

Relaxation

‘To equip people affected by CFS / ME with the skills for self-management towards a better quality of life’.



Pride in our older people's and adult community services

What is relaxation?



Relaxation is allowing physical and/or mental tension to be released. Tension is the body's natural response to threat, part of the body's alarm or survival mechanism. It can be a very useful response, but a lot of the time, we don't need this tension, so it's okay to learn to let it go, and learn some relaxation skills.

How relaxation can help:

Relaxation is part of a balancing process alongside other aspects of your lifestyle such as what you eat, how you sleep and your physical and mental activity. Learning to relax takes practice. Think about a recipe for a cake- there may be 10 different recipes to try and you may find one or two that you like.

Consider building a 'tool kit' of relaxation techniques, to help unwind and bring your tensions and anxiety under control. Building a resource of different techniques is useful and can allow you to use different techniques depending on the environment and situation you are in.

Relaxation and CFS/ME:

Beginning to consider rest and activity balance is an important first part of self-managing this condition. We frequently find that people state they are resting by watching television, reading a book or going on computers or social media. All of these things are using energy (don't forget it's not just physical activity that uses



energy). We discuss relaxation as a way of achieving a deeper sense of rest and to begin building a foundation on which to gain a balance of activity and deeper rest. We would advise you to consider the length of time you are resting and advise against prolonged rest. We tend not to be prescriptive about an ideal time in which to rest as this is individual to you and your life (you may find that using your chosen

relaxation techniques for 10/15 minutes is enough during the day but you may choose to listen to a guided relaxation technique to help you unwind at bedtime and this may take 30mins). However, prolonged periods of rest (i.e. resting for hours or days) have been found to cause their own problems, including changes in muscle and cardiovascular function and a reduced tolerance to activity.

Relaxation can help to:

- Reduce tiredness – if you can manage everyday life without excessive tension
- Improve performance – your performance in areas of self-care, work and leisure can be raised through self-awareness and control of tension
- Reduce pain – pain can occur as a result of tension. For example, headaches and backache. Relaxation can help you to cope by raising your pain threshold and reducing the amount of pain you experience.
- Cope with stress – relaxation helps you to reduce the effects of stress and to breathe effectively
- Improve sleep – by allowing you to be calm and peaceful and allowing your mind the freedom from daily stressors
- Improve self-confidence – by increasing your self-awareness and ability to cope with daily life
- Improve personal relationships – it is easier to relate well to other people when you are relaxed and self-confident.

Relaxation and stress:



When we feel anxious or stressed, this is our body's natural response to feeling threatened, the alarm system which helps us deal with danger. Physical signs of this include:

- Breathing rate increases,
- Blood pressure increases,
- Heart rate increases,
- Muscles become tense
- Increased sweating occurs
- We enter a state of mental arousal and adrenaline flow- fight or flight

A lot of the time, we don't need those survival responses, so relaxation helps to decrease that adrenaline response, to let it go.

Breathing and Relaxation:

Our out-breath releases tension in the chest muscles and allow all muscles to release their tension more easily. Breathing is far more effective when we use our diaphragms, rather than with the chest muscles. Sit comfortably in a chair and place one hand on your chest and the other on your abdomen (hand on navel). Take two or three fairly large breaths – which hand moves first and which moves most? Practise so that it is the lower hand on your abdomen that moves rather than the one on your chest. People often think that their tummy goes in when they breathe in - but the reverse should be the case.

When you're feeling tense or hoping to relax, try breathing out a little bit more slowly and more deeply, noticing a short pause before the in-breath takes over (don't exaggerate the in-breath, just let it happen). You might find it useful to count slowly or prolong a word such as "one" or "peace" to help elongate the out-breath a little (to yourself or out loud).

Types of relaxation:

There are various ways in which to achieve relaxation, most use breath control in some way. Whichever method you choose, regular practice will help. Some examples are:



- Progressive Muscle Relaxation – tense/relax muscular relaxation
- Meditation/ yoga / Qi Gong / Tai Chi
- Mindfulness
- Guided Imagery or Visualisation (this may not be suitable for patients with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder)
- Massage
- Aromatherapy
- Music (music is very personal, so use whatever helps you relax) either used alone, or with any of the above methods. Using headphones to block out external noise can also be helpful.
- Audiobooks

The use of audiobooks and music are still requiring some energy but often these are useful tools if you struggle to apply the deeper relaxation techniques.

Examples of relaxation techniques:

Here are a couple of examples of simple, quick relaxation techniques to get you started:

Simple Breathing Exercise



Here is an example of a simple breathing exercise which can be done in a few seconds, no matter where you are. It is particularly helpful at stressful times, but it's also useful to do it at regular intervals throughout the day.

Take a deep, slow breath in and hold it for 5 seconds. Feel your abdomen expand as you do this.

Breathe out slowly, to a count of 5. Breathe in again, make every breath slow and steady and exactly the same as the one before it and the one after it. As you breathe out, concentrate on expelling ALL the air in your lungs. If you're alone, you could make a noise like "who" as you do this to help you feel the air being let out. Keep the outbreath going for as long as you can. Keep it relaxed for a few seconds before you inhale again.

Quickie Relaxation

Wherever you are (e.g. in the car, supermarket, awaiting appointment etc.)

- STOP
- SHOULDERS DOWN
- TAKE 2 OR 3 SLIGHTLY SLOWER, SLIGHTLY DEEPER OUT-BREATHS (just let the in-breath happen)
- CARRY ON WITH WHATEVER YOU WERE DOING, BUT JUST A LITTLE SLOWER

The following technique takes longer and best used in a quieter environment where you can get yourself comfortable:

Before any relaxation exercise, go to the toilet if you need to, and wear loose comfortable clothing. Lie or sit somewhere with the whole of your body supported

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

This may not be suitable for patients with severe CFS/ME and, in particular, those experiencing pain.

Make yourself totally comfortable. Close your eyes.

Sit in a comfortable chair (or lie on the floor, or on a bed). Ensure you will not be disturbed by other noises. If you become aware of sounds - just try to ignore them and let them leave your mind just as soon as they enter. Make sure the whole of your body is comfortably supported - including your arms, head and feet. (Rest your arms on the arms of the chair, with your feet flat on the floor - if sitting!)

- Close your eyes. Feel the chair supporting your whole body - your legs, your arms, and your head. If you can feel any tension, begin to let it go. Take 2 slow and deep breaths, and let the tension begin to flow out.
- Become aware of your head - notice how your forehead feels. Let any tension go and feel your forehead become smooth and wide. Let any tension go from around your eyes, your mouth, your cheeks and your jaw. Let your teeth part slightly and feel the tension go.
- Now focus on your neck - let the chair take the weight of your head and feel your neck relax. Now your head is feeling heavy and floppy. Let your shoulders lower gently down. Your shoulders are wider, your neck is longer.
- Notice how your body feels as you begin to relax.
- Be aware of your arms and your hands. Let them sink down into the chair. Now they are feeling heavy and limp.
- Think about your back - from your neck to your hips. Let the tension go and feel yourself sinking down into the chair. Let your hips, your legs and your feet relax and roll outwards. Notice the feeling of relaxation taking over.
- Notice your breathing - your abdomen gently rising and falling as you breathe. Let your next breath be a little deeper, a little slower...
- Now, you are feeling completely relaxed and heavy. Lie still and concentrate on slow, rhythmic breathing....
- When you want to, count back from 5 to 1 and open your eyes. Wiggle your fingers and toes, breathe deeply and stretch. Look around the room, becoming more alert as you notice what you see, hear and feel. Pause before gently rising.

Where now?

We have given you a flavour of some basic relaxation techniques. It is much more effective if you are able to carry out your own self research to find techniques that are best suited to you and your daily life. There are many books on the market that offer self-help guidance to relaxation. The internet has a wealth of information. You may find suitable videos on 'you tube' and there are many Apps via your phone or tablet that you may wish to try.

We have selected just a few to get you started.

- Relaxation and therapy worksheets - www.getselfhelp.co.uk
- Stress / Relaxation Techniques - www.skillsyouneed.com
- Meditation / Mindfulness - www.headspace.com
- Relaxation - www.autogenic-therapy.org.uk
- Mindfulness - www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mindfulness/
- Mindfulness - www.franticworld.com/free-meditations-from-mindfulness/
- Mindfulness / Relaxation / Guided Imagery - www.innerhealthstudio.com/imagery-and-visualization.html
- Breathing Exercise for Stress - www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/ways-relieve-stress/
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation - www.anxietybc.com/sites/default/files/MuscleRelaxation.pdf
- Guided Meditations for Pain - www.breathworks-mindfulness.org.uk/aboutbreathworks
- Sleep / Guided Meditations - www.youtube.com/channel/UCqPYhcdFgrlUXiGmPRAej1w
- Pilates - www.nhs.uk/conditions/nhs-fitness-studio/ms-and-fibromyalgia-pilates-exercise-video/
- Yoga for CFS/ME - www.angela-stevens.co.uk/index.html
www.fionaagombar.co.uk/books-and-dvd/

Relaxation Apps

- Headspace - www.headspace.com/headspace-meditation-app
- Thrive: Feel stress free - <https://thrive.uk.com/download/>
- Chill Panda - <https://apps.beta.nhs.uk/chill-panda/>
- Feeling Good: positive mindset - <https://apps.beta.nhs.uk/feeling-good-positive-mindset/>
- Be Mindful - <https://apps.beta.nhs.uk/be-mindful/>

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Patient Advice and Liaison Service

For information about CPFT services or to raise an issue, contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on Freephone 0800 376 0775, or e-mail pals@cpft.nhs.uk

Out-of-hours service for CPFT mental health service users

Please call **NHS 111** for health advice and support.

If you require this information in another format such as braille, large print or another language, please let us know.

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