

## Exercise #6

### Stress Busters - Three Powerful Relaxation Techniques

The relationship that exists between mind, body, and emotions is inarguably related to our ability to handle stressful situations and daily challenges.

These three stress management techniques will help you harmonize your thoughts, actions, and emotions in a way that increases your capacity and helps you feel more in control of your life.

Find a quiet time and place during the day to do one of these exercises for 10-20 minutes at a time. After seven days, you will feel a difference.

**A. Progressive Muscular Relaxation** – This is a method developed in the 1930s and is based on the idea that mental relaxation will be a natural outcome of physical relaxation. There are two steps in the self-administered Progressive Muscle Relaxation procedure: (a) deliberately tensing muscle groups, and (b) releasing the induced tension.

You will be working with most all the major muscle groups in your body, but for convenience you will make a systematic progression from your feet upwards.

Your instructor will lead this exercise.

**B. Meditation** – Meditation is meant to bring about awareness and peace. The benefits of meditation are uniquely individual, but both physiological and psychological balancing is common. Below is an explanation of how to practice classic and simple meditation:

*The Mantra:* A mantra is a sound, word, or phrase that you repeat to yourself out loud or silently. The purpose of the mantra is to discard your normal thoughts and focus your awareness inward. You can select anything as your mantra--from a single word to a phrase that is meditative for you. Today we will start with the use a natural mantra “hamsa,” being the natural sound one makes when breathing... “ham” (h-ah-m) on inhalation and “sa” (s-ah) on exhalation.

*The Hamsa Meditation:*

- Sit comfortably: back straight, shoulders relaxed, with your arms by your side or resting in your lap. Select a quiet place if possible, but it’s not required.
- Close your eyes and breathe naturally. Sit for a minute before you begin, thinking the mantra to allow your heart and breathing to slow.
- Gently focus your attention on your breath and begin thinking the mantra, slowly and rhythmically, matching the mantra with your breath... (h-ah-m) on inhalation and (s-ah) on exhalation. Allow yourself to become absorbed in it.
- Let your thoughts and feelings come and go without concern. Don't try to control them in any way; simply note them. When you realize you're not repeating the mantra, re-focus your attention on your breath and begin thinking the mantra again. Don't try to force yourself to think the mantra to the exclusion of all other thoughts.

**OVER**

- Meditate for at least 10 minutes, preferably 20 minutes. When done, take about a minute to slowly return to normal awareness. (It's okay to glance at a clock to time your meditation; however, I suggest you don't use any kind of alarm timer.)
- Gently open your eyes and slowly move to your feet. Be careful not to get up too quickly after meditating; you may experience some dizziness after a deep state of rest.
- You may or may not experience a deep state of relaxation and rest your first time meditating. As with many relaxation techniques, meditation takes practice to reap all the benefits. Don't get discouraged; just stay with it.

Your instructor will lead this exercise.

**C. Imagery and Visualization** - Here we substitute actual experience with scenes from our imagination. Your body reacts to these imagined scenes almost as if they were real.

One common use of relaxation imagery is to imagine a scene, place, or event that you remember as safe, peaceful, restful, beautiful, and happy. You can bring all your senses into the image with, for example, sounds of running water and birds, the smell of cut grass, the taste of cool white wine, the warmth of the sun, and so on. Use the imagined place as a retreat from stress and pressure.

Scenes can involve complex images such as lying on a beach in a deserted cove. You may "see" cliffs, sea, and sand around you; "hear" the waves crashing against rocks; "smell" the salt in the air; and "feel" the warmth of the sun and a gentle breeze on your body. Other images might include looking at a mountain view, swimming in a tropical pool, or whatever you want. You will be able to come up with the most effective images for yourself.

Other uses of imagery in relaxation involve creating mental pictures of stress flowing out of your body or of stress, distractions, and everyday concerns being folded away and locked into a padlocked chest.

Your instructor will lead this exercise.

**These descriptions adapted from various private and published sources of classic exercises.**