

Brief Applied Relaxation

Brief applied relaxation combines calm breathing and letting go of muscle tension.

One approach to calm breathing involves 4x1x 4 breathing as follows:

1. Gently and deeply inhale from your diaphragm to a 4 count.
2. Hold for a 1 count.
3. Exhale to a 4 count, gently and deeply from the diaphragm, and imagine letting go of tension and stress.

Tension

Relaxing the muscles of your body may involve gently tensing and relaxing muscle groups or relaxing without tensing. Scan the muscle groups of your body to determine if there are places where you are aware of an increase in tension. For example: do your shoulders feel tight? Does your forehead or jaw feel tense? The more you try to notice tense spots, the better you will become at recognizing them in a second or two. By pausing and scanning your body, you turn your attention to your body and can determine if any areas are tense or tight. This can serve to increase your awareness of the presence of tightness in your body and you can take steps to break the stress-tension cycle by letting go of muscle tension.

After rating the intensity of your tension and localizing it in your body, you can briefly take several steps to alleviate or prevent this tension. First, as you become briefly aware of tension, gently tense and relax away the tension or simply relax away the tension.

Position

You may learn that the position you are in is uncomfortable and producing tension. For example, you may be slouched over in your chair or you may become aware that you are holding your shoulder high. React to this information by changing positions or by stretching or moving.

For example, you may relieve tension in your neck and shoulders by rolling your head from side to side.

Brief Applied Relaxation Exercise

The following exercise can be used at any time during the day. It can be accomplished in as short a time as 20 seconds. It can be done during your coffee break, while watching TV, while driving, or any time when a brief pause is possible. This can especially be appropriately shortly before you enter a situation that has been stressful in the past or that has increased your pain. This exercise can be done many times throughout each day without disrupting schedules and routines.

Begin by interrupting your thoughts. Stop thinking about what's going on around you as much as possible. Become aware of your breathing and of your body. Take a deep breath, hold it, and exhale it slowly. Imagine letting go of stress and relax away muscle tension.

Positive Cues

You may have found a positive image or cue word that has enabled you to become more relaxed. You can use these techniques during the brief relaxation. You may also have been working on positive self-statements to deal with stress and pain. It is important to use some of these positive self-statements at this time. It is also important to praise yourself for going through this exercise. The above technique can be accomplished in a matter of seconds. It can have benefits that can last several hours. In the beginning, it will help to practice brief relaxation as frequently as possible.