



RELAXATION OP-ALMA

Relaxation is a helpful pain management skill. With practice, we can reduce muscle tension and pain, calm our mind, reduce distress, and improve sleep.



We all relax in different ways. However, our favourite activities might not always be possible when we need to calm ourselves. We might be in too much pain, it could be the middle of the night, or we might be in a busy shopping centre. Using our breath, and focusing on our body, we can learn how to achieve relaxation. This skill can be used **anywhere at any time.**

Relaxation Response



Chronic pain can be very stressful.



Stress can make chronic pain worse by increasing muscle tightness which then increases our pain, leading to even more tension¹. Relaxation helps us break this cycle.



Our body's relaxation response involves releasing chemicals and brain signals that slow down the systems in our body².



The relaxation response turns down the effects of stress and worry on our body, reducing tension and slowing our heart rate, among other things².



With lots of practice, we can become very skilled at triggering our relaxation response.

CALM BREATHING

Practice this exercise to trigger the body's relaxation response



Make yourself comfortable, lying down or sitting in a chair. Close your eyes.

Take three long, slow, deep breaths in through the nose and out through the mouth.



Breathe naturally and slowly.

Imagine that your body is heavy and floppy.



Each time you exhale, repeat the word 'Relax' to yourself.

When your mind wanders, gently focus on your breath, and the word 'Relax'.



Imagine that with each breath your body is becoming heavier and more relaxed.

Continue for about 10 minutes.



Before you finish this exercise, sit quietly for a moment or two.

Practice two times a day, for at least 10 minutes each time.



Make relaxation practice a daily habit. Practice for at least 10 minutes at the same time each day. What is the best time to practice? Write it down.



TIP

Practice relaxation when you are not feeling worried, tense, or in a great deal of pain. We need lots of practice - just like learning how to play a musical instrument or learning how to swim.

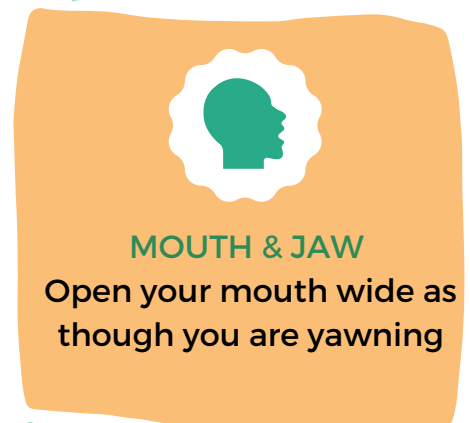
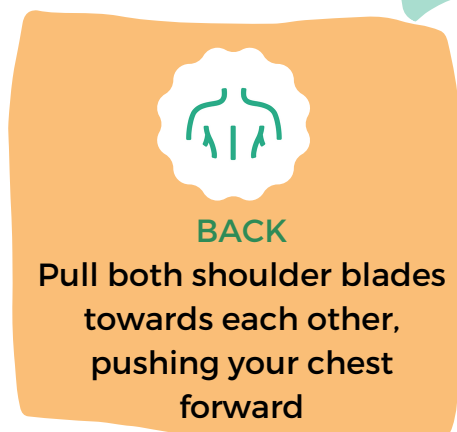
PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

Focus on each part of the body, tensing and relaxing your muscles

This technique helps reduce muscle tension and pain³⁻⁵. With practice, we can easily recognise tension in our muscles which we can then release as we go about our day.

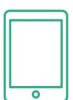
Please do not tighten any muscles that feel painful.
Skip any parts that are uncomfortable.

- Make yourself comfortable, sitting in a chair or lying down. Close your eyes.
- Breathe in as you tense the first muscle for five seconds. Then exhale, relaxing completely.
- Pause for 10 seconds, then move on to the next muscle.
- When you have focused on all muscles, take three deep breaths. Gently open your eyes.
- Start at your forehead...



Scan this QR code to listen to a
Progressive Muscle Relaxation exercise
bit.ly/opalma-relax





CONNECT

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The Breathing App



Mellow Me

Visit

www.youtube.com and type 'Guided Relaxation' into the search bar:



1. McCaffery, M., & Pasero, C. (1999). *Pain: Clinical manual*. (2nd ed). St. Louis, Missouri: Mosby.

2. Benson, H., Beary, J., & Carol, M. (1974). The relaxation response. *Psychiatry*, 37, 37-46.

3. Bernstein, D. A., & Borkovec, T. D. (1973). *Progressive relaxation training: a manual for the helping professions*. Champaign, Illinois: Research Press.

4. Baird, C. L., & Sands, L. (2004). A pilot study of the effectiveness of guided imagery with progressive muscle relaxation to reduce chronic pain and mobility difficulties of osteoarthritis. *Pain Management Nursing*, 5(3), 97-104.

5. Kwekkeboom, K. L., & Gretarsdottir, E. (2006). Systematic review of relaxation interventions for pain. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 38(3), 269-277.