

# SIMPLE HABITS TO REDUCE STRESS AND ANXIETY

## What is Active Relaxation?

Practicing active relaxation is a simple habit that reduces anxiety and stress. It is different from just hanging out around the house. When we actively relax, we intentionally reduce our level of agitation. This can involve slowing our breath, relaxing our muscles, controlling our thoughts, or some combination of all of the above. Watching TV can be fun and enjoyable, but it is passive relaxation. Passive relaxation does not reduce stress and anxiety the way active relaxation does.

## Why make stress reduction/relaxation a habit?

Making relaxation a habit is more effective than only relaxing when we are stressed. Active relaxation helps us from being as stressed in the first place. When relaxation is a habit we de-stress faster.

## How do we relax actively and create a relaxation habit?

There are lots of ways to reduce stress and create a habit of relaxation. Here are a few simple ones. Whichever one you choose, you should try to practice the strategy every day. These are all meant to be constructive ways of coping with stress. Unconstructive ways of coping with anxiety can make it worse. They include suppressing your feelings, denying that the source of your anxiety exists, or rationalizing your anxiety to yourself.

## Strategies for Relaxing and Reducing Stress

- Breathe and Relax
  - Inhale through your nose slowly and then exhale do a long, slow exhale through your mouth. Do this several times for a few minutes.
- Exercise
  - Physical activity burns off stress and gives you an emotional lift. Try walking twenty minutes every other day.
- Healthy Eating
  - Don't skip meals. Reduce caffeine, fats, alcohol and sugar. Eat fruits and vegetables.
- Mix Fun and Work
  - Take time out for a walk or close your eyes and imagine a wonderful, peaceful scene.
- Give Yourself a Break
  - Sometimes we are too hard on ourselves. Give yourself a break and develop kinder, more realistic self-talk.
- Let Off Steam
  - Anger can easily sap your energy away from other items needing your attention. When anger builds, go play racquetball or jog, write in your journal, or get help from an objective party.

Adapted from information provided by The University of Arizona's Counseling and Psych Services department (2017)

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