



# Relaxation

Regular relaxation training is an important component of Life Style Management, we so often recommend for ailments like hypertension, IHD, chronic backache and is equally valuable in anxiety, insomnia and chronic anger. Today we medicos need relaxation more than our patients! How many of us understand relaxation and really practice it?

Relaxation training differs from what we normally think of as 'relaxing'. It's more than listening to music, seeing a movie or reading to take our mind off things or taking a long, quiet walk to unwind. When Relaxation is referred to in relation to stress management or when Psychologists talk about 'learning to relax', it refers to the regular practice of one or more of a group of specific relaxation exercises. These exercises most often involve a combination of deep breathing, muscle relaxation and visualization techniques (imagery) that have been scientifically proven to release the muscular tension our body stores during times of stress.

In 1975, Herbert Benson studied the body changes when a person is deeply relaxed. During this 'relaxation response', the heart rate, respiratory rate, blood pressure, basal metabolic rate, muscular tensions, oxygen consumption all are decreased. On the other hand á brain waves – associated with a state of calmness – are increased. Every one of these physical conditions is exactly opposite to reactions that anxiety and fear produce in our body. Deep relaxation and anxiety are physiological opposites.

When practiced regularly, relaxation training is very effective in controlling general, interpersonal and performance anxiety. Let us look at some vital components of Relaxation Training.



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**1. BREATHING EXERCISE:** Open expansive breathing and our physical and emotional well being are very much intertwined. Most of us have a tendency to restrict our breathing when we are frightened, anxious or feel overwhelmed. It is not "natural" to restrict one's breathing at such times, but for most of us it is a default habit. "dar se meri saans hi ruk gayi!" Restricting our breathing has become a habit that we do so "well" that we have come to not even notice when and how we do it. The practice of deep breathing is meant to reawaken us to the process of breathing and help us to reverse degenerative breathing habits.

The exercise requires inhaling through your nose and sinuses, exhaling through your throat and mouth. Sit up straight, comfortably, without leaning against the back of the chair and remain relaxed while practicing this.

- a. Breathe in slowly through your nose making a "Suuu" sound which emanates from the area of your sinuses. What is important here is that you make a slow and constant inhalation and that the inhalation has some sound to it.
- b. Hold onto the breath in the chest for about the same time that you inhaled.
- c. Exhale slowly through your mouth making a "Haaa" sound which emanates from your throat, as the air lightly bounces off your palate. The sound you make is a throaty sound.
- d. While being certain to remain relaxed, build up to a cycle of inhaling for about twenty seconds, holding in for twenty seconds and exhaling for about twenty seconds.

Perform this Graceful Breathing, for a minimum of five minutes. During periods of stress, breathing appropriately even for 2 minutes will suffice.

**PRANAYAMA:** The voluntary interruption of the movement of breathing in and out is pranayama. By controlling the vital energy of breathing, the mind is rapidly brought under control, mainly by the holding of the breath for a considerable time; we must do only what we can, as this, to be effective, must be done without any feeling of discomfort.