

# Relaxation Techniques



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It is normal for you to feel anxious, sad, angry, and overwhelmed while going through cancer treatment. Learning to relax will help you deal with these feelings. The following relaxation techniques will be covered in this pamphlet:

- deep breathing
- progressive muscular relaxation
- autogenics
- guided imagery

These techniques will help you manage stress and reduce anxiety.

## Key Points for Learning to Relax

1. Find a quiet environment. Relaxing music in the background can also help to block out distractions.
2. Give yourself permission to relax. Set aside this time just for you. Relaxing is a way that you can take care of yourself.
3. Learning to relax at a deep level takes practice so be patient. Do not feel as if you have failed if you do not get it right away.

## Deep Breathing

1. Find a comfortable position.
2. Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose. Feel your abdomen being pushed upward as you inhale.
3. Exhale slowly through your mouth while pursing (like blowing out candles) your lips as you gently blow out. Take long, slow deep breaths. Focus on the flow of your breath as you become more and more relaxed.
4. You can use images in your mind to help with breathing. For example, when breathing in, imagine that your arms and legs are straws and the air is being drawn into every cell in your body. When breathing out, imagine you are slowly blowing out candles on a cake.

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**Created: 10/2008**

**Form: D-5560**



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## **Progressive Muscular Relaxation**

1. Find a comfortable position.
2. As you tighten each muscle group, notice the muscle tension, how it feels, and hold it for a count of 5.
3. Then release the muscle group and try to allow all of the tension in those muscles to relax once. Pause. Notice the difference between the tension and the restful feeling of relaxation. Repeat.
4. As you proceed, try not to allow muscle tension back in those areas that you have already allowed to relax. Feel how your whole body relaxes completely each time you tense and relax.
5. Do the technique slowly. Do not rush. Allow muscles to fully relax.

## **Autogenics**

Autogenic training will teach your body and mind to respond quickly to your verbal commands to relax using sensations of warmth and heaviness.

1. Find a comfortable position. Close your eyes, picture yourself in a peaceful place.
2. Say each phrases listed below four times. Pause between each phrase to really appreciate the sensation of heaviness and warmth.

“My hands are heavy and warm.”

“My arms are heavy and warm.”

“My shoulders are heavy and warm.”

“My feet are heavy and warm.”

“My calves are heavy and warm.”

“My legs are heavy and warm.”

## **Guided Imagery**

Guided imagery, or using your imagination to help you to relax, can be used in combination with deep breathing or autogenics. Choose a scene that you associate with feelings of relaxation. This can be real, imaginary, present or in the past.

1. Find a comfortable position.
2. Close your eyes and picture yourself in a calm peaceful place. For example lying on a warm beach, swinging in a hammock, sitting in your favourite chair, or walking through a meadow.
3. Visualize what you can see in this environment (the greenness of the grass)
4. Think of the sounds (the babbling brook, crashing waves).
5. Create or recall different smells (smell of fragrant flowers, salt sea air).
6. Explore different textures in your environment (soft sand, warm soothing water).



7. Experience different tastes (fresh water, freshly baked cookies from the oven).
8. Some images or memories may bring back sad feelings. It may be helpful to create new images with less emotional attachments.

### **Community Resources for Relaxation Training**

- Wellspring
- Gilda's Club Greater Toronto
- Eli Bay: The Relaxation Response Institute

You can also search on the internet for your local community agencies that provide relaxation programs.