

# The Benefits of Relaxation

## Counselling Service Tip Sheet



### **Why try relaxation techniques? What will I get out of it?**

There are many physical, biological and psychological benefits to be gained from using relaxation techniques. These benefits have been widely documented, with immediate effects including (to name just a mere few) lowered 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 – particularly good news for students!

### **Types of relaxation techniques**

Many basic types of relaxation, like walking or sitting quietly, are very simple and easy to do. Other, more advanced or structured forms of relaxation, like Yoga or meditation, require some training or discipline. The most popular and easily learned forms of more structured relaxation skills include: controlled breathing, progressive muscle relaxation and visualisation techniques. Other forms also exist. See Counselling Tip

Sheets: Relaxation and Stress Reduction 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 to avoid focussing on past worries and 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.

### **Is it religious?**

No, relaxation techniques don't have to be religious. Psychologists often describe relaxation techniques as more like 'mental gymnastics' rather than spiritual instruction, assisting you to focus on your own individual internal thoughts and processes in the here and now. Some individuals may prefer a more spiritual aspect to assist in the process; however it is not strictly necessary.

### **How often should I use relaxation techniques?**

Regular practice is often recommended. For best results daily practice or at least 5 times a week is encouraged. Practice need not take long – even 15 minutes a day can produce good 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 just 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 are 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 is worth the effort - after all, a little peace of mind is nothing to scoff at...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 on the web or 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 Counsellors at ECU can assist you to develop relaxation techniques that work for you and are available to help you work through any issues or concerns that might be causing you this stress or anxiety.

### **References**

More tips and information is available from:

- Counselling Tip Sheets: Relaxation and Stress Reduction Techniques
- Counselling Tip Sheet: Managing Stress

### **Acknowledgements**

Editors: Mel Johnston and Bronwyn Williams

Please note that this tip-sheet provides information and guidance only - it is not a substitute for professional counselling and support.

CRICOS IPC 00279B

## **ECU Counselling Service**

Reception: Mount Lawley: Building 3, Room 128

Joondalup: Building 34, Room 245

Telephone: 9370 6706 Email: [counselling@ecu.edu.au](mailto:counselling@ecu.edu.au)