

GROUP EXERCISE TIMETABLE

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Relaxation Therapy

Simple breathing and relaxation self-help exercises are very useful for a variety of conditions. Almost everyone can learn the techniques and they can offer an immediate and at times quite dramatic reduction in the effects of anxiety and muscle tension and on the nervous system that controls blood pressure and the digestive tract.

Many people with cancer and indeed many of their family and friends can be helped to relax and experience a sense of calmness if taught these simple methods. Self-help exercise requires motivation and constant practice to provide benefit and this may be also achieved by attending group sessions.

Lying flat may be uncomfortable for people who are breathless or in pain but many relaxation exercises can be done sitting up or using pillows for support.

Here is a simple exercise to try:-

- Find a quiet room where you will be undisturbed for about 10-15 minutes. Undo any tight clothing and remove your shoes then lie down on the bed or floor. Spend a few moments settling yourself down. Close your eyes, spread your feet 12-18 inches apart and check that your head, neck and spine are in a straight line.
- Now focus your attention on your breathing. Do not try to change your breathing for the moment. Become aware of how fast or slow you are breathing. Notice whether there are any gaps or pauses between your breathing in and breathing out.
- Now put one hand on your upper chest and one hand on your abdomen just below your rib cage. Relax your shoulders and hands. As you breathe in, feel your abdomen expand. As you breathe out allow your abdomen to flatten. There should be little or no movement in your chest. Allow yourself a little time to get into regular rhythm.
- It may help to imagine that as you are breathing in, you draw half a circle with your breath and as you breathe out you complete the second half of the circle.
- Allow your breath to become smooth, easy and regular. Now consciously slow down your breathing out and allow your breathing in to follow smoothly and easily. Smooth out any gaps or pauses in your breathing.
- If any distractions, thoughts or worries come into your mind, allow them to come then allow them to go and bring your attention back to your breathing.
- When you are ready to end this exercise take a few deeper breaths in through the nose and out through the mouth. Bring some feeling back into your fingers and toes. Open your eyes slowly and turn over to one side if in lying position, before gently sitting up.

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Simple visualisation for relaxation

Imagine you are sitting or standing in the middle of a stream. The water is flowing away in front of you.

Notice if there is any sound from the running water. Notice if there are any trees, etc. on the banks of the stream. Now see the leaves floating down the stream away from you.

They can be any shape, colour or size. As the thoughts come into your mind – positive, negative, neutral – be aware of what the thought is, and then place it on a leaf.

Now watch it float away down the stream.

At times, you will forget the stream and follow a thought out into the wilderness. At other, you will find yourself right on the leaf with thought or feeling.

As you acknowledge each of your thoughts, you do not need to hang on them or push them away. Just put them on a leaf and let them do what they do.

Just acknowledge it and then place it on a leaf.

By watching it float away, you may begin to notice that the thought – or the feeling – is not you. It is something you have.

When you notice this, also notice if the hold it has on you changes.

Do this for as long as you like.