

Why should I learn how to relax? How will I benefit?

We all face stress in our day- to- day lives. Stress can be caused by various factors. The most common causes of stress include family and friends, life changes, work, academics, and health conditions. The body responds to various stressful situations through several physiological changes such as increased heart rate, sweating, flushing, increased blood pressure, etc. This is called the **flight or fight** response as the body prepares to face stressful situations. As stress builds up on a continuous basis, people experience various stress-related problems such as sleep disturbances, muscle tension and headaches and in the long run stress responses can lead to negative outcomes such as physical and mental illnesses. Learning to relax is therefore important to deal with these stressful situations in a more adaptive and effective way.

Sometimes we try to deal with stress responses without quite being aware of them. This may also include maladaptive methods such as smoking, drinking or just watching TV. On the other hand it could also be adaptive methods like listening to music, reading, or gardening. Drinking, smoking or taking other drugs although appear to reduce tension, it has adverse effects on health on a long run. When used repeatedly, people become increasingly immune to the effects of these

substances, and may require more of a substance to get the same effect.

What is relaxation and how does it work?

Relaxation refers to a set of responses that are the opposite of arousal or stress. The word relaxation literally means to be free from tension. The term relaxation response means a state in which both the mind and body are in deep rest.

Relaxation is not the same as physical exercise, playing sports or pursuing a hobby. Although these activities help distract one from stress, they do not have the same effects as relaxation.

What are the different ways in which I can learn to relax?

Few relaxation techniques focus on relaxing the mind and few on the body. Some other techniques target both the mind and the body.

What are some of the relaxation techniques?

There are many relaxation techniques that one can use. Each of these techniques target specific stress responses. Relaxation techniques vary from simple breathing to meditation and progressive muscle relaxation. Choosing a strategy that suits you best is important. In addition, the time and place for

relaxation is very important in order to start practicing the techniques.

Some of the most commonly used methods are:

Imagery:

Imagery is a method that involves using pleasant visual images such as that of scenery – such as a warm beach, traveling through the hills. It can be practiced at first at a specific time and place and later generalized to other situations. Pleasant images help in increasing feelings of relaxation and sense of calm. Visual images can also be used to stop or take away unpleasant thoughts and sensations such as imagining that the pain has gradually disappeared from one's body.

Progressive or Deep Muscle relaxation:

Muscle relaxation was first described by Edmund Jacobson in 1938. It involves the progressive and gradual tensing and then releasing of muscle groups along with the instruction to relax and breathe easily. The focus of progressive muscle relaxation is to train oneself in recognizing states of bodily tension and then relaxing them.

This form of relaxation is typically done lying down or in a chair with an arm rest. The entire sequence of relaxation takes approximately 20 minutes and is followed by a period of rest for about 10 minutes.

Breathing exercises:

Deep breathing or diaphragmatic breathing is a simple and easy method of relaxation. It involves taking measured, deep breaths or inhaling and exhaling from the diaphragm. Shallow breathing is an indication of anxiety and stress and the aim of deep breathing is to regularize the flow of breath and thereby relaxing the mind and body.

Meditation:

There are several meditation techniques that have been described to produce states of mental relaxation. Amongst these the Mindfulness meditation has been researched extensively for stress-related problems. It involves training oneself to be aware of one's thoughts without labeling them as being good or bad. It is described as a moment to moment awareness with being judgmental. Mindfulness meditation takes several weeks of practice before it can be used in everyday life.

Biofeedback:

Biofeedback refers to methods by which the person uses instruments to help detect physiological changes such as heart rate, skin conductance, muscle and then learns to alter these physiological responses through practice.



What are the things that would help in relaxation?

- Regular practice, setting aside a quiet place and sufficient time for practice
- Identifying the right method of relaxation
- Not forcing yourself to relax
- Adopting a comfortable posture

What are the reasons for relaxation not working?

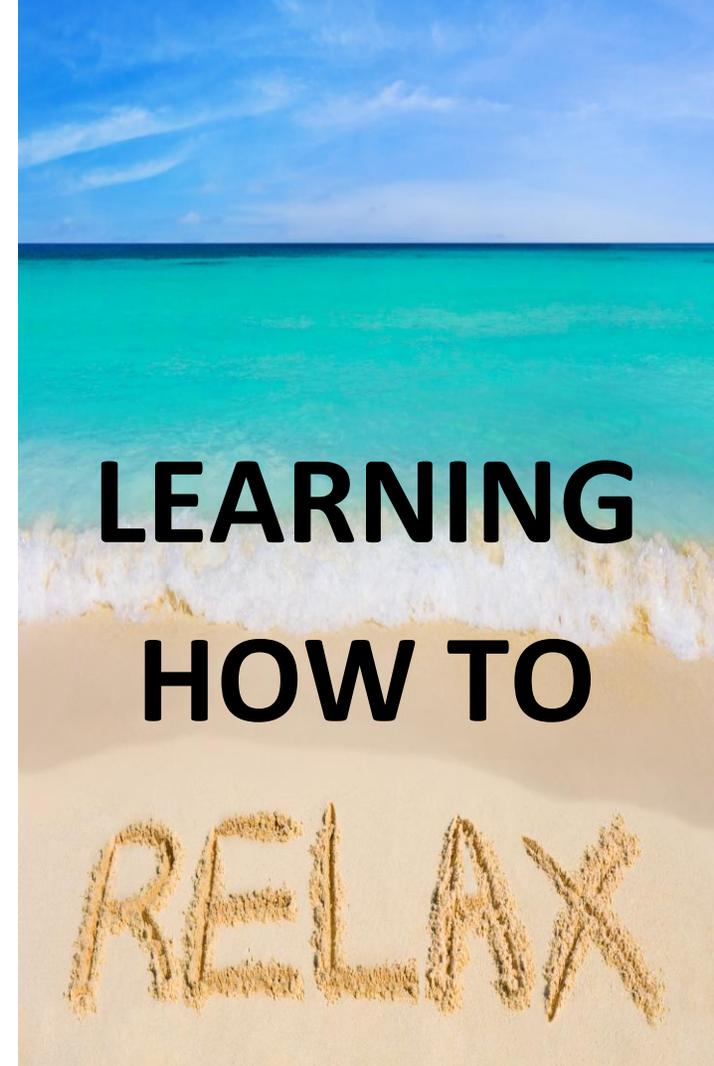
At times, relaxation does not work for individuals and in some people they may actually lead to worsening of anxiety. The reasons might be:

- Trying too hard to relax
- Practicing relaxation that may not be suitable for the kind of anxiety/stress
- Insufficient learning of the relaxation skills
- Improper posture, timing and place of relaxation
- Excessive tiredness and hunger

Some may feel being in a quiet and a peaceful environment may facilitate negative think. If you start any relaxation technique and feel uncomfortable or disturbed, do not continue.

When can I use relaxation skills?

Practicing relaxation techniques regularly can produce maximum results.



**NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MENTAL
HEALTH AND NEURO SCIENCES**
Stress Management and Lifestyle Clinic
NIMHANS CENTRE FOR WELL BEING
1/B, 9th main, 1st phase, 1st stage, BTM
Layout, Bangalore-76
Phone- 080 26685948/ 9480829670
Email- nimhans.wellbeing@gmail.com