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Relaxation Therapy

If you feel tense or stressed in the evening, you may want to use a relaxation technique. There are many techniques but all have a common element. They all focus attention on a non-provocative process, such as breathing, a pleasant or neutral image, an internalised word, etc. This focus of attention prevents other intrusive thoughts from entering your consciousness, thus avoiding worry about these thoughts and allowing relaxation and sleep. Your body and mind relax.

It is important to choose a technique or focus of attention you feel comfortable with. Some techniques include:

- ▶ Deep Breathing (focusing attention on breathing)
- ▶ Progressive muscle relaxation
- ▶ Visualisation (mental imagery)
- ▶ Meditation
- ▶ Self-hypnosis

Mindfulness meditation

- ▶ Many people say that they have tried a relaxation technique but it didn't work. But many try only once or twice. Learning how to relax is a skill, just like learning to ride a bike is a skill. It takes practice to become good at it. You need to keep trying, even after falling off the bike a few times. Likewise, relaxation is a mental skill that needs practice to become skilled and maintain the attention focus for longer periods of time.
- ▶ At the beginning, while you are relaxing, you will probably be aware of intrusive thoughts that automatically come into your consciousness. When this happens, recognise they are there, don't react to them, and then simply re-focus on your non-provocative image or process. Thoughts are likely to intrude into your consciousness many times while trying to maintain a relaxed state. Expect this – don't be discouraged by it. Be mindful of them, just recognise that it has occurred and regain your focus of attention.
- ▶ Relaxation techniques to help you get to sleep should be well practised before using them at night. Try to find about 10 minutes each day to practise before trying to use the technique at night to help you sleep. Without practice the technique will not work very well and you may

easily be discouraged or even conclude that “yet another treatment doesn’t work with me”. With practice the length of time you can maintain your focus without intrusive thoughts will get gradually longer and longer. That will allow your alertness to drop steadily until you cross the threshold into sleep.

- ▶ Once you feel confident that you can keep your focus of attention for long periods during the relaxation process you may use them at night while attempting to fall asleep after going to bed or after waking up during the night. Some meditation classes recommend not using relaxation to fall asleep. However, they may be seeking other goals for the relaxation. In fact, relaxation techniques and meditation are very helpful for falling asleep and can be used for that purpose.
- ▶ You can learn these techniques on your own or by using a CD/DVD/audio download, attending classes (meditation, yoga) or consulting a psychologist or therapist. It is best to listen to these audio lessons out of bed rather than when you are attempting sleep. Learn them to the point of being able to hear the instructions in your mind while you are in bed.
- ▶ If you also have a “worry time”, it would be helpful to follow it with relaxation as the last thing before bed.