

Porterbrook Clinic

Sheffield Care Trust

Improving your **Relationship**

Learning to relax

Information for Users of our service

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This leaflet is all about learning how to relax: to achieve a sense of calm in your body and mind by releasing tension from your muscles, and allowing your mind to be refreshed.

What does relaxation have to do with my sexual difficulties?

Stress and anxiety are major impediments to sexual desire, because it's almost impossible to enjoy sex when you're preoccupied with financial problems, work issues or other worries. Often we hold a lot of tension in our bodies without even being aware of it; this can make it more difficult to become sexually aroused and to have an orgasm. On the other hand, if you are someone who has a problem with ejaculating too quickly, tension and anxiety will also make this condition worse.

I sit and watch TV most nights – that's relaxing, isn't it?

It might be, but just because you are distracting yourself and 'zoning out' mentally doesn't necessarily mean you are relaxing physically.

What could relaxation do for me?

- Learning a relaxation technique like the one overleaf, and practicing it regularly, could help you to feel calmer, happier and more energetic.
- If you are able to unwind and bring tensions and anxiety under control, you are likely to be able to think more clearly and concentrate better.
- It can also have an important effect on your health and well-being, lowering your blood pressure, heart rate and adrenaline flow.
- It could help you to sleep and reduce tiredness, by allowing you to be calm during the day, and then helping you to get off to sleep more easily at night.
- It could improve your personal relationships. It is easier to relate well to other people when you are feeling relaxed and self-aware; if you are holding tension in your body, you are more likely to be irritable and less likely to listen well.
- If you are suffering from any painful conditions, it could ease this – pain often feels much worse and can be more difficult to cope with if you are tense.

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- Tuning into your body is an important step towards getting you in the mood for sex.

The link between relaxation and breathing

Taking a deep breath, and letting it out slowly, is an effective way to wind down, and one that we often do instinctively (as a deep sigh). It is important to breathe from the diaphragm, not just from the chest. To check you are doing this, sit comfortably in a chair and place one hand on your chest and the other on your navel (tummy button). Take two or three fairly large breaths: the hand on your abdomen should move before the hand on your chest starts to rise.

Ways to relax and release physical tension

- It is helpful to pay some attention to your breathing whenever you're feeling tense and would like to unwind a little. It can also help when you are preparing for a stressful situation such as a difficult conversation or a job interview. Pause what you are doing, allow your shoulders to fall away from your ears, and take two or three deep breaths.
- Make sure you breathe out for longer than you breathe in - for example, breathe in to the count of three, then out to the count of four. Be aware of the ground under your feet. Then carry on with whatever you were doing, but a little slower and more mindfully.
- Learn the relaxation technique below and practice it regularly.
 - Listen to a relaxation tape. These often include a relaxation exercise similar to the one described below. They can also include soothing music, sounds from nature (such as a waterfall, waves crashing or jungle sounds) or a guided visualisation (where you imagine a relaxing and happy scene such as a walk along a beach).
 - Go for a massage therapy such as aromatherapy, Swedish massage or Shiatsu.
 - Join a yoga or meditation class.
 - Take part in a physical activity such as dancing, walking, swimming or a team sport.
 - Finally, of course, a healthy, enjoyable sex life is itself an aid to well-being and a great stress-buster!
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A relaxation exercise

This exercise can be completed in about ten minutes, but if you have twenty minutes or so to spare, so much the better. The exercise is great to carry out if you're feeling really stressed, but it's even better if you can get into the habit of doing it regularly, preferably daily, however you're feeling. This will help you to cope better day to day, and will stand you in good stead for when stressful situations arise.

Choose a warm, quiet room where you will not be disturbed. Wear loose clothing and take off your shoes. Sit in an easy chair and make yourself completely comfortable. Close your eyes.

Rest your arms on the arms of the chair, or fold your hands in your lap. Place your feet flat on the floor, and imagine you are deeply "grounded" – attached and rooted to the ground, and drawing strength and peace from it.

As you rest, you will probably be aware of distant sounds. Don't worry about this - just let them come into your consciousness and then float off again. Notice how you are breathing, then take

three slow, deep breaths, making sure that you are breathing from right down inside your abdomen. Breathe out for longer than you breathe in. If it's helpful, think of a word as you breathe out, such as 'peace' or 'release'.

Become aware of your head, face and neck. Release any tension from your forehead, around your eyes, your mouth and your jaw.

Be aware of your arms and your hands. Let them sink down into the chair or your lap. Let your shoulders sink gently.

Now think about the rest of your body, and see if you can notice where the muscle tensions are. If you can feel any tension, bring your attention to that part of the body, and as you breathe out, imagine the tension starting to flow away, like sand through an egg timer.

Allow a sense of well-being and heaviness to spread throughout your body.

Once you are feeling relaxed and heavy, sit comfortably and concentrate on slow, deep, rhythmic breathing ... in for three, out for four ... in for three, out for four ...

When you are ready to finish, count back from 5 to 1 and slowly open your eyes. Shake out your hands and feet, and stretch. Wait a little, and then rise in your own time.

