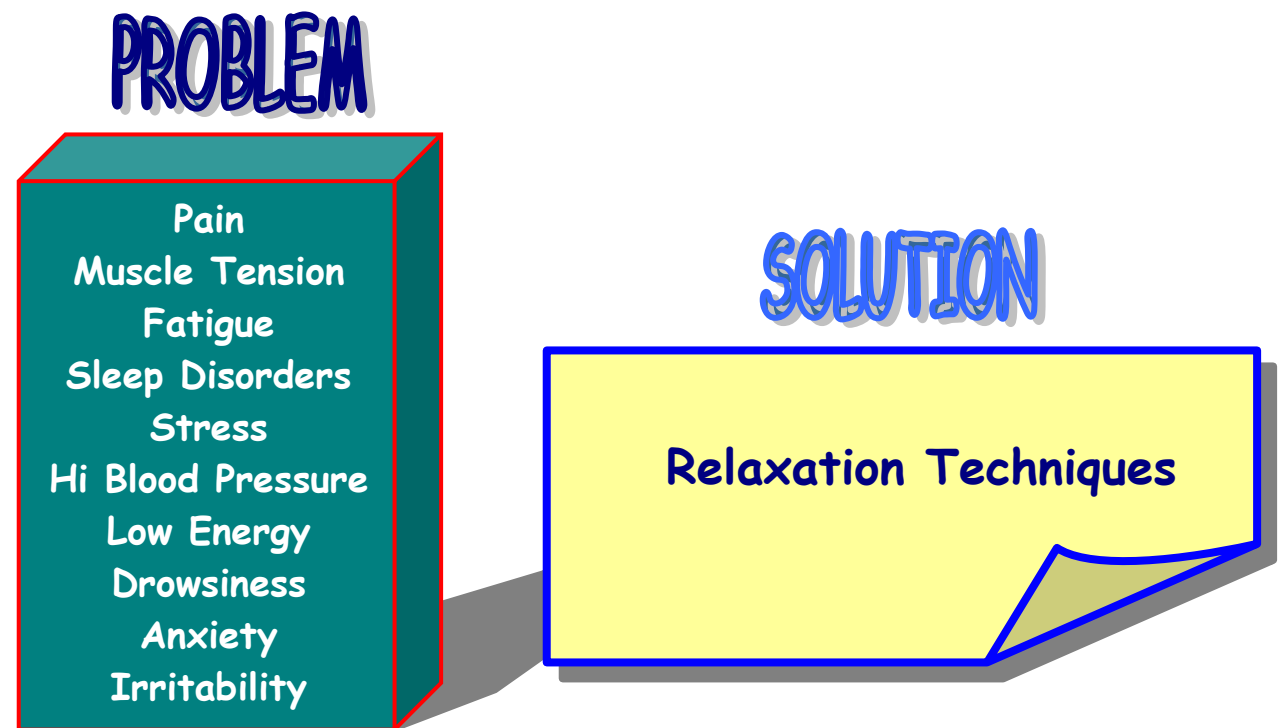


## YOU REALLY NEED TO RELAX: Effective Methods

The relaxation response is perhaps one of the most important skills you will use to gain control over your body. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) recognizes the relaxation response as having broad health benefits including the reduction of pain and restoration of sleep.

In addition, research on the relaxation response has shown that this simple technique can: increase energy, decrease fatigue as well as increase arousal from a drowsy state. It can increase motivation, productivity, and improve decision-making ability. The relaxation response lowers stress hormone levels and lowers blood pressure.



### What is the Relaxation Response?

The relaxation response is defined as your personal ability to make your body release chemicals and brain signals that make your muscles and organs slow down and increases blood flow to the brain. Drugs can do some of this for you, however they often have unwanted side effects. You can get your body to relax just as well

without drugs while remaining conscious and aware at the same time. To be physically relaxed and mentally alert is the goal of the relaxation response.

**The Relaxation Response is not:**

- Laying on the couch
- Sleeping
- Being Lazy

**The Relaxation Response is:**

- A mentally active process that leaves the body relaxed
- Best done in an awake state
- Trainable and becomes more and more profound with practice

**There are many ways of achieving the relaxation response.**

Some of these techniques are called:

- Progressive Muscle Relaxation (tense & relax)
- Visual Imagery
- Deep Breathing
- Meditation
- Hypnosis
- Yoga
- Biofeedback



**Which of these  
techniques is best?**

To date, there is no data supporting the idea that one method is any better than any other. What does matter is your willingness to use a particular technique for your own health and your ability to gain relaxation through that method.

We will discuss two different versions of the relaxation response: **Progressive muscle relaxation** (also known as **Tense & Relax**) and **visual imagery**.

**Progressive Muscle Relaxation (Tense & Relax Technique)**

Everyone has a resting level of muscle tension. Some people have a great amount of tension at rest, others less. When people are under acute stress, their muscles tend to have higher levels of resting tension that can be painful and fatiguing. After you tense and relax muscles, the tension level not only returns to the original

level, but will automatically drop below the original level, producing even greater relaxation to the muscles.

- ✓ Start the exercise by getting comfortable.
- ✓ You can keep your eyes open or shut. Most people prefer to close their eyes.
- ✓ If you are wearing glasses or contact lenses, you may want to remove them before starting the exercise.
- ✓ Try not to fall asleep.
- ✓ As you perform this exercise, you will tense different muscle groups above their normal level of tension.
- ✓ When tensing, you need not tense to the point of pain - simple tensing for 2 seconds is generally sufficient.
- ✓ Focus on how the tension feels. Then, let the tension go.
- ✓ Focus on the sensations of relaxation.
- ✓ Continue to breathe deeply and regularly throughout the exercise.



**After you have become skilled at using this technique, you can repeat parts of it in a shorter format when you need a quick relaxation break.** For example, when sitting in traffic, you can tense the muscles in your shoulders and upper back and then relax them to get a nice burst of relaxation.

**Are you ready to learn the tense and relax technique?**  
**Let's go!**



## SKILL: The Tense & Relax Technique

**Purpose:** to relax your body without the use of drugs

**Goal:** to tense and relax various muscle groups of the body to produce relaxation

**Step 1:** Begin deep breathing.

**Step 2:** Tense the muscle groups (as described below) and then relax them.

### **The Tense & Relax Exercise:**

#### **Preparation**

- 1) Make yourself as comfortable as possible in a seated position
- 2) Try and sit up straight with good posture with your hands resting in your lap
- 3) Remove your glasses if you wear them, some people prefer to remove their contact lenses

#### **Tensing and Relaxing Specific Muscle Groups**

##### **1. Relaxation of the feet and calves:**

- ✧ Flex your feet (pull toes toward the knees)
- ✧ Contract calf muscles and muscles of lower leg
- ✧ Feel the tension build and hold the tension
- ✧ Take a deep breath
- ✧ As you exhale say the word "RELAX" and let the tension go



##### **2. Relaxation of the knees and upper thighs:**

- ✧ Straighten your knees and squeeze your legs together
- ✧ Contract your thigh muscles and all the muscles of your legs
- ✧ Feel the tension build and hold the tension
- ✧ Take a deep breath
- ✧ As you exhale say the word "RELAX" and let the tension go

##### **3. Relaxation of the hips and buttocks**

- ✧ Tense the buttock muscles by squeezing them inward and upward
- ✧ Feel the tension build and hold the tension
- ✧ Take a deep breath
- ✧ As you exhale say the word "RELAX" and let the tension go

#### 4. Relaxation of the abdomen

- ✧ Observe your abdomen rising and falling with each breath
- ✧ Inhale and press your navel toward the spine then tense the abdomen
- ✧ Feel the tension build and hold the tension
- ✧ Take a deep breath
- ✧ As you exhale say the word "RELAX" and let the tension go

#### 5. Relaxation of the upper back

- ✧ Draw the shoulder blades together to the midline of the body
- ✧ Contract the muscles across the upper back
- ✧ Feel the tension build and hold the tension
- ✧ Take a deep breath
- ✧ As you exhale say the word "RELAX" and let the tension go



#### 6. Relaxation of the Arms and Palms of the Hands

- ✧ Turn palms face down and make a tight fist in each hand
- ✧ Raise and stretch both arms with fists
- ✧ Feel the tension build and hold the tension
- ✧ Take a deep breath
- ✧ As you exhale say the word "RELAX" and let the tension go

#### 7. Relaxation of the Chin, Neck, and Shoulders

- ✧ Drop your chin to your chest
- ✧ Draw your shoulders up toward your ears
- ✧ Feel the tension build and hold the tension
- ✧ Take a deep breath
- ✧ As you exhale say the word "RELAX" and let the tension go

#### 8. Relaxation of the Jaw and Facial muscles

- ✧ Clench your teeth together
- ✧ Tense the muscles in the back of your jaw
- ✧ Turn the corners of your mouth into a tight smile
- ✧ Wrinkle the bridge of your nose and squeeze your eyes shut
- ✧ Tense all facial muscles in toward the center of your face
- ✧ Feel the tension build and hold the tension
- ✧ Take a deep breath
- ✧ As you exhale say the word "RELAX" and let the tension go



#### 9. Relaxation of the Forehead

- ✧ Raise eyebrows up and tense the muscles across the forehead and scalp
- ✧ Feel the tension build and hold the tension

- ✧ Take a deep breath
- ✧ As you exhale say the word "RELAX" and let the tension go

#### **10. Intensification of Relaxation throughout the Body**

- ✧ Focus on relaxation flowing from the crown of your head
- ✧ Over your face
- ✧ Down the back of your neck and shoulders
- ✧ Down your body through your arms and hands
- ✧ Over your chest and abdomen
- ✧ Flowing through your hips and buttocks
- ✧ Into your thighs, your knees and calves
- ✧ And finally into your ankles and feet
- ✧ Continue to deep breath for several minutes in silence

#### **11. Finishing the Tense & Relax Exercise**

- ✧ Count backwards in your head from 3 to 1
  - a) 3 - become aware of your surroundings (location, people, noises)
  - b) 2 - Move your feet, legs, hands, arms, rotate your head
  - c) 1 - open your eyes feeling re-energized, refreshed, and relaxed



# Visual Imagery

While some people like tensing and relaxing, others can often become more relaxed by simply imaging a beautiful place.

This technique uses your mind to distract you from pain, tension, or problems. It asks you to create images in your mind that are so captivating, so rich in detail, and so all-consuming for your mind, that you get lost in the images your mind creates.

Is imagery an acceptable way of obtaining the relaxation response?

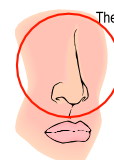
Yes. But... there are some guidelines about how to gain the most benefit from this strategy.

How do I visualize?

- ✓ Start the exercise by sitting or lying in a comfortable position and deep breathing. Unlike the tense-relax technique, the focus is not on your body but on a pleasant image.
- ✓ You will want to decide where you want to go in your image before starting. Some people like to have several destinations in mind since, at first, it may be difficult to stay interested in any one image for very long.
- ✓ You can leave your eyes open or you can shut them. Most people prefer to close their eyes when creating a mental image.
- ✓ Your image can take you anywhere of your choosing. For example it could be a beach, a mountain retreat, a hiking trail, your own back yard, a fishing pond, a clean kitchen with tasty cinnamon buns baking, a favorite restaurant, a computer generated virtual reality, or a psychedelic '60's-like landscape. Whatever you choose, try to make it peaceful, and calming.
- ✓ In creating your image, **USE ALL OF YOUR SENSES**. For example: If imagining a woods try to imagine:
  - ✧ Vision: the moss, the trees, animals, the sun, the soil, leaves
  - ✧ Smell: smell the moist earth, the heavy scent of green vegetation
  - ✧ Sounds: hear the birds, sticks cracking, animals moving, creeks
  - ✧ Feel: the cool moist air, the cool soil, the warm sun in a clearing



The Human Eye



The Nose

- ✓ Taste: the fresh water from a creek, a ripe berry, a sweet apple
- ✓ Start off with 5 minutes then gradually expand your imagery time to about 15-20 minutes per day.

**This Technique:**

Takes a lot of concentration and a lot of practice in order to fully master concentrating on your image and not being distracted by internal bodily discomfort or external noises.

After you have become skilled at using this technique, you can repeat parts of it in a shorter format (i.e., a few seconds or a few minutes) when you need a quick relaxation break.

Now let's focus on the steps to relaxation through visualization.....





## SKILL: Visual Imagery

**Purpose:** to relax your body without the use of drugs

**Goal:** to use visualization and all your senses to produce relaxation

Your imagery experience will have 4 parts: Entering the image, the journey to a private place in the image, experiencing the private place, and finally returning and ending the imagery.

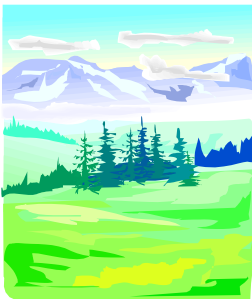
### **Step 1: Enter Your Image.**

- As you enter your image notice the view.
- What is in the distance?
- What do you hear?
- Are there any immediate smells or tastes?
- Reach out and touch the things in your immediate environment.
- How do these things feel?
- What is under your feet? How does this feel?
- Are there any new smells or sounds?
- What is the temperature? Make it comfortable.
- Look above you. What do you see?
- What do you hear now?
- Identify a path along which you will travel as you journey through this place.



### **Step 2: The Journey.**

- As you begin your journey take several additional deep breaths.
- Your journey should take you deeper and deeper into your image.
- As you travel, be keenly aware of the sights passing by you.
- As you travel, be aware of new sounds that occur.
- As you travel, be aware of the temperature, and feelings under your feet.
- As you travel, be aware of the things you can touch and examine their texture.



- As you travel, be aware of smells and tastes that enter your image.
- Continue on your journey until you find a place of rich sensory experiences. This is your private place.

### **Step 3: The Private Place**

- Once you reach your private place take several additional deep breaths.
- Your private place should make you feel calm, peaceful, and filled with sensory pleasure.
- In your private place, be keenly aware of the sights around you.
- In your private place, be aware of new sounds that occur.
- In your private place, be aware of the temperature, and feelings under your feet.
- In your private place, be aware of the things you can touch and examine their texture.
- In your private place, be aware of smells and tastes that enter your image.
- Stay in your private place for several minutes allowing your imagination to run free with pleasurable images.



### **Step 4: The Return Home**

- Before you start to return home, do the following:
  - Notice how your body feels
  - You will want to return to this feeling in the future
- Try and recall the best aspects of your journey and of your private place. You will want to return to these in the future.
  - Prepare to leave by counting backwards from 3 to 1.



3 - Become aware of your surroundings  
(location, people, noises)

2 - Move your feet, legs, hands, rotate your head

1 - Open your eyes feeling re-energized, refreshed, and relaxed



**Purpose:** to relax your body without the use of drugs

**Goal:** to use the tense & relax technique and visualization to produce relaxation

**Step 1: Try the Tense & Relax Technique**

Schedule 20 minutes (for 3 days this week) to go through all of the major muscle groups. Note your tension level **before** and then **after** doing the exercise.

**Step 2: Try the Visual Imagery Technique**

Schedule 20 minutes (3 days this week) to try the visual imagery technique using the instructions in this chapter. Note your tension level **before** and then **after** doing the exercise.



<b>GOAL: Rate Before &amp; After Tension levels for</b>	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
Tension level before_____	<b>8</b>		<b>10</b>				<b>5</b>
<b>Tense &amp; Relax</b> (3 days) Tension level after_____	<b>5</b>		<b>6</b>				<b>3</b>
Tension level before_____		<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>			<b>8</b>	
<b>Visual Imagery</b> (3 days) Tension level after_____		<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>			<b>7</b>	

## Let's Summarize...

- ♦ Find a relaxation exercise that suits you the best. They can all work equally well.
- ♦ Develop a routine to fit at least one technique into your day (at whatever time you prefer) to practice it.
- ♦ Use something in your environment (like something round) as a reminder to fit relaxation into your day.
- ♦ Over time, as you use a relaxation exercise (e.g., Tense & Relax or Visual Imagery) on a daily basis, you can expect to get better at the skill.
- ♦ The relaxation response can significantly:

- Decrease pain
- Increase energy
- Decrease muscle tension
- Increase motivation
- Decrease irritability
- Improve sleep
- Enhance productivity
- Lower Blood Pressure
- Lower Stress Hormone Levels
- Increase arousal from the drowsy state
- Improve decision-making ability
- Reduce fatigue
- Decrease anxiety



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Tension level before____ <b>Visual Imagery</b> (3 days) Tension level after____							