Benefits of the Practice of Deep Relaxation

Podcast

The stress of daily living produces bodily tension in our muscles, organs and nervous system, and there is a direct relationship between this bodily tension and mental stress. Often, we are unaware of this effect and the bodily tension can become so habitual, that we forget what it is like to be relaxed. The quality of our everyday life can be severely affected and, as well as physical stress, we may experience psychological problems like poor memory and concentration, or anxiety and depression. Research has shown that the regular practice of deep relaxation (or low arousal training) benefits all aspects of physical and mental health, improving blood pressure, respiratory and gastrointestinal symptoms amongst others. By learning to reduce the physical tension in our bodies, we develop a tool for self help that benefits our overall health and sense of wellbeing. With regular practice, we learn to be more aware of tension as it occurs and to respond to it naturally and effectively with the relaxation response.

RELAXATION SESSION

BELL Welcome to this relaxation session. Make sure you allow yourself to have 15 minutes, when you know you won’t be disturbed and when you are not going to be attending to any other tasks such as driving a car or riding a bike.

BELL Here are some guidelines to help you enjoy the session. If this is your first relaxation session, ensure you take your time to listen to these initial guidelines before you start. It is worth spending a few minutes to prepare, so you can gain the full benefit from this time you are giving yourself.

BELL Choose a quiet room with soft lighting. Remove your shoes and loosen any tight clothing that constricts your breathing. You can undertake the relaxation either lying on the floor, or sitting in a chair. Have a light blanket to cover yourself with, as your body temperature may drop while you relax. If you are lying down, you may want to support your head, or your spine, or behind your knees with a small cushion. If you are sitting in a chair, ensure that the soles of your feet can rest on the floor, or on a cushion placed on the floor.

BELL Let’s take some time now to make sure you are in a comfortable resting position for your body during the relaxation. If you are lying down, ensure your head, neck and spine are in a straight line. Let your arms rest lightly by the sides of your body, with the palms turned upwards and the fingers softly curled. Have your legs straight, with the feet separated about hip width. Let your feet drop loosely outward. If you are lying down, you may want to support your head, or your spine, or behind your knees with a small cushion. If you are sitting in a chair, ensure that the soles of your feet can rest on the floor, or on a cushion placed on the floor.

BELL Now become aware of your body resting on the floor, or sitting in a chair, feel the weight of the body and all the points of contact with the floor or chair, from the back of the heels, all the way up the back of the legs, the buttocks, lower and upper back, shoulders and the back of your head. Allow the whole back of the body to rest on the floor or in the chair ... the whole body resting on the floor or in a chair ... the whole body.

BELL Now take your attention to sounds ... start with sounds you can hear outside the room, maybe the sound of traffic, of the wind in the trees. Note each sound and move your attention on to the next sound, just allowing your awareness to shift from sound to sound.

BELL Now take your attention to sounds within the room, maybe subtle sounds like the hum of a fan. Just note each sound and then move your attention on to the next one.

BELL Now take your attention to the sound of your breath, as it moves in and out of your body. Feel the cool air at your nostrils as you inhale and the warm air as you exhale. Be aware of the gentle rise and fall of your chest and abdomen as you breathe in and breathe out, just listening to the sound of your breath and feeling the movement of your breath in and out of your body.

BELL Now, a full, deep, conscious breath in, and as you breathe out, feel yourself letting go of all your worries, feeling your worries and cares drifting away from you and dissolving in the distance. You might picture your worries and cares as specific shapes and colours as they flow away from your body. Do this twice more, each time you breathe out, feeling your worries and cares drifting further and further away, and feeling your body releasing more and more tension on each exhalation.

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When you have done this 3 times, allow your breath to return to its natural rhythm. Remember, anytime during the relaxation that your worries come back to you, you can just take your attention back to your breath again, knowing you will be able to attend to your concerns later.

BELL
This is a good time to make a resolution, a promise or intention for yourself, about something that is important to you... a simple statement of intent. You say it to yourself as though it is already the case. It could be as simple as "each day I give myself time to relax", or "I am kind to the people around me", or "I have all the energy I need for my life". Take some time now to choose a resolution... Repeat it to yourself 3 times, and then let it go. If you don't have a resolve right now, decide that one will become clear for you soon.

BELL
Now take your attention to the soles of your feet. Picture there a golden pink globe, like the sun. You can feel a gentle warm breeze blowing from the globe, relaxing your toes, the soles of your feet, heels and spreading up through your ankles, lower legs, upper legs, easing away the tension... both legs and both feet feeling relaxed, warm, soft and letting go.
Now you can feel the relaxing warmth flowing from your legs up into your abdomen and buttocks, into your lower back, upper back and chest, soothing all the nerve endings and releasing all the tension throughout your torso. Your torso, legs and feet all feeling soft, warm and letting go.

BELL
Now picture the golden link light covering your body and legs, feel it spreading up through your shoulders, flowing down the arms and into the hands, right down to the very tips of the fingers... feeling the hands, arms, shoulders, torso, legs and feet, all at ease and letting go.

Now the flow of relaxation is moving up the neck and into the back of your head, covering your whole scalp, relaxing all the parts of your brain, spreading down over the face: the forehead, eyes, nose, mouth, cheeks, chin, jaw... the whole face, the whole head and the neck, all at ease and letting go.

BELL
Feel this beautiful flow of golden pink relaxation covering the whole body: the head, neck, shoulders, arms, hands, torso, legs, feet... all bathed in the soft pink glow of warmth and relaxation... the whole body letting go, the whole body, the whole body.

Long Pause (approx 3-5 minutes)

BELL
Soon the relaxation session will be coming to an end. Feel your awareness becoming more focused. Allow your resolution to come up into your consciousness... repeat it to yourself 3 times with quiet confidence, then just let it go.

BELL
Now, take your attention to your breath. Feel the natural gentle rise and fall of your chest and abdomen as you breathe in and out, feel the wave like rhythm of your breath supporting and enlivening you. Gradually, start to take some deeper breaths, start to feel more alert, allowing the breath to bring the vitality and energy back into your body.

BELL
Now, become aware of your body resting on the floor or in a chair, feel the contact of all the parts of the body with the floor or chair and become aware of the room you are in, your environment.

BELL
Begin to slowly move your fingers and toes, your arms and legs, feeling the awareness returning to all the parts of your body. You might want to stretch a little now, take your arms up above your head... stretch out your legs, feeling all the benefits you have gained from giving yourself this time to relax.

BELL
Bend your knees if you are lying down, bend your elbow and place your right arm beneath your head. Roll over onto your right side, resting there for a while, and take your time to slowly come up into a standing position. If you are sitting in a chair, stretch your arms and legs, roll your shoulders a few times and slowly bring yourself to a standing position. Give yourself a few moments to become more alert, stretch again and move as you feel the need, and ensure you are fully awake before you undertake your next activity.

BELL
The relaxation session has ended now.