



York Teaching Hospital  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Relaxation and wellbeing

Information for patients, relatives and carers

① For more information, please contact:

**Physiotherapy Department**

Contact Telephone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Caring with pride



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## Relaxation

### Practising relaxation techniques can:

- Reduce pain caused by muscle tension.
- Improve your quality of sleep.
- Make you feel more positive.
- Make you feel healthier.
- Lower your stress by reducing the activity of stress hormones, which will result in slowing your heart rate, lowering your blood pressure and lowering your breathing rate.
- Improve your concentration and mood.
- Help you feel less tired.
- Reduce how angry and frustrated you feel.

If you take time to relax and rest, it doesn't mean you are giving in! Relaxing and resting are important in helping you manage yourself and control your symptoms.

## Points to remember when practising relaxation at home

You should practise relaxation techniques regularly so they become a way of life. You will find that relaxing at the same time each day, when you are not going to be disturbed and can turn off your phone and other electronic equipment, will help to build the techniques into a routine and helps keep you motivated. Try different types of relaxation to find which you think is most effective.

You can find some audio resources on our website [www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk](http://www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk):

Search for “Relaxation”

Choose “Relaxation Audio”

- Wear loose comfortable clothing.
- If possible practise relaxation exercises lying down. If this is not possible, sit in a comfortable chair with a back support high enough to support your head. If you are on a settee, you will need arm rests or cushions to support your elbows.
- Try to avoid falling asleep while relaxing. Falling asleep prevents you from experiencing both the physical and psychological benefits of relaxation.
- Once learnt as a skill, you can then use the techniques as part of a plan to improve your sleep problems.

- At the end of your relaxation session ensure that you allow plenty of time to readjust to a more alert state.
- Don't stand up straight away. Gently stretch your arms and legs and sit quietly for a few minutes before resuming your daily activities.
- Never put a relaxation CD on in the car whilst driving or as a passenger, as it could reduce your level of concentration.

## Diaphragmatic breathing

When we are in pain or stressed we often only use the upper part of our chest to breathe. This results in breathing being shallower, fast and less efficient. It also can lead to pain in the muscles around the neck as these muscles are overworking to breathe.

Diaphragmatic breathing can help reduce this tension and pain by using the diaphragm muscle which allows the tight muscles at the top of your chest to relax (see technique on next page).

It can be done in lying or sitting as a relaxation technique. Alternatively you can do it in any situation if you are in pain or feeling stressed and you notice your breathing has become rapid and your neck muscles are tight.

## Technique

- Sit comfortably with your legs uncrossed and your shoulders relaxed.
- Place one hand on your stomach and one on your chest.
- Breathe in normally whilst thinking of taking the air down to the bottom of your lungs. You should feel your chest stays still and your stomach moves out a little.
- Then gently breathe out and allow your stomach to fall in slightly.
- Take another breath in the same way and feel your stomach again 'move out' to expand.
- Again slowly breathe out and your stomach should fall.
- Continue to breathe gently for another few minutes until you feel the muscles around your upper chest relaxing and your breathing is calm and relaxed.

## Tips for home

Don't make your breaths too big as it may make you feel dizzy.

It can take practice to be able to do it effectively.

Check your breathing as often as you can during the day and correct it.

## **Advice on managing sleep**

Tiredness and fatigue can be some of the most severe aspects of your condition. You may have difficulty sleeping, or waking in the early hours, or feeling un-refreshed after you have tried to sleep. Guidelines state that altered sleep-wake cycles may make your fatigue worse and that managing your sleep is an important strategy for managing the condition you have.

### **Managing your sleep can include a number of steps**

Introduction a routine for sleeping which includes where possible, going to bed at a similar time each night, when you are tired and waking and getting out of bed at the same time each day. You should reduce gradually the times you sleep during the day. You should try to get at least 30 minutes' of natural daylight each day. Here are some hints to help you sleep at night.

- Keeping the bed and bedroom for sleep.
- Ensure the bedroom helps you sleep by keeping it at a comfortable temperature, dark and quiet.
- Reduce the amount of time in bed when you're not sleeping or using relaxation techniques.
- Avoid caffeine, stimulants, excessive alcohol, or a heavy meal prior to going to bed at night.

- Establishing a 'wind-down' period before going to bed and do something which makes you feel relaxed.
- Avoiding stimulating activities prior to going to bed such as using phones or tablets for checking emails and social media.
- Use coping strategies to reduce thoughts or worries that may prevent falling asleep e.g. writing a list.
- Use of relaxation techniques.
- Keeping a sleep diary.

## **Tell us what you think of this leaflet**

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact:  
Heather Harrison, Physiotherapy Department,  
Archways, Belgrave Street, York YO31 8YZ or telephone  
01904 725390.

## **Teaching, training and research**

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

## **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email  
[pals@york.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@york.nhs.uk).

An answer phone is available out of hours.

Providing care together in York, Scarborough, Bridlington,  
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