

Life Lines

Improving Your Quality of Life — One Step at a Time



The Importance of Relaxation

Are you feeling stressed at home or work? Take a deep breath and try to relax!

Many of us lead busy lives with numerous work, family, or social commitments. Sometimes these commitments leave us feeling tired or anxious, and we can easily go long periods without relaxing, yet relaxation is perhaps the single most important key to health and well-being. Specifically, it is vital to combating stress, which is known to contribute to the development of various diseases.




Many mental health professionals suggest we take at least ten minutes a day to wind down. Taking this small amount of time for ourselves can reduce potential mental health problems, memory failure, or various physical ailments.

So what does it mean to be relaxed? Simply put, we are relaxed when we lessen tension or anxiety. We can become relaxed in numerous ways but generally, we relax when we are resting, or are engaged in something enjoyable. When we relax, our body has an opportunity to unwind. This could mean doing something as simple as sitting motionless, taking a short walk, or enjoying a hot bath. The benefits of relaxation are well documented. Some are mentioned below.




- ☑ **Energy restoration.** We often neglect the fact that we regularly push ourselves to the maximum. In order to keep generating more energy, we need to let our bodies rest. Relaxing allows our batteries to recharge, and generate more energy that we can then devote to our activities.
- ☑ **Bodily repair.** Our bodies are designed to repair themselves from the daily wear and tear we impose on them, and this mostly happens while we relax. By taking time to relax, we allow our bodies the opportunity to focus on healing. If we neglect to relax and push ourselves beyond our physical limits, we prevent ourselves from achieving optimal physical health.
- ☑ **Increased mental focus.** Just as we push our bodies, we also tend to push our minds past their limits. Intense thinking can be just as draining as physical exertion. When we set aside time to relax, we quiet our thoughts and let our minds rest. This can often be more restorative than the physical aspects of relaxation.
- ☑ **Mood improvement.** Relaxation can help us feel happier. Just the act of resting relieves stress and allows us to feel content. We can even take a more proactive role in improving our mood during periods of rest and enhance the effect. For instance, relaxation techniques such as visualizing a pleasant memory contribute a great deal to improving our mood.

Unfortunately, sometimes we are not able to relax. Maybe we don't know how, cannot afford the time, or perhaps we find that our minds wander. Relaxing can be difficult, especially if we're really busy.

We don't necessarily need to relax in solitude, or solely when we're at home. In fact, taking a few moments to relax while at work has been known to increase productivity and decrease restlessness. If you find that while at work you regularly feel stressed, tense, or anxious, try partaking in the simple activities listed below.

-  **Get to work earlier.** Try to avoid the morning rush, and get to work earlier than others. There will be fewer traffic jams, phone calls, or interruptions. You will get more done in a calmer morning environment, which will have a trickle effect and decrease your stress for the rest of the day.
-  **Clean your workspace.** Clear your desk and virtual desktop, often. A cluttered desk will distract you, as each item is something you have to think about when you look at it. Keep a clear desk and your mind will follow suit.
-  **Remember to breathe.** Take even just two minutes to practice deep breathing — it shouldn't be confined to meditation. Try to focus, breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth. Practicing deep breathing exercises often will train your body to take full breaths. This can be helpful to reduce your workday stress, going forward.

What about relaxing at home? What else can you do to ease your mind and body? Some helpful tips are listed below.

-  **Exercise.** Virtually any form of exercise can act as a stress reliever and relax you. Post-workout, you'll often find that you've forgotten the day's irritations and concentrated only on your body's movements. You may find that this focus on a single task, and the resulting energy and optimism from a workout, can help you remain calm and clear in everything that you do.
-  **Meditate.** Find time to meditate for 10 or 15 minutes each day. Meditation helps you control the flow of thoughts, and will help you quell your worries and anxieties. Guided meditation is an easy introduction for those who have never meditated.
-  **Read.** 'Relaxation reading' is a great way to unwind. Lose yourself in the pages of the written word, and stay away from reading anything work-related. The benefits of relaxation reading should not be underestimated, and the expression curling up with a good book epitomises the escapism that relaxation reading can provide.

Relaxation is extremely important. In general, it may seem counterproductive to set aside time to relax in the midst of a busy schedule. However, doing so either at work or at home can actually help us increase our productivity, accomplish more in less time, and feel happier overall. Additionally, learning to relax is crucial to helping us overcome stress. It allows us to enjoy the few precious moments of our busy lives that we truly have to ourselves — no matter how short those moments may be.



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