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# Make time for relaxation

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Chances are your latest to-do list doesn't include one important task: to relax. But rest and relaxation is as important to a healthy lifestyle as eating well and doing exercise. Relaxation helps to rejuvenate your body and mind, and can have a positive effect on your mood, immune system and stress levels – but, like any new skill, learning to relax properly takes practice.

## Why relaxing is important

When you're tense, you put your mind and body under pressure, and this can make you feel tired, stressed or even in pain. Learning to relieve this tension and relaxing your body and mind can reduce any stress or pain, and help you cope with things more easily.

Many of us think of relaxing as something you do on the sofa watching TV. This can be a good way to relax – but, when you're feeling stressed or tense, it can be helpful to have a more structured relaxation plan in place.

Below you'll find some tips on fitting relaxing into your life and examples of useful relaxation exercises. Don't worry if you find it hard at first – some of the exercises, like deep breathing, need to be learned and will come with practice.

### Top tip 1: Make relaxation time a priority

Try to make time for relaxing every day. You may find it easier if you do it first thing in the morning – before other tasks and responsibilities get in the way. But remember, even a five-minute breathing exercise by your desk can help to ease some of the tension that you build up during the day.

### Top tip 2: Practice relaxing on the go

Try to practice your relaxation techniques while you're doing other things – for example, meditate when you're sitting on the bus or waiting for a dentist appointment, try deep breathing when you're doing housework or mowing the lawn, or practice mindful walking when you're walking the dog or climbing the stairs at work (mindfulness means focusing on the present moment). If you're learning yoga or tai chi, practice the moves while you're in the park or waiting for the kettle to boil. (You can find out more about mindfulness in the podcast on our Mindbuilding site.)

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## Mindbuilding tools

### Relaxation exercise

[▶ www.linkhere.com](#)

### Five-minute breathing exercise

[▶ www.linkhere.com](#)

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### Top tip 3: Become more mindful during exercise

When you exercise, turn off the TV or stereo, and focus on your body instead. Try to time your breathing with your movements and pay attention to how your body feels as you move, raise or lower your arms or legs.

### Top tip 4: Find the flow

Try to find an activity that gets you so immersed that you forget about your to-do lists or life's stresses – this is sometimes known as getting into a state of flow. You usually find a state of flow when you're doing something you really enjoy, like exercising, playing an instrument or doing gardening.

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**Top tip 5: Avoid doing relaxation exercises when you're sleepy**

Some relaxation exercises can make you sleepy, especially if it's close to bedtime. You'll get more out of them if you do them when you're fully awake and alert.

**Find the technique that works for you**

There's no single relaxation technique that will work for everyone – the one that works for you will depend on how fit you are, what makes you focus and whether you enjoy time alone or social interaction.

A good place to start is to ask yourself how you tend to react when you become stressed.

- **Do you tend to become angry or agitated?**

You may respond best to relaxation techniques that quieten you down, like meditation, deep breathing or visualisation.

- **Do you tend to feel low or become withdrawn?**

You may respond best to stimulating relaxation techniques that energise your nervous system, like rhythmic exercises or brain puzzles.

- **Do you tend to speed up inside but your body slows down?**

You need to find a relaxation technique that gives you both safety and stimulation, like power yoga or mindful walking (mindfulness means focusing on the present moment).

Sources:

[www.getselfhelp.co.uk](http://www.getselfhelp.co.uk)

[www.helpguide.org](http://www.helpguide.org)

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## Mindbuilding

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### Related topics

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- Accepting change
- Setting goals
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