



WORKTALK RELAXATION EXERCISE

There are many versions of this exercise. This one is quoted from the highly recommended book *Overcoming Stress* by Dr. Vernon Coleman Sheldon Press 1978/1988 pages 48-49

To relax your body you must learn just how your muscles feel when they are tight and tense. Clench your fist and you'll feel the muscles of your hand and forearm tight and firm. Now let your fist unfold and you'll feel the muscles relax. To relax properly all you have to do is stiffen and then relax the muscles of your body group by group.

When you first start learning to relax you should choose a quiet, private place where you are not likely to be interrupted and where stimuli are least disturbing. It's difficult to begin relaxing in a busy, crowded office or bus although you will be able to do just that eventually. Lie down in a darkened room where you are alone and unlikely to be disturbed. Allow a quarter of an hour and plan to spend that much time each day for a week until you have mastered the art of physical relaxation. (You will not have to relax step by step as you become more experienced - you will learn how to relax your entire body more or less instantly.) You will begin to feel better after just one session. You will feel calmer and more relaxed and your body will feel fresher and your mind more alert.

Twenty steps to a relaxed body:

1. Clench your left hand as tightly as you can, making a fist with the fingers. Do it well and you will see the knuckles go white. If you now let your fist unfold you will feel the muscles relax. When your hand was clenched the muscles were tensed; unfolded the same muscles are relaxed. This is what you must do with the other muscle group of your body.
2. Bend your left arm and try to make your left biceps muscle stand out as much as you can. Then relax and let the muscles ease. Let your arm lie loosely by your side and ignore it.
3. Relax your right hand in the same way.
4. Relax your right biceps muscle in the same way.
5. Tighten the muscles of your left foot. Curl your toes. When the foot feels as tense as you can make it let it relax.
6. Tense the muscles of your left calf. If you reach down you can feel the muscles at the back of your leg firm up as you tense them. Bend your foot back at the ankle to help tighten up the muscles. Then let the muscles relax.
7. Straighten your leg and push your foot away from you. You will feel the muscles on the front of your thigh tighten up; they should be firm right up to the top of your leg.
8. Relax your right foot.
9. Relax your right lower leg.
10. Relax your right thigh.
11. Lift yourself up by tightening up your buttock muscles. You will be able to lift your body upward by an inch or so. Then let the muscles fall loose again.
12. Tense and contract your abdominal muscles. Try to pull your abdominal wall as far in as possible. Then let go and allow your waist to reach its maximum circumference.



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13. Tighten the muscles of your chest. Take a big deep breath in and strain to hold it for as long as possible. Then let go.
14. Push your shoulders backwards as far as they will go, then turn them forwards and inwards. Finally shrug them as high as you can. Keep your head perfectly still and try to touch your ears with your shoulders. It will probably be impossible but try anyway. Then let your shoulders relax and ease.
15. Next tighten up the muscles of your back. Try to make yourself as tall as you can. Then let the muscles relax.
16. The muscles of the neck are next. Lift your head forwards and pull at the muscles at the back of your neck. Turn your head first one way and then the other. Push your head backward with as much force as you can. Then let the muscles of your neck relax. Move it about to make sure that it really is completely loose and easy.
17. Move your eyebrows upward and then pull them down as far as they will go. do this several times making sure that you can feel the muscles tightening both when you move the eyebrows up and when you can pull them down. Then let them relax.
18. Screw up your eyes as tightly as you can. Pretend that someone is trying to force your eyes open. Keep them shut tightly. The, keeping your eyelids closed let them relax.
19. Move your lower jaw around. Grit your teeth. Wrinkle your nose. Smile as wide as you can showing as many teeth as you have got. Now let all these facial muscles relax.
20. Push your tongue out as far as it will go, push it firmly against the bottom of your mouth and the top of your mouth and then let it lie relaxed and easy inside your mouth.

Remember, as you do these simple exercises, that your breathing should be slow, deep and regular. Take deep breaths and breath as slowly as you comfortably can.