

# Jacobson's progressive relaxation technique

The aim of this information sheet is to remind you about how you can manage your stress using Jacobson's progressive relaxation technique. This is a technique that uses muscle contraction and relaxation to make you feel calmer. You should have already practiced this technique with your occupational therapist or as part of the cardiovascular rehabilitation programme. You may want to ask a family member or friend to read it out to help you relax. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to your occupational therapist or a member of the cardiovascular rehabilitation team.

## What is the purpose of the technique?

Relaxation can help to relieve the symptoms of stress. Although the cause of the anxiety will not disappear, you will probably feel more able to deal with it once you have released the tension in your body and cleared your thoughts.

Jacobson's progressive relaxation technique involves contracting and relaxing the muscles to make you feel calmer.

Don't worry if you find it difficult to relax at first. It is a skill that needs to be learned and it will come with practice. Once you have mastered it you will be able to use it throughout your life, for example when driving a car, sitting in your office or standing in a supermarket queue.

## How do I prepare to relax?

Allow yourself 15–20 minutes to complete this relaxation technique. Find a place that is warm, quiet and free from disturbances. If possible dim the lights and tell people that you should not be disturbed – you may want to switch off any phones. Make yourself comfortable on the floor, on the bed or in a chair. Snuggle down and settle your body so that it feels limp.

**If you can, ask a friend or family member to read the next sections to you.**

## What do I need to do?

### 1. Tension-relaxation.

**Is about tensing and then relaxing different muscle groups throughout your body, so that it learns to recognize the difference that exists between a state of muscular tension and another of muscular relaxation.**

- Gently breathe in – hold – and let go.
- Gently pull your toes up towards your knees – just a little – hold briefly – and let go. Recognise the difference.
- Press your heels into the floor – hold – and let go.
- Pull your knees together – hold briefly – now let them drift apart a little. Be aware of the new position.

- Squeeze your buttocks together – hold – now let go.
- Gently pull in your tummy muscles towards your spine – hold briefly – now let go. Feel the difference.
- Shoulders – gently pull them up towards your ears, just enough to recognise the tension – hold briefly – now let go. Recognise the new position.
- Gently press your elbows and upper arms to the sides of your body – hold for a moment – now let go.
- Hands – gently clench – hold – and let go.
- Push your head forward slightly – hold briefly – now let your head go back to a balanced position. Feel the difference.
- Grit your teeth together – hold briefly – now let your jaw sag slightly. Feel the difference.
- Lips – press together – now let go until hardly touching. Purse your lips – now let go and feel the difference.
- Press your tongue briefly to the roof of your mouth – hold – and let it drop loosely. Feel the new position.
- Eyes – screw them up a little – hold – and let go.
- Forehead – frown a little – hold – now let go.

2. Mentally review the groups of muscles, checking that they have relaxed to the maximum. Now spend a few moments enjoying the feeling of release, releasing a little more with each exhale.

3. Mental relaxation (think of a possible nice and positive scene or keep the mind blank, it is about relaxing the mind while continuing relaxing your whole body.)

## **How do I end the relaxation session?**

Gradually allow your awareness to expand to become aware of your breathing and of the contact between your body and the floor, bed or chair. When you feel ready, open your eyes, and have a gentle stretch.