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## Relaxation Exercises

Relaxation exercises are easy to learn and use, and can be remarkably effective in addressing anxiety, stress, test or performance anxiety, phobias, and other similar concerns. Most relaxation exercises take about 10 minutes, and there are several websites and smartphone applications which offer free, downloadable audio recordings with instructions.

- ★ I can e-mail you an audio file of a 9-minute “progressive muscle” relaxation exercise that I recorded.
- ★ The University of San Diego Counseling Center website includes a “Relaxation Exercises” webpage that provides instructions and access to audio recordings of a few different exercises, including the one I recorded: <http://www.sandiego.edu/counseling-center/resources/relaxation-exercises.php>
- ★ The UCSD Counseling & Psychological Services website offers a range of exercises: <http://caps.ucsd.edu/download.html> (click on the iRelax Audio tab of the Download Center webpage).
- ★ Search the “app store” on your smartphone for applications that offer relaxation exercises and other similar tools--use the keywords *relaxation* or *anxiety*.

Listen to a few different relaxation exercises, find one you like, and then practice whichever exercise you prefer at least once or twice a day. Expect your ability to relax to improve as you continue practicing, and expect to practice two or three weeks before you become genuinely proficient. Once you learn how to do one of the exercises, you may no longer require the recorded instructions, and you can tailor the exercise to your own liking. Some tips:

- Avoid practicing immediately after engaging in vigorous exercise.
- Sit quietly and in a comfortable position, with your legs uncrossed and your arms resting at your sides. This is especially important when you are first learning the exercise.
- Adopt a calm, accepting attitude towards your practice. Don't worry about how well you're doing or about possible interruptions. Instead, know that with repetition your ability to relax will grow.
- When you are ready, close your eyes, begin listening to the recording of the exercise, and follow the directions.
- As you work through the exercise, you can expect your mind to wander a bit—when this happens you can simply redirect your focus back to the recording.
- Once you've finished, stretch, look around and remain still another minute or two.

As you become skilled with a relaxation exercise, try applying it to specific situations that might otherwise be anxiety provoking, such as difficult social situations, tests, oral presentations, job interviews, and so forth. You might also do an exercise just before bedtime to improve sleep, or first thing in the morning to feel “centered” as you start a stressful day.

**To learn more** about relaxation exercises and other effective ways of managing stress and anxiety, look up *The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook* (2008), by Martha Davis, Elizabeth R. Eshelman, and Matthew McKay. This popular self-help book details a wide variety of sensible, straightforward, and effective strategies for addressing everyday stress.