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Always consult your doctor on any health matter

RELAXATION AND YOU

A six lesson course to follow in the comfort of your own home
by Eileen Hewitson

LESSON THREE

To go more deeply into the practice of relaxation, more time has to be set aside. It is preferable (certainly at first) to try to practise every two or three days, but even once a week can bring benefits. Ideally, at least fifteen minutes should be spent on this exercise. You can learn to relax to the point where your body feels as though it is hardly a part of you and your mind feels relaxed and uncluttered.

So, to get the body to be able to reach this stage, you must first make it comfortable. Make sure that you are not going to be disturbed (phone disconnected, cat and dog outside and all teenagers locked in the garden shed!). Make sure too, that you are going to be warm, because the body does lose heat as it winds down. You should be totally supported (head, back and legs) so use the floor, a bed or couch, a good high-backed chair with footrest, whatever suits you best and treat yourself to this special time. If you wear glasses, remove them. If you find background noise helpful, play music or natural sounds that do not demand your attention.

Relax the muscles in each part of the body, working from head to toe or vice versa, paying particular attention to those areas where you know you may have tension. If you have been practising the two minute relax, you will be able to do this quite naturally. If any muscle groups do feel tense, then gently stretch them and let them move back quite easily into a comfortable position. If, when you relax, you feel any discomfort anywhere, then adjust your position and this will help you to relax even more deeply.

Close your eyes and spend a few moments watching the breath entering the body and then leaving it slightly warmer and moister. As you breathe out, tell yourself to let go. Do this a couple of times more, saying to yourself ... **relax** ... **let go** ... each time you breathe **out**.

In the same way that you watch the breath in and out, observe your thoughts. These will come - that is as it should be - but try not to become involved in them - just let them go. If you find your attention wandering to everyday things or if you are troubled by a problem, then very gently but quite firmly bring your concentration back into your relaxing, back into your breathing and let go a bit more as you exhale. Check that the body has not tightened up in response to these intrusive thoughts, and then let yourself drift once more.

Try not to judge how well you are relaxing - aim just to enjoy it. It is, after all, a state of doing absolutely nothing and being at peace. No effort is required on your part; if you let go, all tension will leave the body and the mind of its own accord.

You can, if you wish, use your imagination to visualise yourself in a place where you feel totally at ease, completely at peace with yourself and the world around you - maybe on a seashore, or beside a lake (particularly if you are playing one of the tapes with the sounds of waves lapping) in a garden, on a mountain

When you have spent as much time as you wish on yourself, gently stretch the body (like a cat does) and in your own time and in your own way, become alert and active once more, feeling good.

There are many books and tapes which can aid you in your study - ask friends, neighbours, libraries, hospitals if you can beg or borrow them. Experiment, probe, keep your mind open and take the time to be kind to yourself.

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