

# LEARNING HOW TO RELAX YOURSELF

## Helpful Guidelines for Improving Your Relaxation Skills

You have just had a training session in a very powerful relaxation training technique called “progressive muscle relaxation training.” In my reading of the research this and one other technique have the best record for training you to be able to relax yourself in the stressful situation. I have had great results in my practice, even with people having multiple daily panic attacks, as well as those who just want to be calmer throughout their day.

### Guidelines for learning:

- If you want to move forward the fastest, practice this 20 minute exercise twice a day for three to six weeks. Most who do this find that they come to a place sometime in this timeframe where they can say, “I no longer have to practice this, because I now have the ability to relax myself with just a deep breath *in* the stressful situation enough to meet the demands of my stressful life.” If you can’t set aside that much time each day, once a day is fine; but it will probably take you about six to twelve weeks to reach your goal.
- This exercise trains you *how* to relax, but it doesn’t necessarily train you *when* to relax so that it can become a daily habit. It is *very important* that you put up your blue dots in places (watch, phone, computer, steering wheel, TV, etc.) where you might need a reminder to *use* your improving ability to relax yourself with just a deep breath in the midst of a stressful situation. This helps you to develop the *habit* of being tuned in to your body throughout your day to where staying relaxed becomes more automatic.
- Don’t try to do anything else while practicing the 20 minute exercise. Follow these suggestions for maximum learning:
  - Sit up in a chair and keep your head erect to avoid falling asleep.
  - Keep your eyes closed while practicing the exercise.
  - Adjust my instructions on the tape or CD so that you don’t experience any pain or discomfort. (e.g., if you sprained your ankle, only do one foot instead of both feet.)
  - Try not to be thinking while doing the exercise. Any time you notice yourself thinking, let the thoughts disappear and refocus your attention on body sensation. Do not try to analyze your experience, just sense the differences between the tense and relaxed states in each part of your body.
- Besides learning how to relax your body, the other critical ingredient for being relaxed is to examine your “self-talk” to learn how to avoid worry, catastrophizing, perfectionistic thinking, negative untrue assumptions, etc. Much of talk therapy has to do with this kind of cognitive retraining in “fighting the battle of the mind.”

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