

The Mindfulness and Relaxation Centre at Beaumont Hospital

Patient Information Handout: Relaxation Practice

What is Relaxation Practice?

Relaxation is not just about having a holiday or taking a break from our normal routine, although both of those things can lift our mood. Teaching ourselves to relax means learning ways to reduce our physical tension levels and the emotional worry that goes with being stressed. Our bodies are built to go through periods of tension and relaxation naturally, and developing a relaxation practice reminds us how to trigger this natural relaxation response.

Relaxation practice can be as simple as learning how to do relaxation breathing (sometimes called abdominal breathing) and practicing it regularly. We can also use tools such as imagery, when we actively imagine calming scenes, or progressive muscle relaxation, when we work at tensing and relaxing all of our muscle groups. The important thing is learning how to reduce tension. If we are very stressed, a daily practice is recommended.

In order to achieve a full relaxation response, our relaxation exercises should last between 15 to 20 minutes. The more we practice, the easier it becomes to reduce our levels of tension.

Why should I do it?

Research shows that people who have a regular relaxation practice reduce their physical experience of stress and tension significantly. This is associated with better health outcomes and a better quality of life.

Where can I find more information?

Beaumont Hospital has a free online resource with recordings of relaxation exercises you can try created by Beaumont Hospital employees. It also has explanations and suggestions for further reading. Check out the Mindfulness and Relaxation Centre at Beaumont Hospital:

www.beaumont.ie/marc