

## Relaxing your Posture

This is a short relaxation exercise that you can practice to help you to relax your posture and reduce muscle tension. It is simply trying to reverse what happens to our bodies when we are anxious, and holding tension.

1. Make sure that you are in a quiet room, where you are unlikely to be disturbed and that you are comfortable.
2. You can either close your eyes or choose to focus your vision on a particular spot in the room so your concentration does not wander. You can start off by practicing your breathing exercises, breathing gently in and out.
3. Allow your body and head to feel supported in the chair
4. Drop your shoulders and unfold your arms and rest them on your lap or by your sides
5. Allow your hands to open and curve naturally at the fingers and palms
6. Uncross your legs / ankles and relax your feet and ankles
7. Allow your jaw to relax and unclench and allow your teeth and lips to be slightly apart
8. Let your tongue rest comfortably in your mouth
9. Allow your forehead to become wider and smoother

This technique can be done throughout the day and by practicing it, it helps you to become more aware of muscle tension, and aims to help your muscles to relax. You may wish to listen to some relaxing music, or imagine a place which you find relaxing.

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## Anxiety and relaxation

*Information for patients*

## What is Anxiety?

It is normal for us to have feelings of anxiety – feelings of unease, worry or fear. The Fight and Flight response is the term given to what happens to our body when we encounter a stressful situation. It is a natural physiological response, and how our body prepares itself for action, i.e. if a car is speeding down the road towards us, our body needs to get into action, ready to run away.

Our senses alert our brain of a threat and our body then produces adrenaline which is released into the bloodstream to different areas of our bodies (i.e. muscles, heart and lungs). As a result we may experience symptoms such as tense muscles, rapid heart rate, breathlessness, nausea, sweating, dizziness, dry mouth and needing to go to the toilet more frequently.

## When does Anxiety become a problem?

When a stressful event has subsided, your anxiety should return to normal and your body should relax.

However, there might be several things that now prevent you from resting and relaxing. These may include various investigations that you are undergoing, the illness itself and some of the symptoms you experience such as breathlessness or fatigue. You might also have financial concerns, worries about your family and concerns about the future. Anxiety can build up and it can be difficult for the body to relax and then it can begin to affect your daily life and wellbeing.

Anxiety can present itself in many different ways. You may have feelings of tearfulness, negative thinking, constant worrying, irritability and sleep difficulties. Some people can also experience panic.

There are various coping strategies and relaxation techniques that can help you to manage anxiety and to also help deal with feelings of panic. If you can learn to manage your anxiety, this should also help you to cope with feelings of breathlessness and fatigue.

## Recognising Personal Triggers and Symptoms

Think about what events and situations can cause anxiety and become aware of your symptoms and feelings. For example, you may get an upset stomach and feel sick or you may experience headaches. Everyone can experience different responses. If you can learn to become more aware of when you are feeling anxious, then you can learn a method of relaxation to help you to calm down.

Although the cause of anxiety won't disappear, you may feel more able to deal with it once you've released the tension in your body and cleared your thoughts.

## Relaxation

Relaxation is a useful skill for us all to learn, particularly those who suffer from anxiety, poor sleep, fatigue and breathlessness. Relaxation focuses on resting yourself both physically and mentally. Relaxation can be in the form of a relaxing hobby such as swimming, reading books, jigsaws or in the form of a specific technique / exercise. Some relaxation techniques are aimed more for relaxing the body (i.e. breathing exercises, progressive muscular relaxation, and massage) and others for relaxing the mind (i.e. visualisation techniques).

It is useful to understand that relaxation often does not come easily and naturally to us, but it does become easier with practice and then it will become more effective.

There is an example of a short relaxation exercise at the end of this leaflet that you can try to help you to practice relaxing your posture.

Your Occupational Therapist / Physiotherapist can work with you to give you further advice and to help identify which methods of relaxation will benefit you. It is also important to make sure that your GP knows how you are feeling.