stress levels down, and consequently improves our health. Too much work and not enough time for ourselves can result in physical and mental health problems. So, it's important everybody takes at least ten minutes a day to wind down, whether it's soaking in a lovely bubble bath or doing a quick relaxation session before going to sleep or simply listening to some relaxing music.

There are so many wonderful ways you can relax including meditation, massage and yoga.

Relaxation is the key when it comes to stress relief therapies. Studies have shown evidence of many other benefits coming from regular relaxation treatments, such as a decrease in the risk of heart attack, protection from mental health problems, improved immune system and memory.

Stress levels are so much higher than they used to be, so it's important for our health to bring these levels down. Sometimes, finding time for ourselves can be difficult so, with added stresses and little spare time, our levels of stress hormones can be raised. This then causes anxiety. Too

much adrenaline and cortisol in our bodies can cause our blood pressure to rise, making our brains behave differently.

Sleepless nights can be terrible if your mind's buzzing with information and you desperately need sleep. Relaxation can help you switch off, and you'll be asleep within seconds.

## Relax in the bath

Many people find it difficult to actually relax. Whether it's not having the time to, or finding your mind wanders when trying to relax, it can be difficult, especially if you're a generally busy person. A lovely hot bubble bath can work wonders. Warm water loosens up muscles, so it's a great way to feel pampered without really doing a lot. It will also deepen respiration and take the tension away from your body, pushing those stresses and strains straight down the plughole!



Just a 30 minute soak in a warm bubble bath will help you feel relax and lighten your mind. A hot bath (preferably no hotter than 37° C) can ease tension and make you feel relaxed before going to bed. This depends upon how you choose to think.

## Music

Music is a great way of helping you to relax, relieve stress and any anxieties you may have. It also helps you function mentally and physically, which is why music is a great therapy. It's regularly used for meditation and Tai Chi, and as an aid for sleep disorders. Studies have suggested that slow, gentle, soothing music can improve learning, creativity and memory. Pachabel's Canon in D minor is wonderful!

Breathing has to be the easiest form of relaxation. This involves inhaling slowly and deeply, counting four seconds in your mind. Hold your breath for another four seconds, then exhale slowly.

*“There is more to life than increasing its speed”*

Gandhi

**F**eel yourself relaxing as you do this. Feel your shoulders and back sink into the floor as you exhale. Repeat this exercise ten times. After this, breathe normally, but focus on relaxing phrases. Repeat the concentrated breathing exercise another ten times, then breathe normally again. This time focus on pleasurable feelings in your body. Repeat the whole procedure, alternating the inhale-hold-exhale exercise ten times with mental encouragement.

Another technique is something called “Mindfulness”. This refers to being completely in touch with and aware of the present moment, as well as taking a non-evaluative and non-judgmental approach to your inner experience. For example, a mindful approach to one’s inner experience is simply viewing “thoughts as thoughts” as opposed to evaluating certain thoughts as positive or negative.

The term comes from Eastern spiritual and religious traditions like Zen Buddhism.



However, mental health professionals are beginning to recognise that mindfulness can have many benefits for people suffering from difficulties such as anxiety and depression. The benefits of building relaxation into your day are multiple and chilling out is a way to not only look after yourself physically, mentally and emotionally, it is also the best way to soothe the soul.

#### Relaxation - Useful Tips:

- Get yourself into a comfortable position with no distractions.
- Adopt a passive attitude and let yourself become relaxed.
- Concentrate on how you feel and visualise a relaxing image.
- Think about a one- or two-syllable word to repeat over in your mind, and close your eyes.
- Relax all of your muscles, starting with your feet and working up the body.
- Focus on your breathing. Breath in four counts, hold for four counts, exhale four counts.
- Imagine worries as balloons and let them go and watch them float away.
- Have a hot bath with candles and a cup of camomile tea.

#### Life is what YOU make it!

The above article is an extract from *The Happy Handbook - A Compendium of Modern Life Skills* by Liggy Webb which is out now.



Liggy Webb is widely respected as a leading expert in the field of *Modern Life Skills and Workplace Wellness*.

As a presenter, consultant and author she is passionate about her work and improving the quality of people’s lives. She is the founding director of The Learning Architect a consortium of niche industry experts. Liggy has developed a range of techniques to support individuals and organizations to cope more effectively with modern living and the demands and challenges of life in the twenty tens and beyond.

As a consultant with the United Nations she travels expensively and has recently returned from Afghanistan which she describes as biggest life education to date!

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