

Mind, body and working at home - *Relaxation*

Hints, tips and links to keep you and your teams calm, connected and well

It might feel like our pace of life has slowed slightly at the moment with most of us being at home more. However, even when we don't have the morning commute, appointments, social engagements or after school clubs to get to; it's still really important that we take time to relax and unwind.



We all experience day to day stresses and it could be that these are increased at the moment due to the global pandemic. Whilst we can cope with certain levels of stress, without good ways to manage it and keep it in check, it can affect our quality of life and even our physical wellbeing so it's important to take some time out to relax and unwind.

The benefits of relaxing



Just 5-10 minutes a day of relaxation can have long term benefits for both the mind and body. It's also a great way to be kind to yourself and grab a bit of 'me' time and there are some real physical benefits including:

- Slowing heart rate
- Lowering blood pressure
- Slowing your breathing rate
- Improving digestion
- Maintaining normal blood sugar levels
- Reducing activity of stress hormones
- Increasing blood flow to major muscles
- Reducing muscle tension and chronic pain



Relaxation methods

There are lots of ways you can relax and unwind and they don't have to take up a lot of time. According to the charity Mind, just stepping away from something stressful for a few minutes or taking time away from your normal routines and thoughts can give you enough space and distance to feel calmer. You could do something activity based such as gardening, go for a walk, run a bath, read a book, play some sport, listen to some music or try out a new recipe for dinner.

You could also try some specific relaxation techniques in the comfort of your own home. Here are some ideas*:

Progressive Muscle Relaxation - Either sitting comfortably or lying down, tense and relax each muscle one at a time all the way up your body starting from your feet up to your face. Focus on your breathing and the tension leaving your body as you relax each muscle.

Breathing Exercises - These are a really simple, effective, and convenient way to reduce stress that can be done anytime, anywhere and don't take long. They can provide relaxation, stress relief, anxiety reduction and you get the most benefit if you make them part of your regular routine. Here's a recommended exercise from the [NHS](#).

The Art of Gratitude

Though not directly related to relaxation, practising gratitude is an excellent way to train your brain to have a more positive outlook on life and tendency towards optimism. Being able to cultivate and maintain a positive outlook even in the face of negative events can really affect your happiness and general wellbeing.



Yoga/Tai Chi - These stretches, flowing movements and rhythmic breathing are a great way to promote relaxation and wellbeing. The physical aspects of these practises offer you a mental focus to help distract you from thoughts or worries and the stretching is great for your posture and improves flexibility. YouTube have lots of free resources for all abilities and even some that you can practise at your desk.

Guided Meditation - Meditation is a great stress reliever because it works well for calming body and mind, and helps you to build resilience over time. There are different types of meditation dependant on your needs. Some focus on self-confidence, sleep or deep breathing. Headspace is a popular guided meditation App and YouTube have lots of free resources you can try.

**If you have any injuries or medical conditions please consult your GP before trying physical activities*

Practised over time, gratitude can positively impact your mental health and has also been shown to strengthen relationships, increase mental strength and even help you sleep better at night. The two key components of gratitude are:

- We affirm the good things we've received
- We acknowledge the role other people play in providing our lives with goodness

Here are some simple steps you can take to start practicing gratitude:

- Keep a gratitude journal - Make a note of your positive thoughts. Think of and write down 3 things you're grateful for when you wake up and 2 more at lunchtime that you have experienced that morning.
- Appreciate the small things – Recognise that nothing that brings you joy is too small for you to be grateful for
- Smile and laugh often – It relaxes facial muscles, calms the nervous system and triggers endorphins which help us feel positive



- Look for the beauty in nature each day - Experiencing the beauty of nature around us increases positive emotions which can lead to positive behaviours and gratitude
- Practice acts of kindness each day – the positive acts of kindness are experienced by the brain of anyone, improving their mood and making them more likely to 'pay it forward'

There's no 'one size fits all' when it comes to relaxing, but there are lots of options available so why not give some of them a try and work out what's best for you. The most important thing is that you make time to relax and unwind, so that your long-term health and wellbeing aren't damaged by the inevitable stresses and challenges life throws at us all.

Useful links and further reading

- **Relaxation** – Articles about why relaxation is important and some hints and tips about how to relax and unwind:
<https://www.wellbeingpeople.com/2019/04/15/why-relaxation-is-so-important/>
<https://www.better-living.co.uk/article/relaxation-why-it-matters-and-how-to-do-it/>
<https://www.mindful.org/7-steps-to-relax-your-body/>
<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/relaxation/relaxation-tips/>
- **Headspace** – helpful articles about relaxation, sleep, stress and anxiety
<https://www.headspace.com>
- **Gratitude** – Helpful links about the art of gratitude and how to practice it
<https://www.slideshare.net/KristineMcCarty1/5-simple-ways-to-practice-gratitude>
<https://www.verywellmind.com/the-benefits-of-gratitude-for-stress-relief-3144867>

