

Relaxation program

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1. A combination of:

Progressive relaxation as conducted by Jacobson, Autogenic training by Schultz and Visualization.

The build-up is as follows:

- 1) Focus on breathing and stress relief
- 2) Progressive relaxation* followed by the hint of heaviness as described by Schultz
- 3) Visualization for which several scenarios can be applied
- 4) Focus back on breathing and energy absorption
- 5) Slowly “waking up”

*For practical reasons only the arms and legs will be targeted

Environment

Before starting the relaxation, make sure you have enough room and a good surface to lay down on your back comfortably. If you like, you can use a pillow and/or support under your knees. Dimming the lights is recommended.

The story

Lay down on your back with your hands beside your body or placed upon your belly. Make sure you are laying comfortably. Close your eyes. Focus your attention on your breathing. Notice how, when you breath in, your belly rises and when you breath out, your belly drops down again. Every time you breathe out, you blow out some of the tension present in your body.

Now you are more relaxed, you are going to create an immense contraction in your arms and legs followed by a sudden release of that tension. This will allow you to clearly notice the difference between tension and relaxation.

We will start with both arms. Focus your attention on your arms. How are your arms laying on the ground? Which parts make contact with the floor? Are your palms facing upward or downward?..NOW MAKE A FIST WITH YOUR HANDS, PUSH YOUR FISTS DOWN IN THE FLOOR, EXTEND YOUR ELBOWS AND CREATE A TENSION IN YOUR ARMS AS BIG AS YOU CAN. HOLD IT, HOLD IT, JUST A LITTLE LONGER... and relax. When you breathe out, all the tension in your arms flows out of your body.. Try to notice how your arms feel now. Maybe they feel warm, or heavy.. like they want to sink in the floor.

Slowly shift your attention from your arms through your abdomen to your legs. Again, try to notice how your legs are laying. Which parts are in contact with the ground? Are your legs spread apart or close together? Are your toes pointing upward or do they fall to the side?.. NOW PULL UP YOUR TOES, EXTEND YOUR LEGS AS HARD AS YOU CAN, PUSHING YOUR KNEES IN THE GROUND. FEEL THE TENSION RISING, COME ON, JUST A LITTLE LONGER, 2 MORE SECONDS.. and relax. When you breathe out, all the tension in your legs flows out of your body. Try to notice how your legs feel now. Maybe they feel warm, or heavy.. Like they want to sink in the floor.

Now you're completely relaxed, imagine you're at a beautiful beach. The sun is warming your body. As you look up to the sky, you see a flock of gulls flying to the horizon. Follow them until you can't see them anymore. You have the feeling the sun is providing you with energy.

Focus back on your breathing. Your belly still rises as you breath in and drops down when you breath out. This time however, you are not blowing tension out, but are breathing energy in. Every time you inhale, you absorb the energy the sun is giving you. So go on and take a couple of deep breaths.

When you feel that you have absorbed enough energy, open your eyes and slowly come to a sitting position. When you are ready, you can continue your day with vigor.

2. Breathing exercise only

This exercise is targeted at applying a diaphragmatic breathing pattern with consistent prolongation of in- and expiration duration.

Environment

Before starting this exercise, make sure you have enough room and a good surface to lay down on your back comfortably. If you like you can use a pillow and/or support under your knees. Dimming the lights is recommended. A relaxing background music is allowed as long as you are still able to focus on the exercise rather than on the music.

The story

Step 1. Lay down on your back with one hand on your belly and the other hand on your chest. To practice the diaphragmatic breathing try to inhale slowly through your nose and exhale through your mouth with pursed lips. When breathing in and breathing out, particularly the hand on your belly moves. Try to keep the movements of your chest small and always following the movements of your abdomen. When you breath in, your stomach rises. When you breath out, your stomach goes down again.

Step 2. When you are confident that you control the diaphragmatic breathing, try to do it without your hands on your body.

Step 3. If you can do the diaphragmatic breathing without the use of your hands, we can start with the prolongation of the in- and expiration. We will start with a 3 second inspiration and 3 second expiration. Count calmly in your head when breathing in and breathing out.

Step 4. When you are comfortable with the 3 second breathing pattern, try to add a second to your in- and expiration. Continue adding seconds every time you are comfortable. Try to build up to 10 seconds (which is hard). It surely isn't necessary and also almost impossible to reach 10 seconds the first time you try this exercise. Try to build it up gradually.

3. Progressive relaxation by Jacobson only

This exercise is targeted at learning to feel the difference between tension and relaxation. Therefore, we will create tension in several muscles by contracting them, followed by a sudden release of the contraction. The

contraction will last for approximately 5 seconds. If you have pain or discomfort in one or more of the targeted muscle groups, feel free to omit that step. It is also important to keep breathing throughout the exercise. A blocking of the respiration should be avoided.

Environment

Before starting this exercise, make sure you have enough room and a good surface to lay down on your back comfortably. If you like you can use a pillow and/or support under your knees. Dimming the lights is recommended. A relaxing background music is allowed as long as you are still able to focus on the exercise rather than on the music.

The story

Lay down on the floor and make yourself comfortable. It is best to extend your legs and lay your arms next to you on the ground. If this is too uncomfortable, you are allowed to bend your knees.

When you are installed and calm, try to forget everything around you and solely focus on your own body. Try to become aware of the position of your body at this point in the room. Which parts of your body are in touch with the floor, which parts are not.

Now you are globally aware of your body, you are going to bring all of your attention to a single body part. We will start with the head and work down to the feet.

Try to focus on your forehead. We will create a tension in the muscles of your forehead by knitting the brows intensely. COME ON, KNIT YOUR BROWS, CREATE A STRONG CONTRACTION AT YOUR FOREHEAD, HOLD ON FOR A COUPLE OF SECONDS,... and relax. Feel the tension flow away.

Pause for 10 seconds

Next, bring your attention to your eyelids. Close your eyes strongly. KEEP YOUR EYES CLOSED, HOLD FOR A FEW MORE SECONDS.. and relax. Feel the tension flow away.

Pause for 10 seconds

Now, smile brightly, feel a tension create in your cheeks and the lower half of your face. KEEP THIS SMILE FOR 5 SECONDS.. and relax. When you breathe out, feel the tension flowing away.

Pause for 10 seconds

We will target the back of your neck. Bring your attention to the back of your neck. Extend your neck as if you want to look up at something in the sky. Simultaneously push your head in the floor to create extra tension. COME ON, PUSH BACK AND CREATE THIS TENSION IN YOUR NECK, JUST A FEW SECONDS.. and relax. Feel the tension flowing away.

Become aware of the relaxed and heavy, warm feeling now present in your head and neck.

Pause for 10 seconds

Gently bring your attention to your arms. When ready, contract every muscle in your arms. Make a fist and try to push your arm in the ground. HOLD, HOLD, HOLD,.. and relax. Breathe out and feel your arms becoming warm and heavy.

Pause for 10 seconds

This time try to focus on your shoulder blades. You will try to pull back your shoulders and make your shoulder blades touch each other. Ready? START, PULL YOUR SHOULDERS BACK AS FAR AS YOU CAN.. and relax. When you loosen up, enjoy the feeling of limpness.

Pause for 10 seconds

Breathe in as deep as you can, holding your breath for 5 seconds. BREATHE IN,... and let go.

Pause for 10 seconds

Focus on you lower back. GENTLY ARCH YOUR BACK AND KEEP IT ARCHED FOR 5 SECONDS,.. and relax. Remember to breathe out and release tension when you relax.

Pause for 10 seconds

Let your focus glide to your legs. You can create a tension in your legs by pulling your toes up, extending your leg and trying to push the back of your knees in the ground. CREATE THE TENSION, PULL UP YOUR TOES, HOLD ON,.. and relax. When you breathe out, the tension in your legs flows to the outside.

Pause for 10 seconds

Now your whole body is relaxed. Feel the warm heaviness of your body.

Pause for 10 seconds

When you are ready, open your eyes and slowly come to a sitting position. Stay seated for a while before you try to stand up.

4. Visualisation

The purpose of visualization is to make a mental trip into another environment than that you are currently in. This can be a place you already know or a fictional situation. In this case you can choose between a calming forest or a relaxing day at the beach. The scenery will be described to you in detail and the key is to maintain focus on everything that is going on in this beautiful destination.

Environment

Before starting this exercise, make sure you have enough room and a good surface to lay down on your back comfortably. If you like you can use a pillow and/or support under your knees. Dimming the lights is recommended. A relaxing background music is allowed as long as you are still able to focus on the exercise rather than on the music.

4.1. The forest

Now, imagine that you are walking down a path into a lush forest. (*short pause*) As you walk along the path you take in the sights, sounds, smells, and feel of the environment. All around you are trees, grasses, soft soil, and fragrant flowers. (*short pause*) You hear the soothing sounds of birds chirping and the breeze as it gently blows

through the treetops. *(short pause)* You smell the rich dampness of the forest floor, and the new spring growth. *(short pause)* Through gaps in the treetops you see the sun high in a cloudless, blue sky. *(short pause)* The sun is dispersed through the canopy of the treetops and filters its warmth down onto the forest floor, creating intricate patterns of light and shadow. *(short pause)* With each breath you take you feel a deep sense of peace and relaxation.

(long pause)

You soon come to a clearing. There are several flat rocks surrounded by soft moss. A small stream runs among the rocks. *(short pause)* You lie back on one of the warm rocks or on the cushiony moss and put your feet into the cool water. You feel the warm sun and gentle, light breeze through your hair and across your skin. *(short pause)* The sparkling clear water rushes around the multicolored rocks, making little whirlpools. You put your hand into the water and lift a handful to your lips. The water is cool and refreshing. *(short pause)* You close your eyes and listen to the water trickling through the rocks. *(short pause)* You bathe in the warm sun and feel as if you are floating...relaxing deeper and deeper.

(long pause)

You let yourself sink further into relaxation, while continuing to be aware of the sights, smells, sounds, and feel of the forest around you. *(short pause)* You allow yourself to let go of any concerns or worries and feel completely refreshed and rejuvenated in this place...

(long pause)

When you are ready, imagine that you slowly get up and leave the clearing. *(short pause)* As you walk back down the path through the forest, fully take in the peaceful nature and realize that you may return whenever you wish by the same path. *(short pause)* Each time you enter this place you will feel relaxed and at peace.

(end)

- Adapted from Chuck Zanone, PhD Georgia Southern University

4.2 the sea

Allow enough time between statements to let it sink in. 20-30 seconds mostly works fine.

You are sitting on a shore. The sound of the sea's water hits up against the beach and almost touches your toes. You decide to slip your toe into the water; just enough to feel it's cool touch. You hear the sounds of the sea around you. What are these sounds you hear? The sun is rising. Is the air warm or cool around you? Breathe in the salty sea air. How do you feel about where you are? You see a row boat. It looks inviting. You stand up and walk across the seashore. The sand squishes in between your toes. You get in the row boat and push off towards the open sea. You gently glide across the still water. What do you see from your new position in the boat? What have you left behind you on the shore? Are you alone? You row out further. The sun is peeking over the horizon. You decide to stop and rest. Your thoughts are free to go where they take you. It is calm. You are at peace on the water. Your mind is at ease away from the shore. You look back to the shore and decide it is time to go back there. You slowly row back. You reach the water's edge and step out. The cool water on your feet startles you and reminds you that you are alive. You inhale. Inhale. Breathe slowly and stretch your arms out towards the morning sky. Inhale and

open your eyes when you feel ready to come back to the room. Take a deep breath and shake out your hands. Welcome back to the room.

- Terry, BYU, 2008