

- My arm is warm.
(Repeat three times for each arm.)
- My leg is warm.
(Repeat three times for each leg.)
- Both my arms and legs feel warm.
(Repeat three times.)

It might help to imagine your arms and legs submerged in warm bath water or basking in sun light.

4. To complete the exercise, take a deep breath and say, “My heartbeat is calm.” (Repeat three times.) Then, “I am calm.” Again, give yourself the suggestion that you will arise refreshed and alert and go back to your regular activities.

The Relaxation Response

As you become more stressed, your breathing becomes shallower and more erratic, thus transporting less oxygen to your body at a time when you need it most. Here you will focus only on your breathing (instead of your tension!) and find it immediately relaxing. Dr. Herbert Benson at Harvard Medical School developed this technique.

1. Sit in a comfortable position. Close your eyes and relax your muscles.
2. Focus on your breathing. Breathe slowly and naturally.
3. Select a word such as the number “one.” Repeat it silently or see it in your mind’s eye each time you exhale. (When outside thoughts intrude, disregard them and return to the word you’ve selected. Maintain a passive, relaxed attitude about any interruptions).
4. Continue for a set period of time - 10 to 20 minutes. Practice the technique twice daily.

Experts in a variety of disciplines agree that relaxing for 20 minutes once or twice a day is helpful in reducing stress – regardless of the specific technique used. No equipment is needed for the “techniques” suggested, though some people report that audio taping the instructions for listening while they’re learning the techniques is helpful.

Another simple way to reduce the impact of stress in your life is to slow down whenever you can. Most people expect too much of themselves. Not everything needs to be done at breakneck speed or on an endless schedule of self-imposed deadlines. Remember, it’s not a waste of time to rest or play, so allow some free time in every day. Be sure to get plenty of sleep and maintain good physical as well as emotional health. If you do have troubles, share them with a trusted friend or counselor.

Last, keep a sense of humor; take some time each day to read or listen to something funny. Laugh out loud it will brighten your outlook. That too is relaxing!

Now, for those books about “plain old relaxation.” Here is one you might enjoy:

“The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook” Martha Davis, Elizabeth Robbins Eshelman, Matthew McKay, & Patrick Fanning



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learning to **Relax**



Dear Counselor,

My first year at the University was very productive! I got a 3.75 GPA, joined a fraternity, made the track team, worked part time at a research center, and became engaged to a terrific girl. I also had headaches, couldn't sleep, lost my appetite, and felt tense and nervous most of the time. My family doctor said my health was just fine, but I was stressed and needed some time for "plain old relaxation" every day. Good student that I am, I went to the bookstore to find books on "plain old relaxation" and there weren't any. Any suggestions for what I might try? It needs to be simple—I don't have time to learn something complicated.

Stressed Sophomore

Progressive Deep Muscle Relaxation

Developed by Edmund Jacobson, M.D., this technique can quickly release accumulated tension so you feel more relaxed. The theory is that once you've felt muscle tension, you can more easily feel muscle relaxation. Here's how to do it:

1. Sit in a chair and close your eyes. Rest your forearms on the arms of the chair, palms downward.
2. Take a few slow, deep breaths. Concentrate on whatever muscle tension you may be feeling, but do nothing about it.

Meditative Suggestion

Using only the power of suggestion (no physical movement), you can teach your body and mind to respond quickly to your own command to relax. Originally developed as "autogenic training" to reduce the tension of chronic headache sufferers, meditative suggestion is helpful for general relaxation as well.

Simply speaking, you will give yourself a series of verbal suggestions geared to induce feelings of either "heaviness" or "warmth." Heaviness suggestions promote muscle relaxation; warmth suggestions relax blood vessels, triggering sensations of warmth. Together, the two sensations promote overall relaxation. Here's how to do it:

I felt tense and nervous most of the time . . .

Dear Stressed Sophomore,

Stress seems to be a "complicating" factor in busy lives today and unfortunately there are no "uncomplicated" answers. Sometimes major stressors like death, divorce or disease will bowl us over — other times stress is more subtle — the minor irritation of waiting in a long line, missing an important phone call or getting two points lower on an exam than you expected. Still other times stress results from a seemingly positive situation — an emotion packed holiday reunion, or perhaps the anticipation of an important athletic event. Since many stressful situations can't be avoided (or we might choose to participate anyway) it's best to learn to deal with them constructively and thus reduce the negative impact on health and well being. "Plain old relaxation" is one such way to do this. First, I'd check back with your doctors to see if they had anything specific in mind. If not, here are three simple relaxation techniques that can be effective for most people who use them regularly.

3. Tell yourself to "tense" and tighten a muscle group for five seconds, then tell yourself to "relax" and let the tension dissolve for 30 seconds. Follow this sequence:
 - Bend both arms at the elbows and wrists. Make a fist with each hand. *Relax.*
 - Press your back against the chair. *Relax.*
 - Tighten your abdomen. *Relax.*
 - Lift and extend your lower legs. *Relax.*
 - Tighten your jaw. *Relax.*
 - Squint your eyes. *Relax.*
 - Tuck your chin against your chest. *Relax.*
4. At the end of the exercise, be sure to "suggest" that when you open your eyes you will feel refreshed, relaxed and alert — then get up, stretch, and go back to your regular activities.

1. Choose a quiet environment without distractions. Dim the lights, sit in a comfortable chair and close your eyes.
2. Start with your right arm (*if you're right-handed*) or left arm (*if you're left-handed*), and quietly give yourself these suggestions:
 - My arm is heavy. (*Repeat three times for each arm.*)
 - My leg is heavy. (*Repeat three times for each leg.*)
 - Both my arms and legs are heavy. (*Repeat three times.*)It might help to visualize small weights attached to your arms and legs.
3. Follow the same sequence for the warmth commands: