



## RELAXATION SELF-HELP

“Just relax”. How many times have you been told to do that? Easier said than done? For many of us with a busy lifestyle, relaxation is a skill like any other; it needs to be learned, and practised regularly. However, trying too hard to relax can be unhelpful, as effort is the opposite of relaxation!

The key to relaxation lies in managing the survival mechanism that activates when we are under threat to help us fight the threat or run away. It's 'fight or flight' that causes our heart to beat faster, our breathing to speed up, muscles to contract and all of the other symptoms we associate with stress and anxiety. Of course, we need to be able to react quickly in an emergency, but fight or flight is often activated when we don't need it. Furthermore, it can be switched on simply by thinking about something we find stressful. Try this short experiment: Bring to mind something you are worried about. How does your body feel? Is there a change in your thoughts or mood? You may feel a reaction straight away; for example, your muscles tightening or a sinking sensation in your stomach.

Relaxation techniques work by releasing physical tension or by harnessing the mind and imagination to work for us, not against us. Oasis-Talk runs regular workshops in relaxation (see [our workshops](#)).

Here are a few suggestions to get you started...

### Make a space for relaxation

Schedule a relaxation break every day; it will help you to recharge your batteries, improve your effectiveness and approach life's challenges in a calmer frame of mind. Even five or ten minutes is a good start. But if you find it hard to set the time aside...

Take a piece of paper and write down all the things that stop you from relaxing, then see if you can come up with some solutions. For example, if you're too busy, could you delegate some of your tasks to someone else? Do you need to reorganise your time a little, turn off the TV, switch off your phone?

## Check in with yourself

The sooner you become aware of tension building up, the easier it is to do something about it. One simple idea is to pause briefly throughout the day. Notice how your body is feeling: Most of us have areas of our body that are particularly prone to tension; for example, neck, shoulders, tummy or jaw. Next, observe your breath. When we are anxious or stressed our breathing tends to be shallower or faster than usual. You may also feel that your chest is tight and your breathing restricted. Notice, too, the mood you are in. Is there a word or image that describes what you are feeling? What thoughts are running through your mind?

## Take a breath... and then another

Rest your hands on your tummy. Can you feel the rising and falling motion as you breathe? Focus your attention here, and simply follow each in-breath and out-breath for a few minutes.

## Counted breathing

This is an exercise to slow and deepen the breathing, helping you to achieve a more relaxed state. Start by following your breath for a few moments as above. See if you can breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth, if this feels comfortable. Now breathe in to a slow count of four, pause for a moment, and breathe out to a slow count of four. Once you've settled into this, try lengthening the out-breath slightly, for example by counting to six as you breathe out. (NOTE: If you haven't done breathing exercises before, start with just a few breaths. You may feel slightly light-headed due to the change in oxygen levels, but this is harmless and will pass)

## Instant holiday

Encourage your body and mind to go into "relax" mode by imagining you are passing through a door into a calm, peaceful place where you feel happy and comfortable. What can you see? What can you hear, or smell? Imagine how the sun or breeze feels on your skin. Stay here as long as you like, then step back through the door and allow the image to fade from your mind.

## Need more help?

- Oasis-Talk runs a [workshop on relaxation](#)
- You can find a wide variety of relaxation books and audio at [Amazon](#) and can watch videos of relaxation teachers on [YouTube](#)