

Metta Massage Therapy

How to (Truly) Relax

Life's stresses give rise to chronic muscular tension. Chronic muscular tension, in turn, produces a surprisingly large number of life's ailments. All of us believe we know how to relax. In fact, most of us cannot truly relax because we have never learned the simple physical skills.

You can learn to unwind both body and mind with the two exercises described below. Each day spend 5-10 minutes on the first and 10-20 minutes on the second. These exercises are best done in a quiet place which is free of distractions. They are especially effective if done on lying down at night or on awakening in the morning.

Exercise One

Find a quiet place if you can. Stand if you have to, sitting is better, lying down is best. Place the thumb of one hand where you can feel your pulse on the other wrist. Close your eyes if you can.

Focus your awareness on your breathing. Breath in and out through your nose quietly for several breaths. Then, for several breaths, count the average number of heartbeats for in-breaths and for out-breaths.

Now, gently change your breathing so each in-breath and each out-breath take the same number of heartbeats. Slowly increase the number of heartbeats per in-breath and per out-breath until you feel comfortable but a little challenged.

Continue to focus on your breath, in and out, while continuing to count. You may notice that your heart speeds up and slows down slightly during the breath cycle. That's a good sign - your heart is responding to the changing amount of oxygen in your lungs. You may also notice that you can feel your heartbeat in your chest - another healthy sign of enhanced internal awareness. As you remain quiet, breathing and counting, you maybe be able to stop holding your wrist and just sense the heartbeats in your chest.

Your nervous system is now in a deeply relaxed (or coherent) state. Continue focusing on your breath and counting for as long as you like. Just one or two minutes is helpful, ten to fifteen minutes is very restorative.

Metta Massage Therapy

With daily practice you will quickly be able to reach this relaxed state anytime you feel the need - during a meeting, after a family argument, before bed.

Exercise Two

As before, find a quiet place. Sitting is good, lying down is better. Close your eyes if you can.

Turn your undivided attention to just one hand for a minute or so. Tune in to the pull of gravity tugging at it. Sense how warm or cool it is. Feel if the skin is stretched. Feel the fingernails if you can. Try to sense your pulse in the hand. Be aware of any other sensations - vibrations, air currents, the touch of clothes, the chair, aches or pains, etc.

Now take a deep breath and focus your attention on letting go the muscles in the hand. Let it flop, droop, hang. Feel the soft tissues actually hanging from the bones as gravity tugs at them. That is the feeling of truly relaxed muscles.

Now, while keeping the hand relaxed, turn your attention to your forearm and repeat the process - be intensely aware for a minute or so, take a deep breath and let it go limp. Repeat methodically until you have covered your whole body, saving your face and scalp for last. Your whole body is now truly relaxed. Remain quiet and completely focused on the soft sensations in your body for as long as you like. You will find that 15 minutes is as restorative as an hour or more of sleep.

At first you will need to think about hand, forearm, upper arm etc. With daily practice you will be able to just think "arm". Finally you will be able to think "body" and your whole body will immediately relax.

These exercises are simple but they are not easy at first.
With daily practice anyone of any age can master them.