

▶ **Workshop: Stress Management** Chapter 4, Lesson 1: Ways to Relax



This week, you will learn simple techniques to relax your body and mind.
Let's begin by looking at how relaxation counters the unhealthy effects of stress.

What are the benefits of relaxation?

Since you can't eliminate stress entirely, it's important to use methods that help promote the "relaxation response", or the natural unwinding of the stress response. Relaxation helps slow down breathing, release muscle tension, lower blood pressure and ease emotional strain. It really doesn't matter what technique you use--just that you do it regularly.

Tips for Relaxing Right Away

It takes only a few minutes out of your day to use simple techniques that can help short-circuit stress. The idea is to become aware of how the stress response is taking hold in your body and to quickly counter it with a method that prompts the relaxation response.

- Scan your body for tension. Is your jaw tight? Your stomach in a knot? Shoulders tense? Just taking notice can help you instantly unwind your muscles.
- Gently tense, then release your muscles. Start with your forehead and move down to your toes, tensing each muscle group to the count of 5. Then relax each one and notice the difference.
- Breathe deeply and slowly. When you're stressed, breathing becomes shallow and robs you of the vital oxygen needed for your heart, brain and other organs. Focus on inhaling slowly, fully expanding your belly, then slowly exhaling. It helps to listen to each breath.
- Picture a mental oasis. For example, see palm trees swaying, feel the warm sand, and hear the lapping of the waves. Try to linger with the image for several minutes. Soon, you'll be transported to tranquility.

More Relaxation Techniques

Any action that helps you feel calm is beneficial. That can range from having a hearty laugh with a friend to petting your dog. Massage, yoga, Tai chi, and meditation are formalized relaxation techniques shown to lower stress. As a bonus, when you meditate, you will feel a sense of calm that can continue throughout your day.

Next Steps

1. Read "Ways to Live Your Life Well"
2. Read "Relaxation Techniques: An Introduction"
3. Take the Chapter 4 Quiz

▶ **Remember** Relaxation techniques can help counter the effects of stress.