

## Just Relax, Already!

It's easy to say, "Hey, don't stress out." But if you tend to dwell on the usual causes of anxiety – work, relationships, finances and so on – finding a path to relaxation can seem like a formidable challenge. So how to go about it?

First of all, it can be tough to relax if you're not fully rested. For most adults, 7-8 hours of sleep a night is essential. Follow a set sleep and wake schedule, minimizing sound and light in your bedroom (i.e., no TV). For best results, avoid caffeine and other stimulants before bedtime.

Hobbies are a proven relaxer, be they physical (gardening, painting) or more cerebral (reading, music). Simple actions like a hug or petting a dog release serotonin, a feel-good hormone. Oh, and that old saw about laughter being the best medicine? As a stress reliever, few things beat a good chuckle.

Exercise is another a way to better relaxation... and not just jogging or yoga, either. Breathing exercises lower stress by reducing muscle tension and feeding oxygen to your body. In a seated position away from distractions, breathe slowly and deeply through the nose to a count of five, then exhale out of the mouth to a count of six. Repeat for two minutes or more.

Finally, if you find you can't seem to relax not matter what you do, make an appointment with your family doctor to discuss healthy and effective ways to put your mind and body at ease.



## Be Kind, Unwind

Relaxing reduces heart disease and high blood pressure risk... and that's just for starters.

- **Bug battler.** Research suggests that relaxing helps your body build immunity to catching a cold.
- **Antidepressant.** Relaxation raises the production of the neurotransmitter dopamine, a natural spirit-lifter.
- **Weight watcher.** Relaxation curbs the desire to reach for "comfort foods" high in fat and sugar.
- **Memory booster.** Anxiety impairs the centers of the brain involved in memory and learning.
- **Decision maker.** A stress-free mind clears thinking, making it easier to weigh risks and rewards.
- **Zit zapper.** Stress ramps up the amount of oil produced by the skin, clogging pores and causing acne.

SOURCES: ACS Distance Education, Huffington Post, Mental Health America