# Relaxation
## Information for patients

Relaxation is the gradual quietening of your mind and your body.  It helps you become aware of tension and control it.  It is the opposite of stress. You can use relaxation regularly to stop the build up of stress, or when you already feel wound up and tense. There are many different ways to relax. The best relaxation is the one that suits you.

This leaflet includes two different types of relaxation technique. Don't worry if you find it hard or strange at first.  Don't try too hard either; just let it come naturally. It will get easier with time and practice. Practice the relaxation every day so that you are able to do it when you are in a stressful situation.

## What you might feel with relaxation
During relaxation you might feel some of these things:

- Body feels lighter or heavier

- Tingling

- Warmth

- Relaxed and easy breathing

- Reduced pain

- Blissfulness

- Decreased urgency

- Reduced muscle tension.

## Your body's response to relaxation
- Reduced pain

- Clear thinking

- Breathing easier

- Improved digestion

- Relaxed muscles

- Relaxed eyes

- Slowed heart rate

- Warm, dry hands

- Improved balance.

## Relaxation techniques

The first relaxation technique in this leaflet is about tensing and then relaxing your muscles.

The second is about your breathing. This technique is quick and simple to do. Once you have mastered this technique you can use it anywhere. You don't need to stop what you are doing.

Try both and see which you like best.

Before you start, think about the best place to relax and the most comfy position for you.

## Place
- Use a quiet room or a room with familiar noises

- Dim the light (aids restfulness)

- Play soft music at a low volume (optional).

## Position
- Find a comfortable position, either in a chair with your feet flat on the floor or lie down on a bed or mat.

- You should feel good support and pressure from the chair or bed on your buttocks and your back.

## 1. Tensing and relaxing your muscles
- Focus natural rhythm of your breaths in, do not hurry or slow them. Take slow, deep breaths as you exhale, (think of the words "relax and let go")

- Direct your attention to your face eyes and jaw

- Try to contract every muscle of your face, squeeze your eyes and mouth tightly shut and then let go. Feel the tension in your face seeping away

- Now move your attention to each area of your body one at a time – your neck, shoulders, arms, hands, fingers, chest, back, abdomen, hips, thighs, lower legs, feet and toes

- Contract each part and let go slowly as you feel the wave of tension sweeping away

- Remain in this new relaxed state for five minutes

- When you are ready to rise, focus on the sounds of the room, gradually let your eyelids become lighter, then open your eyes

- Rise slowly from your position and feel the combination of relaxation with alertness.

## 2. Breathing technique (belly breathing)

When you are stressed your breathing tends to become fast and shallow. Doing this breathing technique will help you to take deeper and slower breaths.

At first you may find it easier to practice the technique lying down on a mat.

- Place one hand on your chest and one on your belly, just below your ribs
- Breathe in through your nose. Notice your belly begin to rise and your chest remains fairly still
- Slowly and evenly, let the breath out through your nose and feel your belly sinking
- Be aware of your hand on your belly rising, while the hand on your chest hardly moves.

This leaflet was compiled by the East Lothian Physiotherapy Department in association with the Patient Information Leaflet Group, NHS Lothian Physiotherapy Service.

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