

QUICK RELAXATION EXERCISES

If you are in situations where you feel distressed, you need to know how to stay relaxed and quickly release tension *while* remaining in the activity. This is important if you do not have time to go off by yourself and use a longer stress reduction exercise.

1. This exercise combines *deep breathing and guided imagery*. Close your eyes and take in a slow, deep breath and hold it for a count of three. At the same time imagine seeing waves of water rushing onto a sandy beach. Exhale and see the waves leaving the shore. Inhale and hold your breath for a count of three and hear the waves rolling into shore, and exhale and hear the waves leaving the shore. Inhale and hold the breath for a count of three and feel the waves coming into shore, wetting and soothing you. Exhale and feel the water roll off your body as the water leaves the beach.
2. This exercise combines *imagery with diversion*. When in an anxiety-provoking situation, as tension rises, refocus on your right hand and imagine that it is swishing back and forth in a cool mountain stream. Feel the coldness of the water on your tingling hand. Imagine seeing the water droplets falling off your hand. Imagine looking at other parts of the scene. Continue rotating back and forth between the real-life situation and fantasizing that your hand is in the mountain stream.
3. This exercise combines *deep muscle relaxation, deep breathing, and self-instruction*. Holding in a deep breath, tense the entire upper part of your body for a count of five. Exhale and then relax that part of the body. Next, hold in a deep breath and tense the entire lower part of the body. Then exhale and let go of the tension. Each time you exhale, say the phrase, "Let it go. Let it be."
4. This is a *sensory diversion* exercise. Switch your focus from whatever is making you anxious to some object around you and notice the outer edges of the object. With your eyes trace along the lines around that object and then move onto other objects and do the same thing. The goal is to clear your mind and only notice lines around objects. To complicate the exercise, pick a line and imagine a herd of elephants walking along that line. See one elephant hold the tail of the elephant in front of him with his trunk, and the elephant in back is doing the same. The purpose is to keep the mind occupied with neutral to pleasant images instead of negative images.
5. This is another *sensory diversion* exercise in conjunction with autogenics training. Imagine you have applied a soothing ointment to your foot. It is creating a feeling of intense warmth as it spreads up from your toes to the arch of the foot. The entire area is warm and tingling. Stay focused on the heat in your foot while doing other stressful activities. For instance, take a walk and as you walk feel the tingling warmth in your foot.
6. This is a *deep breathing and imagery exercise*. When distressed, switch your focus to an area of the room. Imagine seeing a large circle. Inhale deeply and when you do that the number one-hundred appears. Exhale and the number disappears. Inhale and the number ninety-nine appears. Exhale and the number disappears. Continue doing this and with each breath you inhale and exhale the next descending number appears and disappears in place of the previous number.