

Stress Reduction

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive muscle relaxation is a method for ridding the body of tension. It works very well to mitigate hyperventilation, asthma, gastrointestinal problems, headaches, racing heart, fatigue, irritability, and sleeping disorders. You achieve this relaxation by moving systematically through your body, top to bottom, focusing on a muscle group then tensing and releasing the muscles. This enables you to locate and release areas of tension. Add your own visualization to the exercise, making the effect even more powerful.

Visualization

Use your imagination to create a calming, positive message that overrides those produced by a stressful environment. The way to do this imagery is to picture a relaxing image, like sitting by a waterfall in the forest or relaxing on the beach in the warm sun. The more detail you give to your visualization, the more your mind will respond to your imagery. Custom design your ideal place and practice it regularly to feel more relaxed. Imagery can calm you, center you, and be used to rehearse for potentially stressful events. If you see the event taking place and see yourself handling it well, you will be more prepared when it actually occurs.

Meditation

Meditation helps to calm your body and mind, and makes your mind less cluttered. It helps you to be more objective and in control, and diminishes negative thought patterns which might contribute to stress. There are two basic components of any type of meditative practice. The first is to focus your mind, by concentrating on breathing or on a word, sound or phrase. The second is to adopt a passive non-judgmental attitude toward distracting thoughts. Simply allow your thoughts and worries to pass through your mind like a parade. Each time you notice yourself thinking or focusing on something other than the focal point you have chosen, simply go back to the focal point.

Cognitive Restructuring and Positive Thinking

Cognitive restructuring is a way to recognize and reverse negative and harmful thought patterns. Negative thinking is a powerful and harmful force in our lives, but can be switched to happy, positive messages, which can alleviate stress and distress. Once negative thoughts are noticed they can be stopped when you remember to think differently. The first step is to stop the negative thought by simply telling yourself: Stop thinking that. The second step is to replace the negative thought with the more positive view of the same situation. Some examples are:

Negative Thoughts:

- I'm not as smart as the rest of them
- He/she doesn't like me
- I feel nervous when in a group
- I feel overwhelmed
- I made a mistake
- I'll quit this job and go someplace else
- This is so hard
- New situations make me insecure

Replacement Positive Affirmations:

- Everybody is smart in their own unique way
- Not everyone will -- but I'm OK, just as I am
- I am at ease in all situations
- I am in control of my life
- I learn from my mistakes
- Maybe I need a break; I'll feel better later
- This is a big job but I am capable
- I am always open to growing

This material was extracted from a seminar on stress written by Kathy Constantine; used with permission.