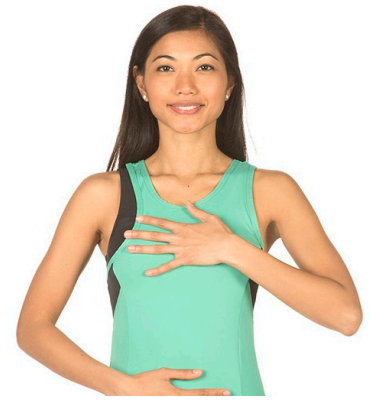


Relaxation for better stress management



There are some simple techniques you can use to reduce your stress level. This fact sheet explains some of them and the benefits they can bring you.

Why learn to better manage stress?

Stress, tension, and anxiety are hard to live with. But they can also cause health problems such as:



- non-restorative sleep
- insomnia
- high blood pressure
- chronic pain
- muscle pain

What benefits will I get from relaxation?

Relaxation techniques can help you manage your stress better. They can also help you fall asleep better. The effects on your health will often be felt after a few weeks of practice. So you have to be consistent and practice every day.

The 3 techniques described here are effective for physical and mental problems. There are others, as well. It is up to you to choose the ones that suit you best. Discuss this with your doctor.

How can I get the most out of relaxation techniques?

The steps for each exercise are given on page 3 in the appendix.

To get the most out of it, it is important to be in a relaxed atmosphere. Here's how to do it:

- > Choose a quiet place where you won't be disturbed. Avoid noise and bright light. Turn off your phones.
- > Make yourself comfortable, sitting or lying down. You can put a mat on the floor or lie on your bed with a pillow under your head.
- > Close your eyes.
- > Let your muscles relax from head to toe.
- > Breathe through your nose. This will help you breathe slowly and deeply (about 6 breaths per minute).



> Let yourself go. Don't react to any negative emotions or thoughts that might come up. This attitude leads to a state called "mindfulness meditation", in which we pay attention to the present moment.

If negative thoughts come up, direct your attention to the exercise or simply to your breathing.

> At the end of the exercise, slowly open your eyes. Wait a few minutes before getting up or going to sleep.



Who can I contact for help or to ask questions?

CHUM Sleep Clinic:

Tel. :

Sleep Laboratory:

Tel. :



USEFUL RESOURCES

Overcoming Insomnia and Sleep Problems, Colin A. Espie; Constable & Robinson, London, UK (2006)

Dormir - Le sommeil raconté, Pierre Mayer, Éditions Pierre Tisseyre, 2012

Vaincre les ennemis du sommeil, Charles Morin, Éditions de l'Homme, 2009

Quebec Lung Association (QLA):

> pq.lung.ca

Click on Lung Health → Diseases → List of lung diseases (on left) → Sleep apnea

Canadian Sleep Society:

> css-scs.ca

Centre for Studies on Human Stress:

> humanstress.ca

Other health sheets published by the CHUM are available. Ask for those that might fit your situation.



You can also find them on our web site

chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante

The content of this document in no way replaces the recommendations and diagnoses made, or the treatment suggested by your health professional.

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Here are 3 techniques to relax your muscles, breathe well, and fall asleep more easily. They are simple and easy to do.

1 MUSCLE RELAXATION

This technique consists of gently tightening and then relaxing different muscle groups. Lie down with a pillow under your head.



Breathe slowly from your abdomen, as described in exercise 2 on page 5.

For each part of your body, tighten your muscles for 5 seconds. Then release for 20 seconds. Focus on relaxing your muscles. Let your body sink into the bed or the mat on the floor without resisting. Then move on to the next group of muscles. Follow the steps below.



- 1- Close your fists and clench them. Then release them and relax.

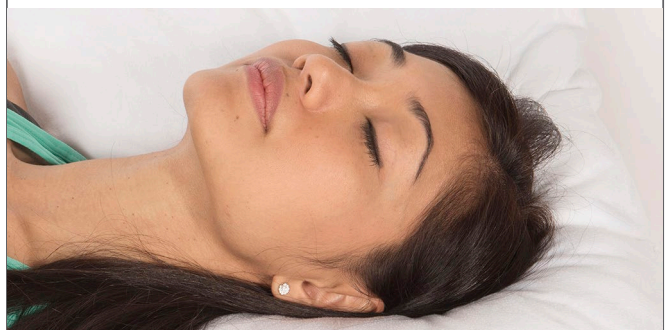
1 MUSCLE RELAXATION (continued)



- 2- Bend your forearms towards your shoulders to expand your biceps. Release.



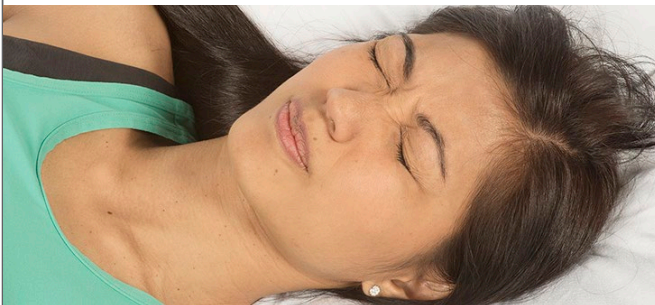
- 3- Push your arms straight down and lock your elbows. Release.



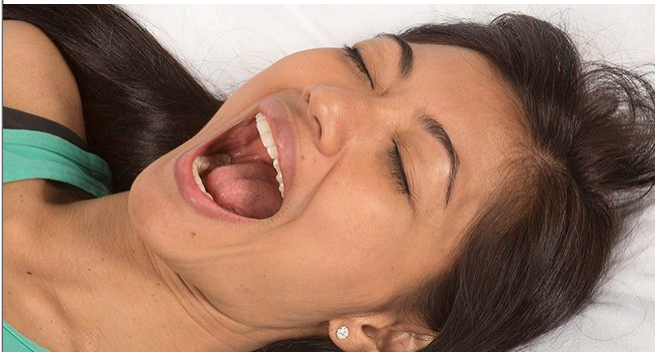
- 4- Raise your eyebrows as high as you can. Release.

1

MUSCLE RELAXATION (continued)



5- Close your eyes very tightly. Release.



6- Open your mouth wide. Release.



7- Tilt your head back, pushing it into the pillow. Release.



8- Shrug your shoulders as if you were going to touch your ears. Release.

1

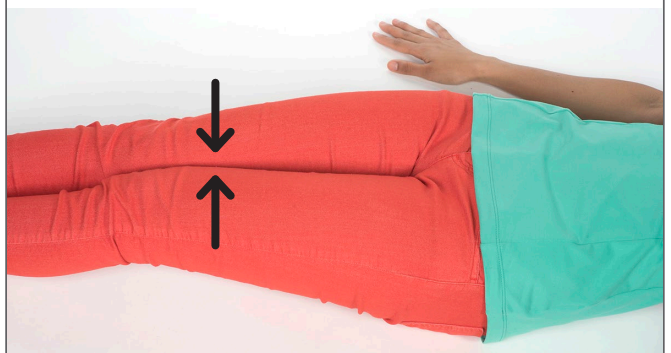
MUSCLE RELAXATION (continued)



9- Push your shoulders back, as if you wanted your two shoulder blades to touch. Release.



10- Squeeze your buttocks. Release.



11- Squeeze your thighs against each other. Release.



12- Point your toes up. Release.

1**MUSCLE RELAXATION (continued)**

13- Stretch your whole body, with your eyes and hands closed, stretching your arms, legs, and feet. Release and feel the weight of your body is at it sinks into the mattress.

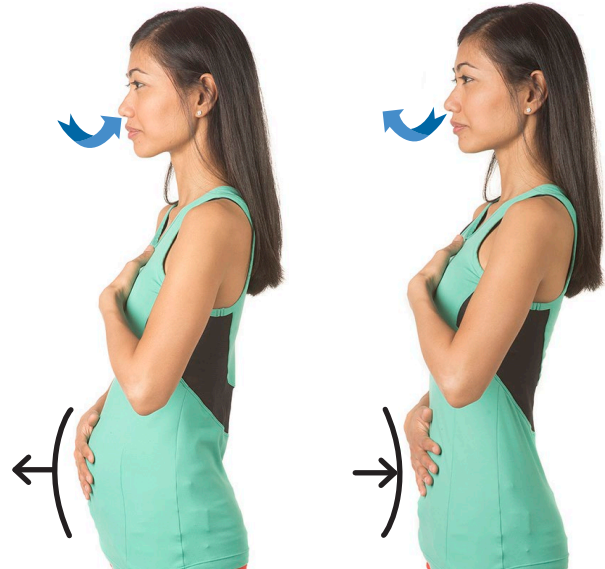
2**BREATHING AND HEART RHYTHM**

When you're stressed, your heartbeat is erratic. It speeds up and slows down unevenly and a bit randomly. However, when you're calm and serene, it beats regularly. This is called "cardiac coherence".

By doing exercises in which you breathe through the belly (abdominal breathing), slowly and deeply (about 6 breaths per minute), you will get back to this state of well-being. This helps your heart to beat more regularly, which is good for your body and your health.

Here are the steps to follow:

- 1-** Place one hand on your chest and the other fairly high up on your abdomen. Breathe normally. You will probably feel that it is your chest that is moving, not your abdomen. The idea is to reverse that.

**2****BREATHING AND... (CONTINUED)**

- 2-** Start again, and this time try to breathe without moving your chest. Start from your lower abdomen by expanding it as you inhale. Then exhale by pushing the air fully out of the abdomen. Do this for a few minutes. Gradually make the exhalations longer.

For example: inhale for 3 seconds, then exhale slowly for 5 to 6 seconds. Wait for the next breath to start on its own. Now it's your abdomen that's moving, not your chest.

3

TO HELP YOU FALL ASLEEP

In this technique, you use mental imagery to reduce tension in your body and mind. It involves thinking of a story instead of letting your thoughts go in all directions. It is very effective in keeping away negative or worrying thoughts. It can help if you have trouble falling asleep or if you wake up in the middle of the night and have trouble getting back to sleep.

Here's how you do it.



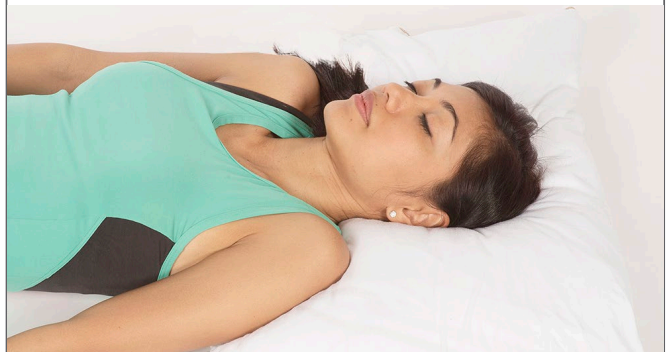
- 1- Imagine a story that is easy to remember, lively, and takes about 10 minutes. You can use your best memories and create a story with them. You need to think of a scenario in advance and use the same one often. Mental imagery is much less useful if you improvise or just count sheep.

3

TO HELP YOU FALL... (CONTINUED)



- 2- Write down a word or paste (or draw) an image that triggers the scenario, and leave them on your nightstand. If you have trouble falling asleep or going back to sleep, use the word or picture to start the scenario. Close your eyes and scroll through the story in your mind.



- 3- You can do your muscle relaxation or abdominal breathing exercises at the same time.

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Questions

Write down any questions you want to ask your care team so you don't forget anything.





Observations - Comments

Write down observations you feel are important : your symptoms, treatments, follow-up, energy level, spirit, etc.





Resource people and contacts

Write down phone numbers, email addresses and websites that could be useful.



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