

RELAXATION

and the Management of Stress and Anxiety

Ray Miller BA, M Psychol, C Psychol, FBPS

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and the Management of Stress and Anxiety

(a guide to help you
to help yourself)

Ray Miller BA, M Psychol, C Psychol, FBPSS



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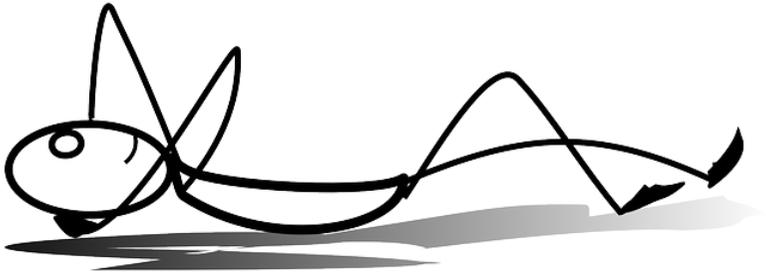
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1 Introduction

This guide is designed to help you understand more about **Anxiety, Stress and Tension**. More importantly, it is designed to help you to deal more effectively with these problems.

The methods used are those of Anxiety Management and Relaxation. These methods have been developed by Psychologists to help a very wide range of people. They can be very successful if followed through correctly. Earlier editions of this booklet ran to over 5,000 copies and it has been used in a variety of settings. Some of the lessons learned have been added to this edition to make it even more helpful.

For this course you will need to practise Relaxation Exercises. These are easy to follow and not at all strenuous. They are listed in the appendices and, in section 3, you will be told how to get the best out of them.

This course is not intended to replace appropriate psychological or medical treatment for those with severe anxiety or stress problems. It may, however, usefully be used as a part of such treatment. If you are receiving any treatment at this time, then show this booklet to your therapist or doctor.

If you have any doubts at all concerning the use of this course, then consult your GP or family doctor.

Many doctors have used these techniques and will be happy to advise you on their suitability.

Who can benefit from Relaxation?

Really almost **anyone** can benefit! We all face Anxiety, Stress and Tension at some time. They are facts of life. Learn how to cope with them and life will be that much easier.

In fact, you don't have to wait until you are already Tense or Anxious to learn how to Relax. If you learn how to Relax now, you can prevent Stress and Tension from building up in the first place. Prevention is better than cure.

Relaxation training can help you to face times of extra Stress. Examples might be Interviews, Exams and Tests, Family Problems, Social Occasions, Speeches or just one of those days when everything seems to get on top of you.

There is no magic to the techniques. Anyone can learn them. Like any skill, they improve with practice. How much you get out of them depends on how much and how well you practise. It's up to you.

The most common mistake made is failing to keep up with the practice because you feel OK. When you need them, the skills are rusty and don't work too well. Used properly, they build up your confidence in your ability to cope.

One word of warning!

People with low blood pressure will sometimes get dizzy during relaxation. This is because relaxation also tends to lower your blood pressure. If breathing deeply during the exercises makes you dizzy then miss that part out.

Always make sure that you stretch and get up slowly after relaxation. This avoids sudden changes in blood pressure. If you follow this instruction, then you can do yourself no harm by relaxing. Even the dizziness during relaxation is unpleasant rather than dangerous.

If, however, you have any doubts or worries, then ask your doctor.

What sort of problems can be helped?

Here is a list of just some of the problems that have been helped by these techniques:

Phobias

Very strong, unreasoning fears. Perhaps fears of spiders, dogs, cats or going out and meeting people. Fears about health, money, family or death.

Anxiety states

Constant worry. Making mountains out of molehills. Always expecting the worst. Obsessed by routines or thoughts. Depressed and lacking in confidence.

Stress problems

Stammering, Writer's cramp. Loss of concentration. Poor memory. Difficulty making decisions. Short temper. Overwork. Inability to face the day.

Psychosomatic problems

Ulcers. Angina. Some asthma. Headache. Migraine. High blood pressure. Loss of sleep. Tiredness. Aches and pains. Panting for breath.

(Please note that calling something 'psychosomatic' doesn't mean that it is imaginary. The problem is real and may need treatment. However, it is caused by psychological upset rather than a failure of your body due to illness or disease.)

Sexual problems

Impotence. Frigidity. Premature ejaculation. Painful intercourse. Loss of interest in sex.

As you can see, a great many problems can be helped by learning to cope with Anxiety and Tension. This course will not necessarily cure these problems but will certainly help you to deal with them in a better way. It may also help prevent such problems. Sometimes problems arise simply because your mind and body have become run down under Stress. You get no pleasure from life. Things may even begin to seem unreal to you at times. You can take no real interest in life.

Relaxation and the skills of Anxiety and Stress Management can help you to help yourself to overcome these feelings.

How can you learn to relax?

People often think that relaxation just means doing nothing. This is not the case. You can be doing nothing and still be tense: you can be working and still be relaxed. You have to learn how to relax. It is a skill. You have to train and you have to practise. You have to learn to recognise Stress and Tension as they build up. You have to make the habit of relaxation part of your everyday life.

Sometimes people get medication from their doctor to help them relax. **If your doctor prescribes tablets for you, you should take them.** Medication can help you over a special time of crisis. In the long run, however, tablets don't solve the problem; they merely hide it and reduce the symptoms. Most doctors agree that it is not a good idea to be taking medication for Stress or Anxiety for too long.

When you have learned to control Stress and Tension for yourself, you may feel able to do without medication. Ask your doctor if you can cut down gradually or cut the tablets out. They will be glad to advise you on the best way to do it. It is usually a mistake to make any sudden changes to medication as you may get severe withdrawal effects. Your body copes better with a gradual reduction rather than a sudden stop. **Always discuss it with your doctor and take their advice.**

Some people find that activities like Yoga or Meditation help them to relax. They don't suit everyone but if you find they suit you then use them. They will go well with the methods you will learn in this course.

The initial techniques used here are based on ideas developed nearly a century ago. They are sometimes referred to as '**Jacobson's Method of Progressive Muscular Relaxation**'. They have been tried and tested ever since and, properly used, have been found to be very successful. The methods are simple but effective. You can learn them quickly and easily. Once learned, you will not forget them. The skill will remain with you for life: if you keep up the practice.

Regular practice, even if you don't feel stressed or anxious, is the key to mastering the skill of relaxation.

What do you need to know?

There are three stages in learning to cope with Anxiety and Stress:

Education

You will need to understand what Stress and Anxiety are and how they affect you. The full understanding of problems is the first step to overcoming them.

Skill learning

The main skill to be learned is Relaxation. This simple skill will enable you to reduce Stress and Tension and give your body a chance to recover. You will also learn some skills in controlling your thoughts: avoiding negative thoughts and thinking more positively.

Application

To gain lasting benefit, you will need to apply your skills. This is the most important skill of all. Understanding and skills only help if you use them: you must build them into your everyday life. The management of Anxiety and Stress must become your habit.

The following sections of this booklet will help you begin to learn these stages. Read the booklet carefully as many times as you need for you to understand the content. You can come back to it again and again to refresh your knowledge and skill.

Remember, this is a guide to help you to help yourself. However, if you find that you have any difficulty with the course, or if your problems seem too severe, **please consult your doctor**.

In most areas of the country there are psychologists, doctors and other therapists who are trained to deal with Stress and Anxiety. They will understand these methods and can help you with them.

Among them they help thousands of people every year who suffer from Stress, Tension and Anxiety. They can help you to help yourself.

You are not alone.

2 What happens when you get anxious or tense?

Anxiety is a **normal** reaction to danger. It is designed to protect you by making you aware of the danger and helping you take steps to escape or deal with it.

Everyone needs to be able to be anxious. If you never got anxious, that would be something to be anxious about. We all need some stress to keep us on our toes.

Of course, sometimes we get anxious or tense when we are not in any real danger. Stress and anxiety can become a bad habit. Like any other bad habit, it can be hard to break.

You can't **cure** Anxiety. You don't cure natural responses or habits. You learn to **control** them. You can learn to control Anxiety, Stress and Tension.

Properly controlled, they will be there to help when you really need them but will not get in your way when you don't.

In order to control something, it helps to know how it works.

The following sections will give you a guide to how Anxiety and Stress work. They affect you in three main ways:

- i) **They affect the way you think and feel and how your mind works.**
- ii) **They affect your body systems and how your body works.**
- iii) **They affect the way you behave and what you do.**

Let's look at these in more detail.

What happens to the way your mind works?

The most obvious effect is often on your thoughts and feelings. You feel anxious and, perhaps, depressed. You feel like everything is too much for you. You look to the future with the feeling that you can't cope.

A black cloud may seem to hang over everything and you can't seem to concentrate. Even your memory seems poorer. You forget things that happened yesterday although you remember things that happened years ago.

Sometimes you may feel that everything around you is unreal and may even feel unreal yourself. You won't feel able to respond emotionally to those around you: even those you love and who love you. You may be irritable and short tempered. You may find yourself thinking odd thoughts. You may even feel you are going mad. You are not.

You may feel alone: that only you suffer this way. You believe that other people cope and so there must be something very wrong with you. Actually, there are thousands of people suffering Anxiety and Stress but. Like you, they usually try to put a good face on it.

If you are asked to do anything you may be overwhelmed by negative thoughts. You think you have no strengths. That you'd make a mess and look a fool. That you'd become tongue tied. That you have no energy even to make the attempt. Such negative thoughts only make things worse and increase your anxiety.

However, if you think positively and plan ahead to overcome difficulties you can often succeed. Instead of concentrating on weaknesses, look at your strengths. Remember you are not alone. You don't have to be perfect or admired by everyone: who is? Doing your best is usually good enough!

When you catch yourself thinking negatively, try replacing the negative thought with a positive one.

Problems of memory, concentration, irritability and lack of emotion are often the result of the anxiety and therefore temporary. They will improve as you learn to manage your mind and its thoughts and feelings.

What happens to the way your body works?

You are about to begin a course of training designed to help with the problems of Anxiety, Stress and Tension. Before you do that, it will help you to understand a little more about these topics.

Let us begin by looking at your nervous system. Your nervous system has four main parts:

the brain	inside your head
the spinal cord	inside your backbone
the nerve roots	branching out from your backbone
and	
the nerves themselves	carrying messages to the muscles and organs of your body telling them when, and how, to react.

Everything in your body is governed by the nervous system. Over some parts of your body you have a lot of control. Your muscled for example. If you want to lift an object then the message travels from the brain, down the spinal cord, out through thr nerve roots and down the nerves to the muscles of your hand and arm, which contract.

It's easy. You think about it and it happens. We call the nervous system that controls such actions the **voluntary** nervous system. It is called voluntary because it is under your direct control.

There is, however, the **involuntary** nervous system: so called because it is not easy for you to control. It is sometimes called the autonomic system because it works autonomously. That is, it gets on with the job without you having to think about it.

This is very useful. If you had to deliberately keep your heart beating regularly, for example, you would have little time left for anything else. However, lack of control can be a problem if the system starts to do things you don't want.

Let's look then at the involuntary system in more detail. The diagram at the back of this booklet may help you follow the description more easily.

There are two main parts to this system. The **sympathetic** or energy using branch and its opposite, the **parasympathetic**, whose job it is to save energy.

If you are running for a train or cheering on the local team then it is the job of the sympathetic system to make sure you have the energy you need. To do this it speeds up the rate at which your body works.

Adrenalin goes into the bloodstream to make the body work harder.

Your **heart rate** increases to increase blood flow and your blood pressure also increases to ensure good blood distribution.

You **breathe faster** to take in more oxygen.

Your **muscles tense** to use the energy in action.

You **sweat** more to lose the excess heat created.

Your **stomach** stops digesting food to direct blood flow to action areas and prepares to empty itself if necessary.

This system also comes into play if you are anxious or under stress. The reason for this is a body defence mechanism: the **fight or flight** response. The assumption is that anything that worries you is a potential danger and you will need the energy to fight or run away.

If we think of a caveman faced by a tiger, we can see that there might be a good case for this system. Or imagine yourself surprising a burglar in your home. The body quickly begins to produce energy for fight or flight.

Fine if you need it but, if you are out with friends, doing your shopping or having a job interview, then neither fighting nor running are helpful responses to anxiety. Your body, however, may still produce the energy and you begin to notice symptoms.

Heart rate increases and you feel **palpitations**.

Blood pressure increases and you get **hot flushes, ringing in your ears, tingling in your arms and legs** or feelings of **dizziness**.

Breathing increases and you begin to feel **shortness of breath**. Your **breathing becomes irregular** and you may feel sensations of **choking** or being **unable to swallow**. Sometimes you may feel that you are never going to get your next breath. You may begin to take in too much air by **gasping for breath**. This can make you even dizzier.

Muscle tension increases and you may become **fidgety** or **shaky**: your **legs turn to jelly**. Muscles tremble in your mouth and throat and you may begin to **stammer**. Muscles begin to become tired and you get **aches and pains** throughout your body.

You sweat and your hands become **clammy**. You feel **hot, sticky** and **uncomfortable**.

The upset to your stomach may give you **butterflies, knots** or **cramps** and **indigestion** or **heartburn**. You may feel sick or the **urge to go to the toilet**.

Noticing these symptoms makes you worry even more. You begin to think something has gone wrong and you start into an **anxiety spiral** that may end in feelings of **panic** or a longing to **run away** from the situation. The body system has done the work it was designed for all too well.

Tension and stress use up a lot of energy in this way and, as a result, you become tired physically and run down psychologically.

The main feeling is often a heavy sense of dread, as if something terrible was going to happen. This is all the worse because it is a vague feeling and hard to pin down. The uneasiness varies in severity over the course of the day and from one day to another. Some days may be good days and others disastrous for no apparent reason.

The worry associated with this uptight feeling makes you short tempered and irritable. Your concentration and memory suffer as brain processes are disrupted. Normally easy tasks become major obstacles. You tend to put things off.

Worse still, sleep often becomes disturbed and you go to bed with problems running through your mind. You may toss and turn for hours and awake in the morning feeling tired and listless. You may have strange or terrifying nightmares.

Perhaps the most worrying symptom for some people is the sense of things being not quite real. You may feel as if your body doesn't quite belong to you and detached from your surroundings. Many people worry that they may be 'going mad'. They are not. It is just that fatigue and anxiety can interfere with the way that you normally perceive the world about you. They can fool your senses.

Complete breakdown under stress is rare; even when people feel at the end of their tether. With a little help, most people learn to cope well with such feelings. Everyone has faced this situation at some time. It is a **common, normal** problem. It does not imply illness or failure in body function but rather that better control is needed.

Of course, like anything else, if allowed to run out of control for long enough (months or years) then more serious problems can result. If that is the case you should seek professional advice.

This course will help you to put yourself back in control. It will teach you to do so using **muscular relaxation** (remember that muscles are under your voluntary control) as a trigger to your parasympathetic, energy saving system.

Here you have a natural body system for controlling arousal. Learn to use it and the distressing symptoms of Anxiety and Tension can be replaced by Calmness and Relaxation. Muscle relaxation signals to the body that energy is not needed and helps the energy saving system switch on.

You will be learning how to achieve very deep muscular relaxation.

This will not only help you avoid distressing symptoms but will conserve your energy. You will feel less tired, more alert and better able to cope with life.

Stress in your body is like air in a balloon. It can only hold so much. If you keep adding stress on stress, then something has to give. The balloon bursts and you feel you can't cope. But let some stress out from time to time and the balloon remains flexible and able to manage.

The last straw may often be something quite trivial but, with stress addition, it is enough to take the stress level to bursting point. On the other hand, if you learn to relax after stress, then you are emptying the balloon and are ready to cope with the next stress when it comes. Nobody can totally avoid stress in their lives but, if you learn how to deal with it, you can avoid reaching bursting point.

Here are two simple ways to help reduce the physical effects of Stress:

The first is to **slow down**. If you are constantly rushing at things, your body has to produce extra energy. If you are buzzing around like a **wasp** then remember that those letters can stand for:

Wait

Analyse

Slowly Proceed

Wait

Stop for a moment to take the pressure off

Analyse

Consider whether rushing is really necessary. Usually it is not: especially when you consider that rushing causes mistakes. You may actually work more efficiently at a slower pace. Good planning avoids the need to rush.

Then **Slowly Proceed**.

This simple technique, applied to everyday life, can help to avoid much of your stress building up in the first place. (*A man called Peter remembered it as Wait And See, Peter – a clever alternative!*)

The second technique depends on control of your breathing. Take a deep breath and let it out slowly. This will help to stop you gasping for breath and flooding your body with too much oxygen.

Try to return to breathing steadily, regularly and not too deeply. Each time you breathe out, say the word 'Relax' under your breath and try to feel yourself relax.

Of course, these simple methods will not always be totally successful, but they will help you in many situations. You are going to learn more complex relaxation skills that will deal more effectively with Stress and Tension but keep these simple skills in mind from now in your daily life.

With practice, you will come to be able to detect Tension even as it builds up. When you are able to stop it at this stage, you will feel fitter and healthier in both mind and body as a result.

It takes practice to learn relaxation skills thoroughly. Like any other skill worth learning. It is important to practice at least once a day to begin with. How quickly you learn is largely up to you. Once learned you can go on using these skills for the rest of your life.

Just one last thing about the practice exercises.

Practise your relaxation either lying flat on your back on a comfortable bed or in an armchair that will support your head and neck. You should not have to use any muscle to support your body and it may help if the room is warm, quiet and darkened to begin with. When you get up at the end of a relaxation session, do so **slowly**. First stretch like a cat stretches and then stand up slowly and easily.

If you get up quickly, not only will you lose your relaxation, but you may feel slightly dizzy due to changes in your blood pressure. If you get up slowly, you will avoid this problem.

Section three of this booklet will tell you how you can learn the relaxation skills. At the end of the booklet you will find the actual exercises in detail.

What happens to the way you behave?

A main effect of Anxiety on behaviour is avoidance. If a situation regularly causes you stress, you will tend to avoid it if possible. Many people suffering from Stress and Tension notice that they gradually stop doing many of the things that they did before.

Sometimes this seems to be because they have no energy and are always tired. Sometimes they know that they would rather not face a situation that has become difficult. They put off to tomorrow what they know they should have done today. When tomorrow comes they put it off again.

First you tend to avoid more and more until you can no longer cope with the demands of everyday life.

Second, you may become depressed as you seem to be able to achieve less and less. Your confidence drops and you are aware of feeling a failure.

Third, because you are no longer facing up to the difficult situations, you cannot learn how to deal with them any better.

There may also be other ways in which your behaviour is affected. If you have always avoided some situations you may actually lack some of the skills needed. These skills must be learned.

Also the increased arousal due to Anxiety or Stress may make you do less well even in situations you know you should be able to cope with. This is a common feature of anxiety problems but can be very worrying. It is usually temporary. Get the arousal under control and your skills return.

Feelings of failure and worthlessness combine with your increased sensitivity to Stress. You may become irritable, suspicious and short tempered. If so, you may find that others change their behaviour towards you as a result. Your relationships can suffer as a consequence.

When you have learned the skills of Relaxation and can combine them with a more positive way of thinking, you will deal better with these problems. You need to need to apply the skills in your daily life. Planning is the key.

Begin by setting yourself targets to try out your skills. Start with easy targets: something just a bit more difficult than you have been doing recently. Make sure you that don't try too much at once. A good target is something you should feel pretty sure about, but which stretches you just a bit. Success will make you feel like trying something new. The same rule then applies. A small but successful step is better for you than a giant leap that fails. Play safe but keep the progress going.

The more detail in which you can set your targets the better. You will be able to anticipate any difficulties and decide how to cope with them.

Remember that **positive planning** emphasises how you **can cope**. Use those skills you already have to help you develop new ones. Build Relaxation into your targets. Have some alternative ways of coping already planned so that you will think of them easily when the time comes.

If you plan your targets well, you will find that you almost always succeed. However, success is never guaranteed and there will be times when things go wrong. These occasions are also valuable. Try to learn what went wrong and then use that lesson to tackle it again – better.

The most common mistake is over-reaching yourself. If your confidence has taken a knock, then go back to something you have already done well and do it again. Build up from there. You may have lost some time but you will have learned from it and so the time will not have been wasted.

Often people stop setting targets after a while because they seem to be doing well. Sometimes this leads to a certain amount of backsliding.

The skills that helped you the first time can help you again. Get back into practice. If necessary, start this course right from the beginning again. You will find that you haven't forgotten everything, and your skills will quickly be relearned.

3 Relaxation training – how to use the exercises

The aim of Relaxation Training is to reduce the tensions in the muscles of your body. When your muscles are completely relaxed you will experience a pleasant feeling of calmness and heaviness. Sometimes you may become so relaxed that you feel as if you are floating away from your body. This is a very deep level of relaxation.

With practice, your nervous system, which controls the level of tension, will learn to relax too. We concentrate on your muscles because they are the part of your body that you can learn to control most easily. In learning to control your muscles, you will also learn how to control the way Tension builds up in your body.

First you will learn to relieve Tension. Later you will learn how to prevent Tension building up. Eventually Relaxation should become a daily habit. By then you will have learned to cope with life with less worry and stress.

Relaxation training is carried out in three main stages. You will find a timetable a little later in this booklet suggesting how you can work through these stages. This is only a guide as different people will need to work at different rates. You will usually be able to tell from your own progress when to move from stage to stage.

For the time being, let's look at the stages more closely.

Stage I

The biggest difficulty many people experience when starting to learn Relaxation is that they don't always recognise when they are tense. If you have lived with Tension for some time, you take it for granted. You may miss the tell-tale signs that should warn you when Tension is building up. That's why Panic often seems to spring out of nowhere without warning.

You will need to become more aware of the feelings of Tension and Relaxation in your body. This set of exercises are designed to help you to do that.

They take you on a tour of the muscles in your body asking you to tense and relax them. In this way you can feel some of the changes taking place. This is sometimes called ‘**progressive muscular relaxation**’. You may find some areas quite difficult to start with. This is all useful information. It will help you to make sure you get the best out of your training.

After you have finished the exercises, you will generally feel much more relaxed than when you started. This is not essential however. As long as you have begun to be more aware of small changes in tension in your body, these exercises will have done their bit.

Find a quiet room where you can sit in a comfortable chair with a high back. Alternatively, you could lie on your bed or on a rug on the floor. A pillow or cushion under your knees will help if you are lying down. Either sitting or lying, your whole body should be supported without effort.

The room should be warm and, to begin with, you may find it useful to draw the curtains to darken it. Later you will find you can relax in spite of light or noise but to begin with you will want to make it as easy as possible. You should also make sure that you won’t be disturbed for about half an hour.

Make sure you have read and understood the exercises for Stage I in the appendix. You may want to record them for yourself. They are not difficult to remember, and the exact order is not important. Make sure that you don’t rush though. This stage should take at least twenty minutes.

When you are tensing the muscles, don’t be too hard on yourself. The aim is to feel the changes, not pain.

This stage should be practiced at least once a day for a week. The time of day you choose is up to you. It is best if you can choose the same time each day. That helps to build up the habit. Some people find practising last thing at night helps them sleep more soundly. Practise more than once a day if you wish – but not less!

When you feel confident that you have become fully familiar with Stage I then you can move on to Stage II(a).

Stage II(a)

The next two stages in Relaxation Training have a lot in common and so they are referred to as Stage II(a) and Stage II(b). Let's start with Stage II(a).

Now that you have learned how to notice small changes in the levels of Tension and Relaxation in your muscles, you can put it to good use.

Although you have probably felt more relaxed at the end of the Stage I exercises, you have actually had to add some tension to start with. It will obviously be better if you can avoid this.

Also, you really couldn't use Stage I to relax if you were feeling tense or anxious on a bus or in a restaurant. You might feel rather silly as you worked your way around the muscles of your body.

In Stage II(a) you use the skill you have already gained. You try to feel what level of tension already exists in your muscles and let it drain away. You do not have to add any tension or do anything obvious. You simply notice each set of muscles and let them relax in turn. This is sometimes called '**autogenic relaxation**'.

This is not only a method you can use in public, it is also faster. This will be the basis of the Relaxation Skills you will use in everyday situations. It is worth making sure that you practise it very regularly.

Again, at least once a day for a week is the minimum. In addition to practice in a room at home, however, you can also practice in many other situations. During a coffee break at work or taking a break from housework for a cup of tea. You can practise sitting on a bus or train or even sitting at the traffic lights in your car. Look for opportunities.

To start with it may seem difficult. You may not be sure how well you are doing. But, if you have practised Stage I then you are already able to detect and release muscle tension.

Don't rush it. If you persevere then you can reach very deep levels of relaxation. When you feel ready you can move on to Stage II(b).

Stage II(b)

By now you should be finding that you can get your body relaxed quite quickly just by concentrating on reducing the level of tension that you can feel in your muscles. You may find that tension creeps back in when you start to move about, but you can learn more about that in Stage III. Another common problem, however, is that although your body relaxes, your mind is still filled with worrying or distracting thoughts.

In this Stage you will learn how such thoughts can be blocked from your mind. It's not as simple as just not thinking about them. If you were asked not to think about a friendly dog, then a picture of a dog would be the first thing to pop into your mind. Nor is your mind ever truly empty. So if you want to stop worrying thoughts disrupting your relaxation then you must fill your mind with something else. In this exercise we will use the image of the word **Relax**.

By learning how to concentrate and fill your mind with the image of the word **Relax**, you will leave less room for worrying thoughts. Of course, your mind will tend to wander but you can keep coming back to the **Relax** image.

You will practise this Stage along with and following Stage II(a) so that you start with your body already relaxed. In this way the image of the word Relax will become linked to the feeling of Relaxation. You will gradually find that calling the image to mind will help you to relax more quickly and easily.

This Stage should be practiced with Stage II(a) as often as possible for at least a further week. At least once a day. As before, you can find many opportunities to try it out as well as relaxing at home.

When you have practised with the word Relax, you may also want to try other relaxing images that appeal to you. You might imagine a relaxing situation that you have experienced in the past. Perhaps a peaceful garden on a summer day, a deckchair at the beach or even just some of your favourite, relaxing music. Sometimes just concentrating on things like the feel of the chair you are sitting on or the ground under your feet is enough,

This is sometimes called Mindfulness. Just fill in as much detail as you can in the image in your mind. It helps improve your concentration too!

Stage III

The third Stage will help you to learn how to use Relaxation in day to day activities in your life. You will learn that you can make use of some muscles while keeping others relaxed. You will find that you can walk and talk, for example, without your whole body becoming tense or rigid.

After practising Stage II(b) you can begin to use this Stage to extend your ability to relax. First allow yourself five minutes to relax using the techniques you have learned from Stage II(a). Then move into the Stage III exercises. Use this additional combined Stage for a further week.

As well as practising the actual exercises, try to use the same methods while doing everyday tasks. Start with ten minutes a day and decide that, whatever you are doing in that ten minutes, you will do it in a relaxed and comfortable way. You might choose brushing your teeth, shaving, making your bed or washing the dishes to start with. Eventually you can extend your Relaxation to most of the things you do.

In this way you will start to build up the Relaxation habit. You will prevent tension building up. You will learn to take things more slowly and calmly.

Remember too that you may work more efficiently and make fewer mistakes if you avoid excess tension.

Timetable

Everybody is different so that the training schedule suggested here can only be a rough guide to the time you should spend on each Stage. Take longer if you need. If you find a Stage difficult then go back and practice the previous Stage for a bit longer.

Week 1	Stage I
Week 2	Stage II(a)
Week 3	Stage II(a) plus Stage II(b)
Week 4	5 minutes free Relaxation plus Stage III
Week 5	Try building Relaxation into everyday tasks
Week 6 onwards	Continue regular practice and review

Remember

If you have difficulty with a later stage in training, or if you suffer some setback, you can always go back to an earlier stage or even start again from the beginning.

Stages I and II will help to restore your ability to relax and you'll find you can quickly catch up any lost ground. You should take the opportunity to revise them regularly in any case.

It is the application of Relaxation in your day to day life that really helps you most. Relaxing in a quiet room at home is all very helpful but it is not usually where you need your relaxation most. Practise in as many situations as possible as your skills improve.

Try to avoid rushing things. Look for ways to slow down. Use natural opportunities like tea or coffee breaks or travel to sit down and ease your muscles.

You will find you cope better and avoid excessive Stress and Anxiety.

Summary and the bigger picture

If you have followed the Timetable, you will now have come to the end of this course of Relaxation Training. However, it is important to remember that this is only the beginning of the real training period. Learning Relaxation is one thing, but you will benefit from applying your skills to those everyday situations that you find stressful or anxiety provoking. Relaxation skills are for life and, if you maintain and use your skills, will last a lifetime and improve your life.

Here are some tips to help you make the most of your skills by integrating them into your daily routines.

- a) Stage II(a) and (b) can be practised in many settings. Every time you sit down, whether at work, home, in a bus, train or car, you can use the opportunity to Relax.

- b) Try to get into the habit of automatically sitting in the most relaxed position. Allow tension to drain away from your muscles. You can use this technique while having lunch or watching television even waiting for an appointment or interview. Get into the habit of making any break a Relaxation break.
- c) Remember **WASP** (Wait, Analyse and Slowly Proceed) to slow yourself down and avoid creating unnecessary Tension. Learning to stop Tension building up is even better than learning to release it. Watch yourself for signs of Tension and try to slow down and relax *before* it becomes a problem.
- d) Extend the practise of Stage III into your day to day life. Set aside ten minutes every day during which you will make sure that whatever you are doing is done in the most relaxed way you can. Being more relaxed can increase your efficiency with fewer mistakes and less wasted time and effort. Later you can make it fifteen minutes, half an hour and, eventually, almost every job you do.
- e) Plan ahead. Plan for difficult situations by thinking in advance of positive ways in which you can use your Relaxation skills. Plan to slow things down. Plan in advance what you want to do or say. Practise them if possible so that they will come to you more easily when the need arises. There is usually some way in which you can help yourself be better prepared for any foreseen difficulty. Look for that way and use it. Positive planning is the best antidote to Anticipation Anxiety.
- f) Look back positively afterwards. See how much your planning helped and learn lessons for the next time. Things don't always go well the first time or even the second time. But even when things go wrong you can learn lessons that will help you to plan more successfully and cope better in the future. Most successful people succeed because they use failure as a chance to improve.
- g) Remember to give yourself a refresher course from time to time. Any skill needs updating once in a while. Relaxation is no different. Every so often go right back to the beginning of the course and run through all the Stages again.

- h) Read this booklet again too. You may find some things you had forgotten.

Relaxation is only part of the answer however. To benefit fully from your training, you will also need to consider your daily routines and habits. You must ensure that you are giving Relaxation a real chance to work for you. In particular you must look after your physical health. A healthy body deals much better with Stress and Tension.

Here are some ideas:

Organise your day

Lack of planning can lead to you buzzing through the day like a **Wasp**. Leaving everything to the last minute makes everything seem a rush. You can find that you seem to have no time even to think and you build up Stress and Tension. Planning helps you make time for the tasks you want to do. Make time for Relaxation too. Planning the day helps you to face life more smoothly with less rush and uncertainty: less Anxiety.

Improve your fitness

A reasonable amount of exercise is essential to keep your body in good condition. It doesn't have to be hard work. Indeed, if you are not used to exercise, you should take it easy at first and build up slowly. It can be as little as thirty minutes a day of fast walking, for example. Ask your doctor for advice. Join a reputable fitness group; exercising with others is often encouraging. Take up active hobbies. Walk upstairs rather than take a lift. Get off the bus a stop early.

Remember to avoid the activities are bad for you. Smoking, even in moderation, is physically harmful and likely to make you more prone to the adverse effects of Stress. Excessive drinking is also damaging. Obesity, being very overweight puts a real physical stress on your body and organs, particularly your heart. You can become tired and depressed. So watch your weight. Being very underweight also leads to problems.

Eat Properly

As well as watching your weight, a balanced diet is essential to both mental and physical health. Your doctor can provide you with advice about wise eating: avoiding excessive salt, fat or sugars and benefitting from fresh vegetables and fruits. You probably know much of this already.

Particularly make time to eat properly and in a more leisurely way. Hurried, inadequate meals can upset your stomach and lead to indigestion, heartburn or other symptoms.

Remember that a lot of tea and coffee (or any drink high in caffeine) can make you feel more anxious because they contain a stimulant. In moderate quantities they will do you no harm.

Help yourself sleep well

Before you go to bed, allow yourself at least half an hour to unwind. A warm bath can be very relaxing and a warm, milky drink can help to settle you. Avoid tea or coffee last thing at night: they will tend to keep you awake. Don't have a late, heavy meal.

If you can't get to sleep, don't lie tossing and turning. Get up, make yourself a warm drink and read a light book or listen to soothing music until you begin to feel sleepy. Waking for a short period in the middle of sleep is not unusual and not everyone needs eight solid hours.

Ideally the room you sleep in should be dark, quiet and not too warm. Avoid watching TV, or study in bed. Learn to associate your bed with relaxation. Sometimes a hot water bottle helps to make you feel more comfortable. Try to keep regular hours for sleep.

Creative interests and hobbies

Few things are worse than having nothing to think about but work and worries. Your mind needs the right balance of rest and exercise as much as your body. From time to time you need to turn your mind to something completely different.

There are many interests and hobbies to choose from: sport, music, painting, cookery, woodwork, needlecraft, computer studies, languages, local history, dancing, etc.

Most Local Authorities run programmes of day and evening classes in a wide variety of subjects. Local libraries or a computer search of leisure activities in your area are good sources of information about events and organisations of interest. Why not consider taking up a new hobby. It could improve your social life and life-long learning has been shown to be good for your physical as well as mental health.

Avoid getting in a rut

Boredom and routine are bad enemies of the person under stress. A change is as good as a rest and even small changes can keep your mind from becoming stuck in one track. A different route to work, a different meal, a new hairstyle, even a different type of television or book can all help.

Remember that old habits of Stress and Tension are easy to slip back into, especially if your lifestyle itself doesn't change. Changing your general approach to life gives you a better chance of developing new, coping habits.

If you have practiced thoroughly the exercises in this course, you will already be relaxing more easily and coping more effectively with the stresses and anxieties of life. The balance between effort and relaxation is an important one.

Stress and Anxiety can never be totally avoided. Some situations are bound to prove difficult to cope with. Relaxation and positive coping can help you manage and recover more quickly.

In learning these skills, you will have begun to improve your mental and physical health. You will have begun to enjoy life more. It is now up to you to continue as you have begun.

Good luck (and good practice!).

4 Ten hints on how to use your training

1) Regular practice

Practise Relaxation at least once a day. Make time for it whether you feel stressed or not.

2) Sitting relaxed

Develop the habit of **always** sitting in a relaxed position. **Every time you sit down:** e.g. watching television, tea breaks, on a bus, etc.

3) Standing relaxed

Develop the habit of standing in a relaxed manner: e.g. queuing in a shop, waiting for a bus, talking to someone, etc.

4) Moving relaxed

Develop the habit of making your movements smooth and relaxed. Avoid hurried, jerky movement. Practise ten minutes a day to start with, making sure that all your movements in that time are smooth and easy ones.

5) Breathing relaxed

Develop the habit of breathing in a relaxed way. Good breathing control can be a major help in managing anxiety and stress. Breathe from the stomach, not too deeply but smoothly and evenly. A couple of deep, **controlled** breaths can be used to help you to calm down if you are anxious.

6) Planning ahead

Plan to build up your skills and confidence by tackling easy tasks first and gradually increasing the level of difficulty.

Plan to meet a difficult situation in the easiest way. Make sure you are as well prepared as you can be.

Plan to relax **before** a difficult target. Avoid Anticipation Anxiety. Do something interesting and relaxing that will distract you from advance worrying. Remember that your fears are usually worse than the real difficulties.

Plan how you will relax **during** a difficult situation. Plan how you will sit or stand. Plan what you will say and remember to allow pauses for relaxation and breathing control. Plan how you will check yourself to avoid rushing things.

7) Learn from experience

Learn from your **successes**. If your planning has paid off and you have coped well, then you will want to be sure that you use the same techniques again.

Learn from your **setbacks**. Things don't always go well. However, you can learn from what went wrong and avoid the same problems the next time. Often, looking at what went wrong will show you how you can plan better.

Learn from **observing** other people. How do they deal with the situations you find difficult? Maybe they face difficulties too? Are they using techniques that you also could use?

8) WASP

When you find yourself buzzing around like a wasp, remember:

Wait **A**nalyse **S**lowly **P**roceed

9) Returning to basics

Every so often go back and do the relaxation course from Stage I. Read this booklet again too. Remind yourself about your nervous system, anxiety spirals and stress addition. You may be surprised at what you've forgotten. Make sure that you are still getting the best out of your training.

This is especially important if you have had some setback. They will occur occasionally. Going back will help you to restore any skill you may seem to have lost. You will recover from setbacks much more quickly and you may be pleased to find how little you have been delayed in your progress.

10) Thinking positively

Everyone has bad days: they are inevitable. Dwell on them and you will only feel worse. Think of your good days. Keep a record of your achievements and things that have gone well. You can look back on them when the black days loom. Remind yourself of the progress you have made and the things you enjoy.

Negative thinking makes you only see the problems and the down side. Challenge negative thinking by remembering that you are learning skills that will help you overcome difficulties. Look for the positive in every situation.

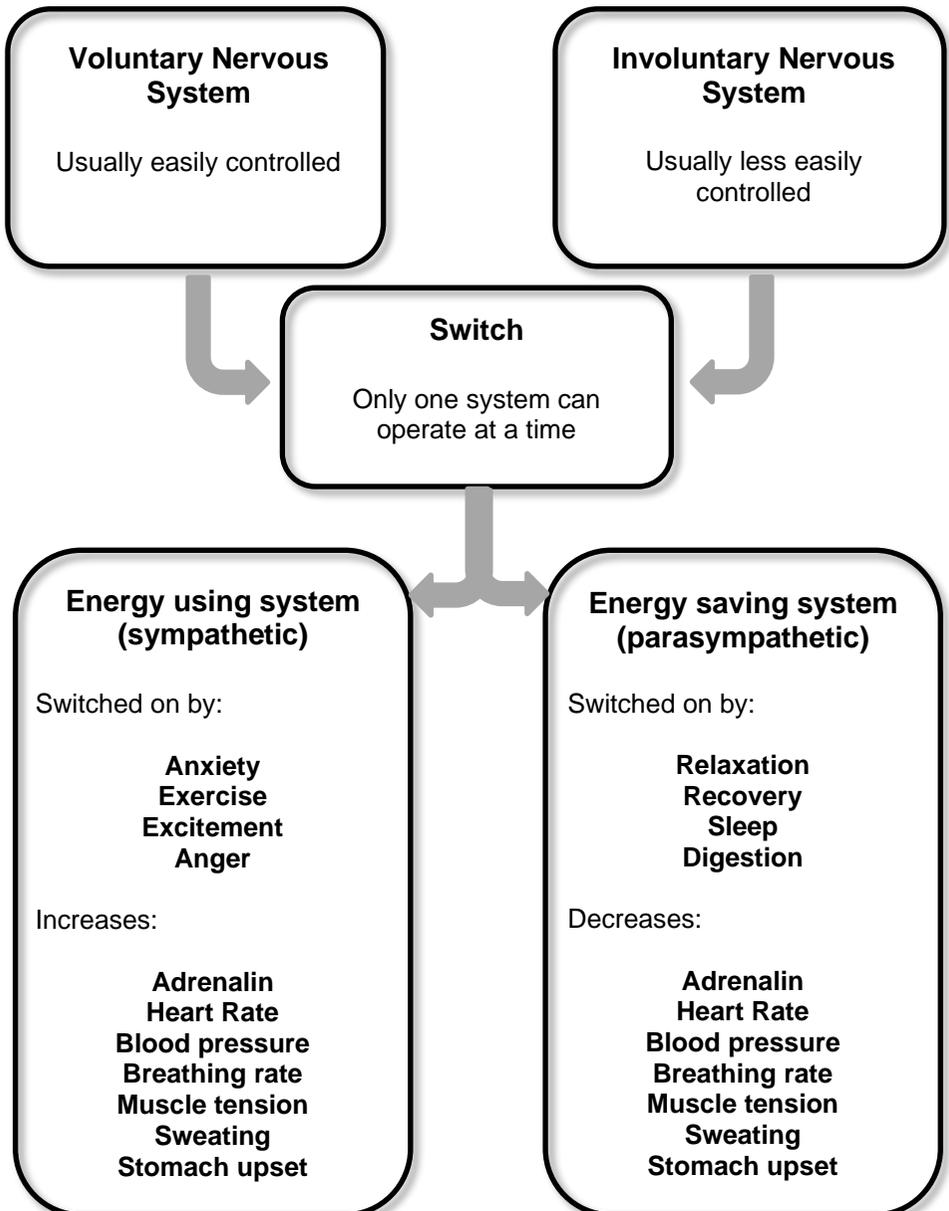
Remember that Anxiety, Stress and Tension are problems, not diseases. You learn to manage them; not to cure them.

Tell other people about your **successes**. That makes them feel good too and their pleasure can give you a lot of support.

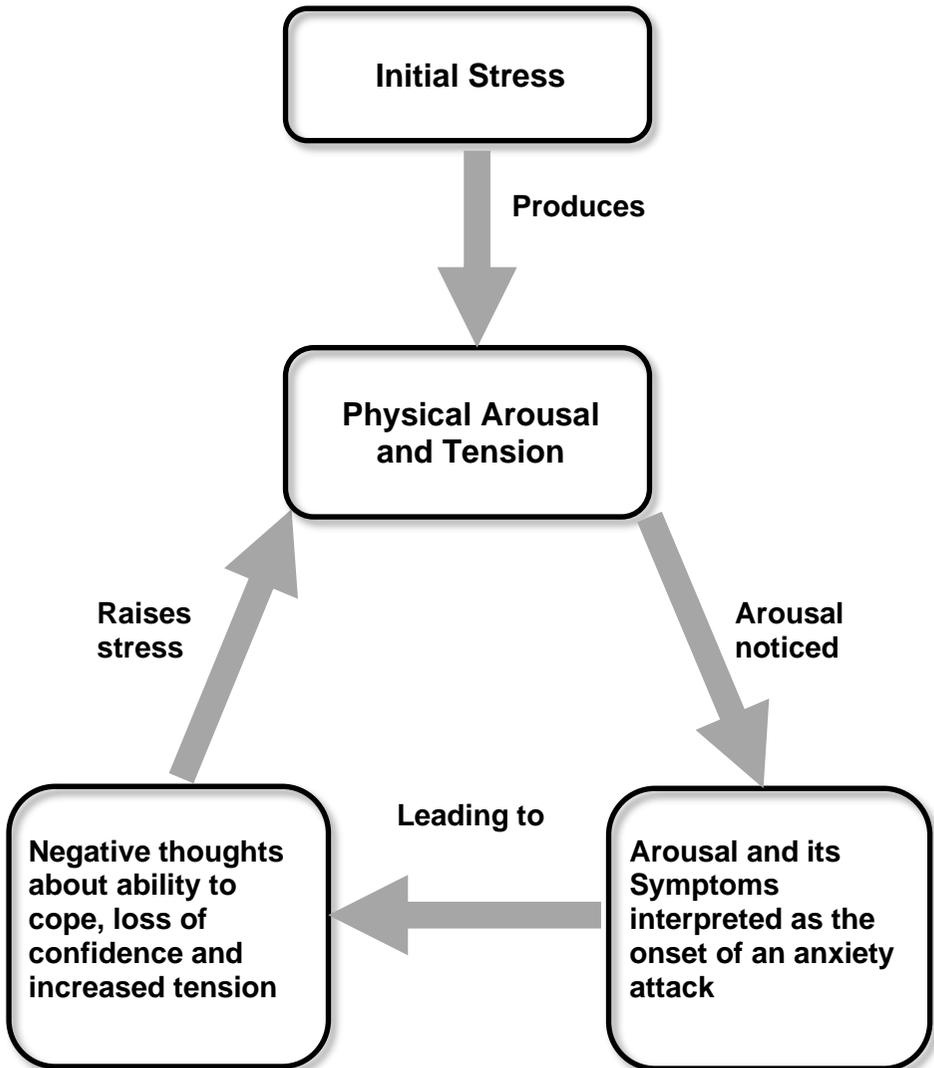
Above all, remember that you can learn to cope. Every success, however seemingly small or insignificant, is a step on the right road.

Appendix I

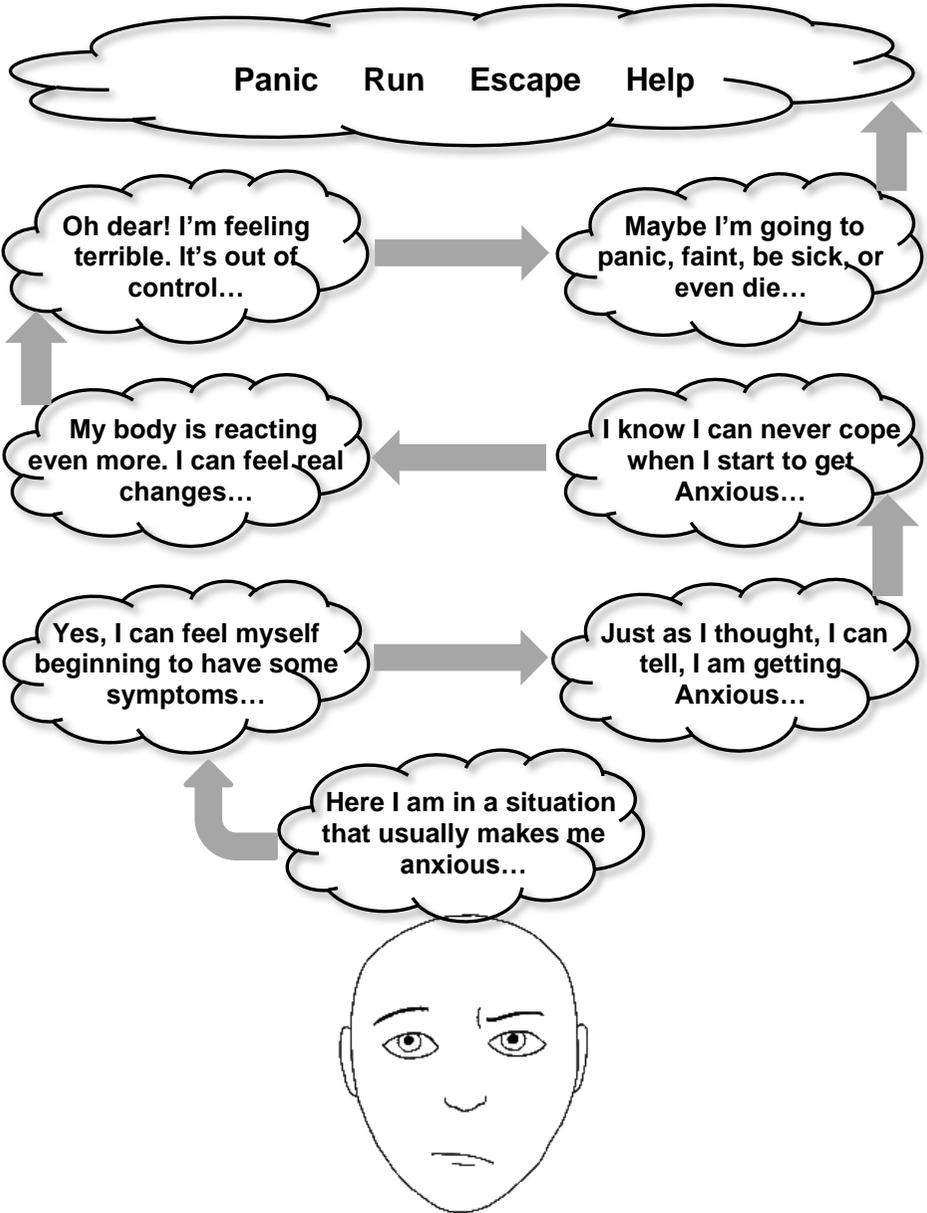
Your nervous system: a simplified model



Appendix II
The vicious circle



Appendix III The Anxiety Spiral



Appendix IV The Exercises

Stage I

Have your legs outstretched and uncrossed and your arms by your sides. Now close your eyes and make yourself as comfortable as you can. Just relax as much as you can.

Now we are going to carry out a series of exercises to help you to become even more relaxed. Until, by the end of the session you are quite deeply relaxed.

First of all I want you to concentrate on the muscles in your **hands, wrists and lower arms**. You can tense these by squeezing your hands into fists. Now, clench your fists, feel the tension in the muscles, feel where the tensions are – and relax. Relax the muscles, letting them unwind, as you enjoy the feeling of letting go. Notice the difference between the tension and the relaxation as you do so. Feel the difference as you let the tension ease away. Letting the muscles unwind and relax. Letting go more and more.

And now the muscles at the **front of your upper arms**. You can tense these by bending your arms at the elbow and trying to touch your wrists to your shoulders. Now, bend your arms at the elbow and feel the tension at the front of your upper arms. Feel where the tensions are – and relax. Let your arms come down again to your sides and relax. Let all the tensions ease away from the muscles as you do so. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. Carry on the feeling of letting go. Letting the muscles unwind and relax.

Now the muscles at the **back of your upper arms**. You can tense these by straightening your arms out in front of you; making them as stiff as you can. Now, straighten your arms. Feel the muscles become tense. Feel where these tensions are, hold it – and relax. Once again let your arms relax to your sides. Let the muscles relax and feel the difference as the tensions ease away from the muscles. Noticing the difference between tension and relaxation as you let the muscles relax. Enjoying the feeling of letting go. Letting the whole of your arms relax more and more deeply. Both arms completely relaxed, completely at ease. Letting the muscles become completely comfortable, completely relaxed.

And now the muscles of your **shoulders**. You can tense these by shrugging your shoulders, bringing them up into your neck as high as you can. Now, shrug your shoulders, bring them up into your neck. Feel the tension in your shoulders. Feel where the muscles are tense. Move your shoulders backwards and forwards slightly and feel the tension shift across your **upper back**. Feel the tension – and relax. Let your shoulders drop down and relax. Feel the difference between tension and relaxation as you do so. Feel the tensions ease away as you let the muscles unwind. No effort, no tension. Enjoying the feeling of letting go as you let the muscles become more comfortable, more and more deeply relaxed.

Now the muscles in your **neck**. You can tense these by pressing your head back against the chair or bed. Now, press your head backwards. Feel the muscles become tense. Feel where the tensions are. Feel the tensions – and relax. Let your head come back to a comfortable position and relax. Letting the tensions ease away from your neck muscles. Feeling the difference as you let the muscles unwind and relax. Enjoying the feeling of letting go. No effort to hold your head; completely supported by the chair or bed. Just letting the muscles unwind and relax, more and more deeply.

So the muscles in your neck are relaxed and the muscles in your shoulders and upper back are relaxed. Make sure that the muscles of your hands and arms are still relaxed. If any tension has crept back into these areas, then try to relax them that little bit more.

Now the muscles in your **face**, starting with the muscles in your **forehead**. You can tense these by lifting up your eyebrows and wrinkling up your forehead as high as you can. Now, lift your eyebrows high, hold it. Feel the tensions, feel where the tensions are – and relax. Relax the tensions, feeling the difference as you let the muscles relax. Letting your eyebrows drop. Letting the skin across your forehead and scalp smooth out completely. Notice the difference as the tensions ease away from your forehead, leaving the muscles more comfortable, more relaxed. No tension, no effort; just deeper and deeper relaxation.

This time I want you to frown as hard as you can. Bringing your eyebrows down and together as if you were annoyed with someone. Now, frown, bring your eyebrows down and together. Feel the tensions. Feel where the tensions are – and relax.

Relax your eyebrows, letting the skin across your forehead smooth out completely once again. Notice the difference as you let the muscles relax. Letting them unwind. Feeling the tension ease away as you let the muscles relax. Enjoying the feeling of letting go. No effort, no tension.

And now the muscles around your **eyes**. You can tense these by squeezing your eyes tightly shut. Now, squeeze your eyes shut. Feel the pressure in your eyelids. Feel the tension around your eyes. Feel where the tensions are – and relax. Relax your eyes. Relax your eyelids so that there is no pressure in your eyelids and your eyes can be comfortable, still and relaxed. Feel the difference as you let the muscles unwind. Letting the tension ease away as the muscles relax.

And the muscles of your **mouth and jaw**. You can tense these by biting your teeth together. Now, bite your teeth together. Feel the tension in your mouth and jaw. Feel where the tensions are – and relax. Let your teeth part slightly so that there is no pressure between your teeth. Notice the difference as you let the muscles relax. No tension, no pressure in the muscles of your jaw. Enjoying the feeling of letting go. Feeling your jaw become more comfortable, more relaxed.

Next the muscles of your **tongue and throat**. You can tense these by pressing the tip of your tongue against the roof of your mouth. Now, press the tip of your tongue against the roof of your mouth. Feel the tension. Feel where the tensions are – and relax. Relax the muscles of your tongue and throat. Letting the tension ease away. Feeling the difference between tension and relaxation as you do so. Letting your tongue drop down to the bottom of your mouth and relax completely, No tension, no effort in your tongue and throat.

Now the muscles in your **lips**. You can tense these by pressing your lips tightly together. Now, press your lips together. Feel the tension in your lips. Feel where the muscles are tense – and relax. Relax your lips so that they are just lightly together. No pressure between your lips. Let the tension ease away from your lips, noticing the difference between tension and relaxation. Enjoy the feeling of relaxation.

Make sure that your lips are relaxed and the muscles of your tongue and throat relaxed. Check that your mouth and jaw are still relaxed and the muscles around your eyes and your forehead. No tension in the muscles of your face.

Make sure that your neck and shoulders, arms and hands are still relaxed. If any tension has crept back into any of these areas, then try to let them relax that little bit more. Just letting any tensions ease away. Leaving the muscles more comfortable, more and more deeply relaxed.

And the muscles of your **chest**. You can tense these by breathing in and filling your lungs right up. Now, fill your lungs. Breathe deeply, hold it, feel the tension in your chest. Feel where the muscles are tense – and relax. Breathe out with a sigh. Feel the muscles of your chest relax as you do so. Now return to breathing normally; not too deeply but regularly and evenly. Each time you breathe out, try to feel the muscles in your chest relax that little bit more. Relax that little bit more. Feel the difference as you let the muscles unwind, letting the tension ease away.

Each time you breathe out, imagine yourself saying the word “Relax” under your breath. As you say the word “Relax”, try to feel your chest relax that little bit more.

Now the muscles in your **stomach**. You can tense these by pulling your stomach in tightly. Now pull your stomach in tightly. Feel the tension. Feel where the muscles are; hold it – and relax. Relax your stomach, letting the tensions ease away from the muscles. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation as you let the muscles become more comfortable, more relaxed. No tension, no effort in the muscles of your stomach.

And lastly the muscles in your **legs**. You can tense these by stretching your legs out in front of you. Making them stiff and straight and pointing your toes away from your head. Now, stretch your legs, making them stiff and straight. Point your toes.

Now, bend your ankles to bring your toes back towards your head. Feel how the tension shifts. Feel where the tensions are. Feel the tensions – and relax. Let your legs and feet come back to a comfortable position and relax. Feel the difference as you let the tensions ease away from the muscles in your legs and ankles. Enjoy the feeling of letting go. Just letting the muscles relax and unwind. Letting your legs become more comfortable, more and more deeply relaxed.

So now your legs are relaxed, and the muscles of your stomach relaxed. Make sure that your chest is still relaxed with your breathing nice and even but not too deep.

Each time you breathe out, imagine saying the word “Relax” under your breath. As you do so, try to feel your chest relax that little bit more. Make sure that your face is still relaxed. The muscles of your lips, your tongue and throat, mouth and jaw, around your eyes and in your forehead. Check that the muscles in your neck, shoulders and upper back are still relaxed and the muscles in your hands and arms.

If any tension has crept back into any of these areas, then try to let the muscles relax that little bit more. Each time you imagine the word “Relax” as you breathe out, try to feel your whole body relax that little bit more. Feel your whole body become heavier, more comfortable, more relaxed. Feel yourself sinking into the chair or bed as you let it do the work of supporting your body. Carry on the feeling of letting go; sinking deeper and deeper into relaxation.

Try to imagine a scene in which you would feel completely relaxed as you are now. Perhaps a warm, sunny summer’s day or listening to a favourite piece of music. Imagine that scene now as clearly as you can. Try to feel that feeling of relaxation now. Enjoy that feeling. Enjoy the feeling of letting go completely; sinking deeper and deeper into relaxation.

Enjoy that feeling for the next few minutes.

When you are ready, stretch like a cat stretches and then you can get up slowly.

Stage II(a)

Have your legs outstretched and uncrossed with your arms by your sides. Close your eyes and let yourself become as comfortable as you can. Relax as deeply as you can. Let all the tensions ease away from your body, comfortable and relaxed. No tension anywhere in your body. This time you are not going to add tension but use your ability to detect any tension already in your body.

Think of your **hands and arms**. Try to feel whether there is any tension present and, if there is, then try to relax that little bit more. Let your hands and arms relax that little bit more. Letting the tension ease away, leaving your muscles relaxed and comfortable.

And your **shoulders**. If there is any tension in your shoulders, then try to note where it is and relax that tension. Relaxing your shoulders. Letting them drop down so that there is no tension, no effort in your shoulders. Just enjoying the feeling of letting go and relaxing.

The muscles in your **neck**. Make sure that they are relaxed. Make sure that your head is in a comfortable position, well supported. So that you can let go any tension in your neck. Letting your neck relax more and more deeply. Letting all the tension ease away from your neck.

Think about the muscles of your **face**, your **forehead**. If there is any tension in your forehead then try to let it relax and ease away. Try to feel the skin across your forehead and scalp become smoother and smoother as you relax. No tension, no effort. Enjoying the feeling of letting go.

And the muscles around your **eyes**. Make sure that your eyelids are just lightly closed with no pressure, no effort. Letting the muscles around your eyes relax completely. No tension. Just deeper and deeper relaxation.

The muscles around your **mouth and jaw**. Make sure that your teeth are slightly parted so that there is no tension or pressure between your **lips**. Your lips just lightly together.

And your **tongue and throat**. Make sure that they are relaxed. Letting your tongue just lie in the bottom of your mouth. Letting the tension ease away from your tongue and throat. Let the whole of your mouth and jaw, lips, tongue and throat relax more and more deeply.

No tension around your mouth. No tension around your eyes or in your forehead. Make sure that all the muscles of your face are completely relaxed. No tension, no effort. Just enjoying the feeling of letting go. Allowing all the muscles of your face to relax more and more deeply.

Make sure that the muscles of your **chest** are relaxed. Your breathing nice and even but not too deep. Every time you breathe out, imagine saying the word “Relax” under your breath. Each time you say the word “Relax”, try to feel the muscles of your chest relax that little bit more. Relax that little bit more.

And the muscles of your **stomach**. If you feel any tension in the muscles of your stomach, then try to let them relax and unwind. Letting all the tensions ease away until there is no effort and no tension in your stomach muscles. Just enjoy the feeling of letting go completely. Letting the tensions ease away. Letting the muscles unwind and relax until you are more and more deeply relaxed.

The muscles of your **legs**. If there are any tensions in your legs, then try to feel where the tensions are and relax the tensions. Relax the tensions. Relaxing the muscles, letting the tensions ease away. Letting the muscles become more comfortable, more and more relaxed. No tension in your legs, just deeper and deeper relaxation.

Try to feel your whole body become more and more deeply relaxed. Enjoying the feeling of letting go. Feel the pleasant sensation of heaviness as you let the muscles relax and unwind. Feel yourself sinking deeper and deeper into the chair or bed as you let the muscles relax and all the tension ease away from your body. Each time you breathe out imagine saying the word “Relax” under your breath. Each time you say the word “Relax”, try to feel your whole body become even more deeply relaxed.

Imagine a pleasant scene in which you would feel as completely relaxed as you are now. Perhaps a warm, sunny summer’s day or listening to a favourite piece of music. Imagine that scene clearly now. Try to feel the feeling of relaxation that you associate with that scene.

Feel yourself relaxing more and more deeply. Just letting go more and more. Arms and hands relaxed, neck and shoulders relaxed. The muscles of your face relaxed and your breathing even, regular and not too deep. Your stomach relaxed and the muscles of your legs heavy, comfortable and relaxed.

Enjoy that feeling for the next few minutes. When you are ready, you can continue to Stage II(b) or stretch like a cat stretches and get up slowly.

Stage II(b)

In this section you can try to relax by building up a relaxing mental image. This helps to reduce interrupting thoughts. You could use any image such as those you have tried at the end of Stage I or Stage II(a). However, for this exercise you are going to start with a mental image of the word “**Relax**”. In this way you will be able to use the word **Relax** as a cue for rapid relaxation in many situations.

Make sure you are sitting in a comfortable chair and can feel relaxed and at ease. You will probably find it helpful to start with if you have practiced Stage II(a) just before starting this section. Sit back and close your eyes.

Try to picture the word **Relax** as if you were reading it in a book. It may be black letters on a white page or you may find that other combinations come to you. You may find that the colours, sizes and shapes of the letters change even as you try to imagine them. This doesn't matter. Just try to note the changes that take place and let the images build up in your mind.

Are the letters large or small? Are they capitals or lower case? Are they fancy or plain? Just concentrate on the images and any changes.

Look now in your mind at the letter “**R**”, the first letter of **Relax**. Try to see what that letter looks like and note its size, shape and colour. Note any changes. Now put it back into the whole word **Relax**. Imagine yourself saying the word **Relax** under your breath as you breathe out.

Look now in your mind at the letter “**E**”, the second letter of **Relax**. Again, try to see what that letter looks like and note its size, shape and colour. Note any changes. Now put it back into the whole word **Relax**. Imagine yourself saying the word **Relax** under your breath as you breathe out.

Look now in your mind at the letter “**L**”, the third letter of **Relax**. Once again, try to see what that letter looks like and note its size, shape and colour. Note any changes. Now put it back into the whole word **Relax**. Imagine yourself saying the word **Relax** under your breath as you breathe out.

Take a moment to check that your whole body feels relaxed and at ease. If you detect any tensions, just try to let them relax and unwind.

This time look in your mind at the letter “**A**”, the fourth letter of **Relax**. Once more. try to see what that letter looks like and note its size, shape and colour. Note any changes. Now put it back into the whole word **Relax**. Imagine yourself saying the word **Relax** under your breath as you breathe out.

And now look in your mind at the letter “**X**”, the last letter of **Relax**. Try to see what that letter looks like and note its size, shape and colour. Note any changes. Now put it back into the whole word **Relax**. Imagine yourself saying the word **Relax** under your breath as you breathe out.

As you picture the whole word **Relax** again, try to feel your whole body relax that little bit more.

From time to time your mind will wander. Don’t fight it. Just gently return to concentrating on the word **Relax** and try to feel your body relax that little bit more. Let the letters change so that you see the word **Relax** in neon letters as on a cinema sign; or imagine it drawn in letters on sand.

If you find the word Relax difficult, you could imagine any other relaxing word or a scene of your choice. Perhaps you could try building up in your mind the relaxing scene that you imagined in Stages I and II(a).

Whatever you use, don’t work too hard at it. The exercise is to help your mind relax. If your mind wanders, and it will, just gently guide it back by concentrating on some aspect of your mental image. Try to feel your body relax as you do so.

The exercise may not be easy the first time, but you will find it improves with practice. Once you become good at it, building mental images can be fun as well as relaxing. Also, you will begin to find that calling your favourite image into your mind starts to trigger automatic relaxation in your body too.

Enjoy the feeling of relaxation for the next few minutes.

When you are ready, you can stretch like a cat stretches and get up slowly.

Stage III

Before beginning this Stage, make sure that you are sitting comfortably and relaxed and have your eyes closed. You may find it useful to have carried out Stage II just before beginning this Stage. In this Stage you are going to find out how to combine movement with relaxation. You will be able to use this skill in many day-to-day activities.

Now, as you are sitting completely relaxed, think about the muscles in your **fingers**. Move your fingers. Move your fingers while keeping the rest of your body completely relaxed. Just move your fingers as if you were playing the piano. Move the fingers around but keep the rest of your body relaxed. Notice how it feels to move your fingers while keeping the rest of your body relaxed and at ease.

And now relax your hands again. Relax your fingers and carry on relaxing your entire body. Enjoying the feeling of letting go throughout the whole of your body.

Now, bend your arms at the elbows and raise your **hands** in the air. Raise your hands in the air and make turning movements, as if you were turning a door knob. Turn your hands but keep the rest of your body relaxed. Now turn your hands from side to side so that first you palms face outwards and then the back of your hands face outwards.

Notice how it feels to move one part of your body while keeping the rest completely relaxed. Carry on moving your hands but keep the rest of your body relaxed.

Now relax your arms again. Relax your arms and let them come back to your sides. No tension in your hands or arms. Just let the whole of your body relax completely.

And now, while keeping the rest of your body completely relaxed, open your **eyes**. Open your eyes and look around you. Move your eyes around while keeping the rest of your body completely relaxed. Just move your eyes and keep everything else still and at ease. Notice how it feels to move your eyes while keeping the rest of your body completely relaxed.

Now move your **head** slightly from side to side. Look around even further but keep the rest of your body completely relaxed. Don't let any other tensions creep in. Carry on moving your head but keeping the rest of your body quite relaxed and at ease.

Notice how it feels to move one part of your body while keeping the rest relaxed. Completely comfortable, completely at ease. Just carry on looking around you, keeping the movements slow, steady and relaxed.

Now stop moving your head. Let your head and neck relax again completely. Close your eyes again so that you can let the muscles of your face relax totally once more. The muscles of your face, head, neck and shoulders relaxed and at ease.

This time move the muscles of your **tongue and jaw**. Notice how you can move these muscles while keeping the rest of your body completely relaxed. Keep the movements gentle and relaxed. Notice how it feels to move your tongue and jaw while the rest of your body remains relaxed and at ease.

In this way you can speak while keeping relaxed and at ease. Using only the muscles you need in your mouth and jaw. Without making any sounds, practise the shapes of some words. Move your lips, tongue and jaw as if you were saying your name. Move the muscles but make no sound. Keeping the rest of your body relaxed and at ease. No tension anywhere else in your body.

Now, **sit up** slowly. Slowly sit upright in a relaxed position keeping your shoulders dropped and relaxed, your neck relaxed, and your stomach relaxed. Just sitting in a comfortable, upright position. Open your eyes again, slowly. Sit comfortably and at ease with your eyes open. Noticing how it feels to sit and relax with your eyes open. No effort, no tension.

And now stretch yourself. Stretch your muscles like a cat stretches and **stand up** slowly. Get up slowly and stand in a relaxed position. Make sure that you can stand there with the whole of your body relaxed. Your hands and arm relaxed and the muscles of your face, neck and shoulders relaxed. Your chest relaxed so that your breathing is nice and even and not too deep. Your stomach relaxed and only the tensions you need in the muscles of your legs and back.

Now **walk** slowly around the room. Take a few steps walking slowly and comfortably. Notice how you can walk and yet keep your body relaxed and at ease. Using only the muscles necessary for the movements you are making. Keep your movements slow and smooth so that they are relaxed and easy. No tension in your arms, shoulders, neck or face. No tension in your chest or stomach. Keep the movements loose and relaxed. No effort, no tension. Notice how you can carry out this action and yet stay completely relaxed.

And now find your seat again and **sit down**. Settle back comfortably and relaxed. Let your whole body relax completely once again. Let any tensions ease away from your muscles, leaving them more and more deeply relaxed. Feel the muscles become warm, heavy and comfortable as you relax.

Now you have seen how you can make movements, talk or walk with only the muscles necessary to each action becoming tense. Keeping the rest of your body relaxed and comfortable. Build this into your everyday life by trying to make sure that all your actions use no more energy, and create no more tension, than is needed for the task at hand.

Enjoy the feeling of relaxation for the next few minutes.

When you are ready, you can stretch like a cat stretches and get up slowly.

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