

# The Benefits of Relaxation

## Why try relaxation techniques?

### What will I get out of it?

There are many physical, biological and psychological benefits from using relaxation techniques. These benefits can have immediate effects, including lowering of heart rate, blood pressure and cortisol levels. In the longer term, relaxation practice can assist you to sleep better and to strengthen your immune system, making you less susceptible to sickness and disease.

Pain can also be better controlled with regular specialised relaxation practise. On the psychological side, relaxation can increase your sense of general well-being and improve your capacity to think clearly, focus and sustain your attention, manage stress, regulate emotions and increase awareness – great news for students!

## Types of relaxation techniques

Some types of relaxation, like walking or sitting quietly, are easy to do. More advanced or structured forms of relaxation, like yoga or meditation, require some training or discipline. The most popular and easily learned forms of structured relaxation skills include controlled breathing, progressive muscle relaxation and visualisation techniques.

## What if I'm not anxious or sick?

You don't have to be! Relaxation techniques may 'vaccinate' you by balancing and controlling mood swings and can provide you with a longer fuse for anger or frustration. By training you to focus on the present, relaxation techniques may help you avoid focussing on past worries or concerns for the future, ultimately leaving you with a lower resting baseline of anxious arousal. In other words, it may take more to push you over the edge.

## Mental gymnastics

Psychologists often describe relaxation techniques as more like 'mental gymnastics' rather than spiritual instruction, assisting you to focus on internal thoughts and processes in the here and now. Some people may prefer a more spiritual aspect to assist in the process, but it's not strictly necessary.

## How often should I use relaxation techniques?

Regular practice is recommended. For best results, daily practice or at least 5 times per week is encouraged. Practice need not take long – even 15 minutes a day can produce benefits. Initial practice may take longer as you develop skills with certain techniques and as you discover that you may prefer some techniques over others. The main point to remember is to find a technique(s) that best suits you and to make it a feature every day, if possible.

## When will I see results?

This is as individual as each person practicing! Studies have shown that after practising relaxation techniques for an hour each day for 8 weeks that participants noticed a stronger immune system (less sickness) and registered with higher activation in parts of the brain associated with positive mood.

Researchers have suggested that we're able to train our minds with relaxation in much the same way as we can learn to train our bodies to respond to exercise. Like physical exercise, practicing relaxation techniques takes some commitment and can be just as easily brushed aside as the demands of everyday life get in the way. Thousands agree that it's worth the effort. So find a relaxation technique that works for you!

## What do I do next?

Numerous articles and books on other relaxation exercises can be found online or in your library. You might also like to join a Yoga, Pilates or Tai Chi class at your local gym. If you want more help, the Psychologists at ECU can assist you to develop relaxation techniques that work for you and are available to help you work through any issues that might be causing you stress or anxiety.

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sheets



## Want to chat to someone?

For a confidential – and free – chat about your general situation, please contact our ECU Psychologist, or the Psychological Counselling Support Team service to make an appointment at any of our campuses.

Alternatively, you can discuss study techniques and tips with a Learning Adviser in our Academic Skills Centre.