

Self-Regulation

The following exercises may be used to practice Self-regulation.

Muscle Fatigue Exercise

This is a simple exercise that involves tensing and then relaxing different muscle groups throughout your body. The exercise involves tensing the muscle group, holding the tension for 10-15 seconds and then releasing it very slowly. This exercise is repeated until the muscle group is relaxed. This is an exercise that requires practice before the signs of tension are relieved. If you are to develop an understanding of your body and its reaction to stress, you should spend at least 15-20 minutes twice a day going through the process of tensing and relaxing different muscle groups in your body. You will most likely want to begin at one end of your body, either your feet or your facial muscles. Tense them. Hold the tension for 10-15 seconds and then, very slowly, relax the muscle group. Again, this exercise requires practice and repetition. If you practice and develop proficiency in these exercises, you will eventually be able to relax most muscle groups in your body without having to do the relaxation exercise. This should be your goal. You may want to use some caution in tensing muscle groups that have previously been injured, and you may wish to seek advice or consultation from a healthcare professional about using this exercise with these muscle groups.

Breathing Exercise

There are a number of breathing exercises. They are often used in yoga and meditation. Almost all require that you sit with your eyes closed, if possible, and direct your attention to your breathing. You should breathe deeply and slowly. Try to follow your breath as it moves in and out of your lungs.

By breathing deeply and slowly, you alter, to some degree, your body chemistry by expelling large amounts of carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide from your lungs and by increasing the level of oxygenation of the blood. This exercise may help you to feel more relaxed and may restore your level of energy. Again, breathe slowly and deeply. Continue the exercise until your pattern of breathing becomes regular and easy.

This is also an exercise that needs to be practiced daily and will require at least 5-10 minutes to be effective in helping you to reduce stress or tension. Throughout the day you can also do “mini’s,” e.g., take a deep breath, hold it for a few seconds and slowly release it (Benson, 1997).

Visualization Exercise

Visualization and directed imagery have been long used as a method of achieving relaxation. Individuals wishing to make use of this exercise may want to do the other relaxation techniques before attempting to visualize. Deep breathing exercises combine easily with visualization and imagery.

In order to practice this exercise and the other exercises above, you will want to find a quiet and relaxing place in which to sit or lie, and you will again want to allocate at least 15-20 minutes for practicing these exercises.

The first step involves closing your eyes and beginning to breathe deeply and slowly, either through your nose or mouth. After a number of deep breaths and a period of “darkness,” you should attempt to “see” a relaxing scene in your mind. You will want to see the scene as clearly and vividly as possible. Try to use the colors of the scene. If you are visualizing walking along the beach, you should try to see the blues and the greens of the water and the sky. Try to feel and hear the scene. Try to hear the birds singing as you walk slowly through the forest. If you are walking on the beach, try to feel the sun’s warmth on your face. Create a relaxing scene that works for you. This may run the gamut from taking a hot bath to floating among the clouds in a glider.