

# **PATIENT INFORMATION**

## **Relaxation**



## **INTRODUCTION**

Relaxation techniques do not cure, but may help in the reduction of symptoms associated with stress. It may help to reduce fatigue, breathlessness and pain.

In addition to releasing tension in the body, relaxation exercises can aid sleep and can be used as a coping mechanism/strategy.

Learning any new skill or exercise takes practice so be patient and keep trying.

If one method does not work for you try another, but do give yourself time to succeed.

## **STRESS/ANXIETY AND RELAXATION**

Feelings of stress or anxiety are a normal physiological response to a threat.

We all experience stress and whatever the cause, it is certainly a regular feature of everyday life. Everyone knows the meaning of anxiety or stress and knows what it feels like.

As we suggested stress/anxiety are normal, healthy responses to situations. However, if the body does not return to “normal” or the stress does not go away, then other problems develop.

- If prolonged it can not only tire us out but also lower our resistance to illness.
- Excess anxiety can also cause physical ailments.

## **Relaxation assists in the release of the body's own natural painkillers – Endorphins**

### **GUIDELINES**

1. Relaxation does not come easily to everybody. You may have forgotten what it feels like to relax under today's stresses.
2. Like any new activity you need to practise in order to perfect.
3. At first you may need to set aside 20 – 30 minutes each day to practise relaxation techniques. It will become increasingly natural.
4. Always use what you have learned if you have a 'flare-up'.

### **RELAXATION EXERCISES**

#### **Environment**

- Be comfortable and well supported – either sitting or lying
- Play soft music
- Ensure the room is warm and dimly lit

#### **Breathing Exercises**

These exercises can be used anywhere at any time. For best results sit or lie, well supported and comfortable. Wear loose clothing. Breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth is recommended but use whichever is most comfortable.

#### **Count to Five**

- Sit comfortably and close your eyes
- Become aware of your breathing

- Slow your breathing down
- Take a breath – as you breath in slowly count to five
- Exhale slowly counting to five
- Visualise yourself calm and in control
- Repeat until you feel relaxed

### Diaphragm Breathing

- Relax your stomach
- Place your right hand on your stomach and your left hand on your upper chest
- Breath in gently, feeling your stomach rise slightly under your right hand
- Breath out slowly, feeling your stomach drop back down
- Your upper chest should be moving very little
- Repeat until your breathing relaxes

Practise these exercises for two or three minutes, several times a day. Gradually slow the rhythm down. Eventually you can do the exercise without using your hands and standing up.

## **Progressive Relaxation Technique**

Start with:

### **Feet**

Turn them up toward your knees, hold for a moment and let them go. Feel them become loose at your ankle joint.

### **Knees and Thighs**

Press them together, hold and let go. Let them roll outwards.

## **Buttocks**

Pinch together, hold and let go. Feel them become soft and spreading.

## **Abdomen**

Pull in tight, hold and let go. (You probably noticed that as you did this you held your breath when your tummy was tight and then breathed out as you let your tummy go. Remember this relationship – the breath out is the important relaxing one).

## **Shoulders**

Pull up towards your ears, hold and let go.

Notice the extra space between your ears and shoulders.

## **Elbows**

Press to sides of body, hold and let go. Your chest is no longer constricted.

## **Hands**

Clench, hold and let go. Feel them become heavier.

## **Jaws**

Press teeth together, hold and let go. Let your jaw sag slightly.

## **Lips**

Press together, hold and let go.

## **Tongue**

Press up to the roof of the mouth, hold and let go. Feel your breathing become easier.

## **Eyes**

Squeeze tightly shut, hold and let go, leaving them lightly closed.

## **Forehead**

Raise your eyebrows high, hold and let go, do not frown. Let the expression come off your face.

## **Autogenic Relaxation Technique**

This method uses the mind to relax the body.

Sit comfortably in the basic sitting position, hands palms down on your thighs.

Close your eyes lightly, slow down your breathing by focusing on breathing out and allow your bodyweight to sink into your support.

Begin by thinking of the crown of your head. Imagine first of all a weight resting on the top and then imagine the release as the weight is removed. Notice the feeling of relaxation.

As you focus on this feeling of relaxation imagine the feeling dropping down into your forehead. Allow the feeling to settle there for a moment – your forehead becoming smoother, higher and wider than before.

Feel the space in between eyes increase, your eyes resting comfortably in their sockets.

Now let the feeling of relaxation go sideways into the temple area and the hollow at the sides of your eyes. Imagine the muscles there, which attach the jaw to the skull, lengthening and relaxing.

Feel the heaviness in the jaw as your teeth separate slightly, your lips become softer and your cheeks smoother.

Focus now on the feeling of heaviness and allow it to spread to the tongue, which flops loosely at the bottom of the mouth. Pick up the feeling of warmth there and allow the feeling of relaxation, heaviness and warmth to spread slowly down the throat and then sideways to the neck muscles.

Check that your head is perfectly centralised to minimise the work done by these supporting muscles.

Now let your shoulders drop away from your ears and imagine a sensation of heaviness and warmth spreading from your neck, along the top of the shoulders and slowly down your upper arms, which you can feel hanging heavily from the shoulder joints – pulling your shoulders down even more.

It sometimes helps to visualise a warm glow at this stage.

Allow the heaviness and warmth to travel slowly to your elbows – then down your forearms to the wrists. Then to the palms of your hands and right down to your fingertips.

Pick up the feeling of weight as the hands rest heavily on your thighs and the feeling of heat from the palms.

Let this feeling of warmth continue on down from your thighs into your knees and then down through your calves towards your ankles.

Focus on this feeling of heaviness and warmth as your feet rest comfortably on the floor. Allow this feeling to spread into your feet and right along your toes.

## Mindfulness

This is method of focusing on an object or feeling to calm the mind and body. Paying attention to the present moment – to your own thoughts and feelings, and to the world around you can improve your mental wellbeing and reduce stress.

How to have a mindful hot drink.

- Look at your cup. Appreciate it, notice it.
- Watch the stream rising off the surface of the tea in your cup.
- Feel the damp warmth and inhale the aroma.
- Pick up the cup – how does it feel as you bring the cup up to your mouth.
- Feel the heaviness, warmth of the cup against your fingers.
- Notice how your mouth becomes ready to sip from the tip of the cup, how it braces itself for the hot liquid.
- How is your breathing? Are you a little tense, in anticipation of the tea being hot? Notice the tension acknowledge it.
- Now, take a sip. How does it taste? Can you describe the flavours? Notice how the liquid goes down your throat, the warmth as the tea travels to your stomach.
- Be alert to each sensation as you enjoy your tea. Pay attention to your thoughts.
- Be present in the moment.

## **IMPORTANT**

**Do not get up in a hurry after relaxation – take your time.**

**Be careful how you get up.**

### **Helpful Tips to Encourage Sleep**

- Be as active as possible during the day.
- Try to relax properly before going to bed. Practise techniques learnt in relaxation sessions. Use of a relaxation tape may be of help.
- Avoid tea, coffee, cocoa and large meals late at night. Try a milky drink before going to bed.
- Avoid drinking a lot of alcohol. It may help you fall asleep, but will wake you up through the night.
- Have a routine. For example, fix a set bedtime and time to get up in the morning.
- If you have had a bad night, resist the temptation to sleep the next day – it will make it harder to go to sleep the following night.
- Make sure that your bed and bedroom are comfortable – not too hot, not too cold, not too noisy.
- If something is troubling you and there is nothing you can do about it there and then, try writing it down before you go to bed and then tell yourself to deal with it tomorrow.
- If you cannot sleep, do not lie there worrying about it, get up and do something you find relaxing like reading or watching television. After a while you should feel tired enough to go to bed again.

This patient information leaflet is intended to be used to support discussion. If there is anything you do not understand or are unsure about, please ask a member of the therapy team.

If you need any further information please do not hesitate to contact:

Occupational Therapy Department  
Southport: 01704 74 4143  
Ormskirk : 01695 65 6861



**During your contact with us, it is important that you are happy with your care and treatment. Please speak to a member of staff and/or the ward/department Sister/Charge Nurse if you have any questions or concerns.**

## **REHABILITATION**

If you have any concerns or questions regarding your rehabilitation, please contact the Director of Rehabilitation, on tel no 01704 704147.

## **INFECTION CONTROL REQUEST**

Preventing infections is a crucial part of our patients' care. To ensure that our standards remain high our staff have regular infection prevention and control training and their practice is monitored in the workplace. We ask patients and visitors to assist us in preventing infections by cleaning their hands at regular intervals and informing staff of areas within the hospital that appear soiled.

As a patient there may be times that you are unsure whether a staff member has cleaned their hands; if in doubt please ask the staff member and they will be only too happy to put your mind at ease by cleaning their hands so that you can see them.

## **SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS**

### **ANY CONDITION SPECIFIC DANGER SIGNALS TO LOOK OUT FOR:**

If your symptoms get worse, contact your GP.

### **CONTACT INFORMATION IF YOU ARE WORRIED ABOUT YOUR CONDITION**

Your own GP –

Rehabilitation Services Southport - (01704) 704143

Rehabilitation Services Ormskirk – (01696) 656268

### **OTHER USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS/CONTACTS:**

NHS 111

Stop Smoking Helpline (Sefton) - 0300 100 1000

Stop Smoking Helpline (West Lancashire) - 0800 328 6297



**Please call 01704 704714 if you need  
this leaflet in an alternative format**

**Southport and Ormskirk Hospital NHS Trust**

Ormskirk & District General Hospital  
Wigan Road, Ormskirk, L39 2AZ  
Tel: (01695) 577111

Southport & Formby District General Hospital  
Town Lane, Kew, Southport, PR8 6PN  
Tel: (01704) 547471

**FOR APPOINTMENTS**

Telephone (01695) 656680  
Email [soh-tr.appointments@nhs.net](mailto:soh-tr.appointments@nhs.net)

Please remember to complete the **attached Friends and Family Test**.

Alternatively, you can complete the *Friends and Family Test* on-line by going to: [southportandormskirk.nhs.uk/FFT](http://southportandormskirk.nhs.uk/FFT)

**Thank you**

Author: Sally Shorrock

Ref: 409

Version: 8

Reviewed: October 2021

Next Review: October 2024