

## Relaxation

The capacity to relax is at the very foundation of any program undertaken to overcome anxiety, phobias, or panic attacks. Many of the other skills described in this book, such as desensitization, visualization, and changing negative self-talk, build on the capacity to achieve deep relaxation.

Relaxation is more than unwinding in front of the TV set or in the bathtub at the end of the day—though, without doubt, these practices can be relaxing. The type of relaxation that really makes a difference in dealing with anxiety is the *regular, daily* practice of some form of *deep relaxation*. Deep relaxation refers to a distinct physiological state that is the exact opposite of the way your body reacts under stress or during a panic attack. This state was originally described by Herbert Benson in 1975 as the *relaxation response*. It involves a series of physiological changes including

- Decrease in heart rate
- Decrease in respiration rate
- Decrease in blood pressure
- Decrease in skeletal muscle tension
- Decrease in metabolic rate and oxygen consumption
- Decrease in analytical thinking
- Increase in skin resistance
- Increase in alpha wave activity in the brain

Regular practice of deep relaxation for twenty to thirty minutes on a daily basis can produce, over time, a generalization of relaxation to the rest of your life. That is, after several weeks of practicing deep relaxation once per day, you will tend to feel more relaxed all the time.

Numerous other benefits of deep relaxation have been documented over the past twenty years. These include

- Reduction of generalized anxiety. Many people have found that regular practice also reduces the frequency and severity of panic attacks.
- Preventing stress from becoming cumulative. Unabated stress tends to build up over time. Entering into a state of

physiological quiescence once a day gives your body the opportunity to recover from the effects of stress. Even sleep can fail to break the cumulative stress cycle unless you've given yourself permission to deeply relax while awake.

- Increased energy level and productivity. (When under stress, you may work against yourself and become less efficient.)
- Improved concentration and memory. Regular practice of deep relaxation tends to increase your ability to focus and keeps your mind from "racing."
- Reduction of insomnia and fatigue. Learning to relax leads to sleep that is deeper and sounder.
- Prevention and/or reduction of psychosomatic disorders, such as hypertension, migraines, headaches, asthma, and ulcers.
- Increased self-confidence and reduced self-blame. For many people, stress and excessive self-criticism or feelings of inadequacy go hand in hand. You can perform better, as well as feel better, when you are relaxed.
- Increased availability of feelings. Muscle tension is one of the chief impediments to an awareness of your feelings.

How can you achieve a state of deep relaxation? Some of the more common methods include

1. Abdominal breathing
2. Progressive muscle relaxation
3. Passive muscle relaxation
4. Visualizing a peaceful scene
5. Guided imagery
6. Meditation
7. Biofeedback
8. Sensory deprivation
9. Yoga
10. Calming music

For our purposes here, we will focus on the first five and the last two of these methods.

## Abdominal Breathing

Your breathing directly reflects the level of tension you carry in your body. Under tension, your breathing usually becomes shallow and rapid, and your breathing occurs high in the chest. When relaxed, you breathe more fully, more deeply, and from your abdomen. It's difficult to be tense and to breathe from your abdomen at the same time.

Some of the benefits of abdominal breathing include

- Increased oxygen supply to the brain and musculature.
- Stimulation of the parasympathetic nervous system. This branch of your autonomic nervous system promotes a state of calmness and quiescence. It works in a fashion exactly opposite to the sympathetic branch of your nervous system, which stimulates a state of emotional arousal and the very physiological reactions underlying a panic attack.
- Greater feelings of connectedness between mind and body. Anxiety and worry tend to keep you “up in your head.” A few minutes of deep abdominal breathing will help bring you down into your whole body.
- More efficient excretion of bodily toxins. Many toxic substances in the body are excreted through the lungs.
- Improved concentration. If your mind is racing, it's difficult to focus your attention. Abdominal breathing will help to quiet your mind.
- Abdominal breathing by itself can trigger a relaxation response.

If you suffer from phobias, panic, or other anxiety disorders, you will tend to have one or both of two types of problems with breathing. Either

1. You breathe too high up in your chest and your breathing is shallow, or
2. You tend to hyperventilate, breathing out too much carbon dioxide relative to the amount of oxygen carried in your bloodstream. Shallow, chest-level breathing, when rapid, can lead to hyperventilation. Hyperventilation, in turn, can cause physical symptoms very similar to those associated with panic attacks.

These two types of breathing are discussed in greater detail below.

## Shallow, Chest-Level Breathing

Studies have found differences in the breathing patterns of anxious and shy people as opposed to those who are more relaxed and outgoing. People who are fearful and shy tend to breathe in a shallow fashion from their chest, while those who are more extroverted and relaxed breathe more slowly, deeply, and from their abdomens.

Before reading on, take a minute to notice how you are breathing right now. Is your breath slow or rapid? Deep or shallow? Does it center around a point high in your chest or down in your abdomen? You might also notice changes in your breathing pattern under stress versus when you are more relaxed.

If you find that your breathing is shallow and high in your chest, don't despair. It's quite possible to retrain yourself to breathe more deeply and from your abdomen. Practicing abdominal breathing (described below) on a regular basis will gradually help you to shift the center of your breath downward from your chest. Regular practice of full abdominal breathing will also increase your lung capacity, helping you to breathe more deeply. A program of vigorous, aerobic exercise can also be helpful.

## Hyperventilation Syndrome

If you breathe from your chest, you may tend to overbreathe, exhaling excess carbon dioxide in relation to the amount of oxygen in your bloodstream. You may also tend to breathe through your mouth. The result is a cluster of symptoms, including rapid heartbeat, dizziness, and tingly sensations that are so similar to the symptoms of panic that they can be indistinguishable. Some of the physiological changes brought on by hyperventilation include

- Increased alkalinity of nerve cells, which causes them to be more excitable. The result is that you feel *nervous* and *jittery*.
- Decreased carbon dioxide in the blood, which can cause your *heart to pump harder and faster* as well as making *lights seem brighter* and *sounds louder*.
- Increased constriction of blood vessels in your brain, which can cause feelings of *dizziness*, *disorientation*, and even a *sense of unreality* or *separateness from your body*.

All these symptoms may be interpreted as a developing panic attack. As soon

as you start responding to these bodily changes with panic-evoking mental statements to yourself, such as “I’m losing control!” or “What’s happening to me?” *you actually do panic*. Symptoms that initially only mimicked panic set off a reaction that leads to genuine panic. Hyperventilation can either 1) cause physical sensations that lead you to panic *or* 2) contribute to an ongoing panic attack by aggravating unpleasant physical symptoms.

If you suspect that you are subject to hyperventilation, you might notice whether you habitually breathe shallowly from your chest and through your mouth. Notice also, when you’re frightened, whether you tend to hold your breath or breathe very shallowly and quickly. The experience of tingling or numb sensations, particularly in your arms or legs, is also a sign of hyperventilation. If any of these characteristics seem to apply to you, hyperventilation may play a role in either instigating or aggravating your panic reactions or anxiety.

The traditional cure for acute hyperventilation symptoms is to breathe into a paper bag. This technique causes you to breathe in carbon dioxide, restoring the normal balance of oxygen to carbon dioxide in your bloodstream. It is a method that works. Equally effective in reducing symptoms of hyperventilation are the abdominal breathing and calming breath exercises described below. Both of them help you to slow your breathing down, which effectively reduces your intake of oxygen and brings the ratio of oxygen to carbon dioxide back into balance.

If you can recognize the symptoms of hyperventilation for what they are, then learn to curtail them by deliberately slowing your breathing, you needn’t react to them with panic.

The two exercises described below can help you change your breathing pattern. By practicing them, you can achieve a state of deep relaxation in a short period of time. Just three minutes of practicing abdominal breathing or the calming breath exercise will usually induce a deep state of relaxation. Many people have successfully used one or the other technique to abort a panic attack when they felt the first signs of anxiety coming on. The techniques are also very helpful in diminishing anticipatory anxiety you may experience in advance of facing a phobic situation. While the techniques of progressive muscle relaxation and meditation described later in this chapter take up to twenty minutes to achieve their effects, the following two methods can produce a moderate to deep level of relaxation in just three to five minutes.

## Abdominal Breathing Exercise

1. Note the level of tension you're feeling. Then place one hand on your abdomen right beneath your rib cage.
2. Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose into the "bottom" of your lungs—in other words, send the air as low down as you can. If you're breathing from your abdomen, your hand should actually *rise*. Your chest should move only slightly while your abdomen expands. (In abdominal breathing, the *diaphragm*—the muscle that separates the chest cavity from the abdominal cavity—moves downward. In so doing, it causes the muscles surrounding the abdominal cavity to push outward.)
3. When you've taken in a full breath, pause for a moment and then exhale slowly through your nose or mouth, depending on your preference. Be sure to exhale fully. *As you exhale, allow your whole body to just let go* (you might visualize your arms and legs going loose and limp like a rag doll).
4. Do ten slow, full abdominal breaths. Try to keep your breathing *smooth* and *regular*, without gulping in a big breath or letting your breath out all at once. It will help to slow down your breathing if you slowly count to four on the inhale (one-two-three-four) and then slowly count to four on the exhale. Remember to pause briefly at the end of each inhalation. Count from ten down to one counting backward one number with each *exhalation*. The process should go like this:

Slow inhale ... Pause ... Slow exhale ("Ten.")

Slow inhale ... Pause ... Slow exhale ("Nine.")

Slow inhale ... Pause ... Slow exhale ("Eight.")

and so on down to one. If you start to feel light-headed while practicing abdominal breathing, stop for fifteen to twenty seconds, then start again.

5. Extend the exercise if you wish by doing two or three "sets" of abdominal breaths, remembering to count backward from ten to one for each set (each exhalation counts as one number). *Five full minutes* of abdominal breathing will have a pronounced effect in reducing anxiety or early symptoms of panic. Some people prefer to count from one to ten instead.

Feel free to do this if it suits you.

## **Calming Breath Exercise**

The *Calming Breath Exercise* was adapted from the ancient discipline of yoga. It is a very efficient technique for achieving a deep state of relaxation quickly.

1. Breathing from your abdomen, inhale through your nose slowly to a count of five (count slowly “one ... two ... three ... four ... five” as you inhale).
2. Pause and hold your breath to a count of five.
3. Exhale slowly, through your nose or mouth, to a count of five (or more if it takes you longer). Be sure to exhale fully.
4. When you’ve exhaled completely, take two breaths in your normal rhythm, then repeat steps 1 through 3 in the cycle above.
5. Keep up the exercise for at least three to five minutes. This should involve going through *at least* ten cycles of in-five, hold-five, out-five. As you continue the exercise, you may notice that you can count higher when you exhale than when you inhale. Allow these variations in your counting to occur if they do, naturally, and just continue with the exercise for up to five minutes. Remember to take two normal breaths between each cycle. If you start to feel light-headed while practicing this exercise, stop for thirty seconds and then start again.
6. Throughout the exercise, keep your breathing *smooth* and *regular*, without gulping in breaths or breathing out suddenly.
7. *Optional*: Each time you exhale, you may wish to say, “Relax,” “Calm,” “Let go,” or any other relaxing word or phrase silently to yourself. Allow your whole body to let go as you do this. If you keep this up each time you practice, eventually just saying your relaxing word by itself will bring on a mild state of relaxation.

The *Calming Breath Exercise* can be a potent technique for halting the momentum of a panic reaction when the first signs of anxiety come on. It is also useful in reducing symptoms of hyperventilation.

## Practice Exercise

Practice the *Abdominal Breathing Exercise* or *Calming Breath Exercise* for *five minutes every day for at least two weeks*. If possible, find a regular time each day to do this so that your breathing exercise becomes a habit. With practice, you can learn in a short period of time to damp down the physiological reactions underlying anxiety and panic.

Once you feel you've gained some mastery in the use of either technique, apply it when you feel stressed or anxious, or when you experience the onset of panic symptoms. By extending your practice of either exercise to a month or longer, you will begin to retrain yourself to breathe from your abdomen. The more you can shift the center of your breathing from your chest to your - abdomen, the more consistently you will feel relaxed on an ongoing basis.

## Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) is a systematic technique for achieving a deep state of relaxation. It was developed by Dr. Edmund Jacobson more than fifty years ago. Dr. Jacobson discovered that a muscle could be relaxed by first tensing it for a few seconds and then releasing it. Tensing and releasing various muscle groups throughout the body produces a deep state of relaxation, which Dr. Jacobson found capable of relieving a variety of conditions, from high blood pressure to ulcerative colitis.

In his original book, *Progressive Relaxation*, Dr. Jacobson developed a series of two hundred different muscle relaxation exercises and a training program that took months to complete. More recently, the system has been abbreviated to fifteen to twenty basic exercises, which have been found to be just as effective, if practiced regularly, as the original more elaborate system.

Progressive muscle relaxation is especially helpful for people whose anxiety is strongly associated with muscle tension. This is what often leads you to say that you are "uptight" or "tense." You may experience chronic tightness in your shoulders and neck, which can be effectively relieved by practicing progressive muscle relaxation. Other symptoms that respond well to progressive muscle relaxation include tension headaches, backaches, tightness in the jaw, tightness around the eyes, muscle spasms, high blood pressure, and insomnia. If you are troubled by racing thoughts, you may find that systematically relaxing your muscles tends to help slow down your mind. Dr. Jacobson himself once said, "An anxious mind cannot exist in a relaxed body."



The immediate effects of progressive muscle relaxation include all the benefits of the relaxation response described at the beginning of this chapter. Long-term effects of *regular* practice of progressive muscle relaxation include

- A decrease in generalized anxiety
- A decrease in anticipatory anxiety related to phobias
- Reduction in the frequency and duration of panic attacks
- Improved ability to face phobic situations through graded exposure
- Improved concentration
- An increased sense of control over moods
- Increased self-esteem
- Increased spontaneity and creativity

These long-term benefits are sometimes called *generalization effects*: the relaxation experienced during daily sessions tends, after a month or two, to *generalize* to the rest of the day. The *regular* practice of progressive muscle relaxation can go a long way toward helping you to better manage your anxiety, face your fears, overcome panic, and feel better all around.

There are no contraindications for progressive muscle relaxation unless the muscle groups to be tensed and relaxed have been injured. If you take tranquilizers, you may find that regular practice of progressive muscle relaxation will enable you to lower your dosage.

### **Guidelines for Practicing Progressive Muscle Relaxation (or Any Form of Deep Relaxation)**

The following guidelines will help you make the most use of progressive muscle relaxation. They are also applicable to *any* form of deep relaxation you undertake to practice regularly, including self-hypnosis, guided visualization, and meditation.

1. Practice at least *twenty minutes per day*. Two twenty-minute periods are preferable. Once a day is mandatory for obtaining generalization effects. (You may want to begin your practice with thirty-minute periods. As you gain skill in relaxation technique, you will find that the amount of time you need to experience the relaxation response will decrease.)

2. Find a *quiet location* to practice where you won't be distracted. Don't permit the phone to ring while you're practicing. Use a fan or air conditioner to blot out background noise, if necessary.
3. Practice at *regular times*. On awakening, before retiring, or before a meal is generally the best time. A consistent daily relaxation routine will increase the likelihood of generalization effects.
4. Practice on an *empty stomach*. Food digestion after meals will tend to disrupt deep relaxation.
5. Assume a *comfortable position*. Your entire body, including your head, should be supported. Lying down on a sofa or bed and sitting in a reclining chair are two ways of supporting your body most completely. (When lying down, you may want to place a pillow beneath your knees for further support.) Sitting up is preferable to lying down if you are feeling tired and sleepy. It's advantageous to experience the full depth of the relaxation response consciously, without going to sleep.
6. *Loosen any tight garments* and take off shoes, watch, glasses, contact lenses, jewelry, and so on.
7. *Make a decision not to worry about anything*. Give yourself permission to put aside the concerns of the day. Allow taking care of yourself and having peace of mind to take precedence over any of your worries. (Success with relaxation depends on giving peace of mind high priority in your overall scheme of values.)
8. Assume a *passive, detached attitude*. This is probably the most important element. You want to adopt a "let it happen" attitude and be free of any worry about how well you are performing the technique. Do not *try* to relax. Do not *try* to control your body. Do not judge your performance. The point is to let go.

## **Progressive Muscle Relaxation Technique**

Progressive muscle relaxation involves tensing and relaxing, in succession, sixteen different muscle groups of the body. The idea is to tense each muscle group hard (not so hard that you strain, however) for about ten seconds and then to let go of it suddenly. You then give yourself fifteen to twenty seconds to relax,

noticing how the muscle group feels when relaxed in contrast to how it felt when tensed, before going on to the next group of muscles. You might also say to yourself, “I am relaxing,” “Letting go,” “Let the tension flow away,” or any other relaxing phrase during each relaxation period between successive muscle groups. Throughout the exercise, maintain your focus on your muscles. When your attention wanders, bring it back to the particular muscle group you’re working on. The guidelines below describe progressive muscle relaxation in detail:

- Make sure you are in a setting that is quiet and comfortable. Observe the guidelines for practicing relaxation that were previously described.
- When you tense a particular muscle group, do so vigorously, without straining, for seven to ten seconds. You may want to count “one-thousand-one,” “one-thousand-two,” and so on, as a way of marking off seconds.
- Concentrate on what is happening. Feel the buildup of tension in each particular muscle group. It is often helpful to visualize the particular muscle group being tensed.
- When you release the muscles, do so abruptly, and then relax, enjoying the sudden feeling of limpness. Allow the relaxation to develop for at least fifteen to twenty seconds before going on to the next group of muscles.
- Allow all the *other* muscles in your body to remain relaxed, as far as possible, while working on a particular muscle group.
- Tense and relax each muscle group once. But if a particular area feels especially tight, you can tense and relax it two or three times, waiting about twenty seconds between each cycle.

Once you are comfortably supported in a quiet place, follow the detailed instructions below:

1. To begin, take three deep abdominal breaths, exhaling slowly each time. As you exhale, imagine that tension throughout your body begins to flow away.
2. Clench your fists. Hold for seven to ten seconds and then release for fifteen to twenty seconds. *Use these same time intervals for all other muscle groups.*
3. Tighten your biceps by drawing your forearms up toward your

shoulders and “making a muscle” with both arms. Hold ... and then relax.

4. Tighten your *triceps*—the muscles on the undersides of your upper arms—by extending your arms out straight and locking your elbows. Hold ... and then relax.
5. Tense the muscles in your forehead by raising your eyebrows as far as you can. Hold ... and then relax. Imagine your forehead muscles becoming smooth and limp as they relax.
6. Tense the muscles around your eyes by clenching your eyelids tightly shut. Hold ... and then relax. Imagine sensations of deep relaxation spreading all around the area of your eyes.
7. Tighten your jaw by opening your mouth so widely that you stretch the muscles around the hinges of your jaw. Hold ... and then relax. Let your lips part and allow your jaw to hang loose.
8. Tighten the muscles in the back of your neck by pulling your head way back, as if you were going to touch your head to your back (be gentle with this muscle group to avoid injury). Focus only on tensing the muscles in your neck. Hold ... and then relax. (Since this area is often especially tight, it’s good to do the tense-relax cycle twice.)
9. Take a few deep breaths and tune in to the weight of your head sinking into whatever surface it is resting on.
10. Tighten your shoulders by raising them up as if you were going to touch your ears. Hold ... and then relax.
11. Tighten the muscles around your shoulder blades by pushing your shoulder blades back as if you were going to touch them together. Hold the tension in your shoulder blades ... and then relax. Since this area is often especially tense, you might repeat the tense-relax sequence twice.
12. Tighten the muscles of your chest by taking in a deep breath. Hold for up to ten seconds ... and then release slowly. Imagine any excess tension in your chest flowing away with the exhalation.
13. Tighten your stomach muscles by sucking your stomach in. Hold... and then release. Imagine a wave of relaxation spreading through your abdomen.
14. Tighten your lower back by arching it up. (You can omit this exercise if you have lower back pain.) Hold ... and then relax.
15. Tighten your buttocks by pulling them together. Hold ... and

- then relax. Imagine the muscles in your hips going loose and limp.
16. Squeeze the muscles in your thighs all the way down to your knees. You will probably have to tighten your hips along with your thighs, since the thigh muscles attach at the pelvis. Hold ... and then relax. Feel your thigh muscles smoothing out and relaxing completely.
  17. Tighten your calf muscles by pulling your toes toward you (flex carefully to avoid cramps). Hold ... and then relax.
  18. Tighten your feet by curling your toes downward. Hold ... and then relax.
  19. Mentally scan your body for any residual tension. If a particular area remains tense, repeat one or two tense-relax cycles for that group of muscles.
  20. Now imagine a wave of relaxation slowly spreading throughout your body, starting at your head and gradually penetrating every muscle group all the way down to your toes.

The entire progressive muscle relaxation sequence should take you twenty to thirty minutes the first time. With practice, you may decrease the time needed to fifteen to twenty minutes. You might want to make an audio recording of the above exercises to expedite your early practice sessions. Or you may wish to obtain a professionally made recording of the progressive muscle relaxation exercise. (See appendix 3.) Some people always prefer to use an audio recording, while others have the exercises so well learned after a few weeks of practice that they prefer doing them from memory.

Remember—regular practice of progressive muscle relaxation once a day will produce a significant reduction in your overall level of anxiety. It will also reduce the frequency and intensity of panic attacks. Finally, regular practice will reduce anticipatory anxiety that may arise in the course of systematically exposing yourself to phobic situations (see chapter 7).

## Passive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive relaxation is an excellent technique for relaxing tight muscles. Passive muscle relaxation, an alternative technique, can induce a general state of relaxation throughout mind and body. Many people prefer it to progressive relaxation because it is effortless. There is no active tensing and relaxing of muscle groups, only focusing on each muscle group in sequence—from feet to

head—and imagining each such group relaxing. Generally, it's best to lie down with your eyes closed when you practice.

The following script leads you through a passive muscle relaxation exercise. You can download passive muscle relaxation instructions to an MP3 player, use a CD, or create your own audio recording using the script below. See the Resources for Relaxation section (appendix 3) at the end of the book for websites that offer passive muscle relaxation recordings. If you make a recording, it's important to read it slowly, with pauses between the sentences.

*Begin by taking two or three deep, abdominal breaths and let yourself settle back into the chair, bed, or wherever you happen to be right now. Make yourself fully comfortable. Let this be a time just for yourself, putting aside all worries and concerns of the day and making this a time just for you. (Pause.)*

*Let each part of your body begin to relax, starting with your feet. Just imagine your feet letting go and relaxing right now. Let go of any excess tension in your feet. Just imagine the tension draining away. (Pause.)*

*As your feet are relaxing, imagine relaxation moving up into your calves. Let the muscles in your calves unwind and loosen up and let go. Allow any tension you're feeling in your calves to just drain away easily and quickly. (Pause.)*

*Now as your calves are relaxing, allow relaxation to move up into your thighs. Let the muscles in your thighs unwind and smooth out and relax completely. You might begin to feel your legs from your waist down to your feet becoming more and more relaxed. You might notice your legs becoming heavy as they relax more and more. (Pause.)*

*Continue now and let relaxation move into your hips. Feel any excess tension in your hips dissolve and flow away. (Pause.)*

*Soon you might allow relaxation to move into your stomach area. Just let go of any stress in your stomach area—let it all go right now, imagining deep sensations of relaxation spreading all around your abdomen. (Pause.)*

*As your stomach is relaxing, continue to allow relaxation to move up into your chest. All the muscles in your chest can unwind and loosen up and let go. Each time you exhale, imagine breathing away any remaining tension in your chest until your chest feels completely relaxed. Let the relaxation deepen and develop throughout your chest, stomach area, and your legs. (Pause.)*

*Soon you might allow relaxation to move into your shoulders—just letting deep sensations of calmness and relaxation spread all through the muscles of your shoulders. Let your shoulders drop, allowing them to feel completely relaxed. Now allow the relaxation in your shoulders to move down into your arms, spreading into your upper arms, down into your elbows and forearms, and finally all the way down to your wrists and hands. Let your arms relax, enjoying the good feeling of relaxation in your arms. (Pause.)*

*Put aside any worries, any uncomfortable, unpleasant thoughts right now. Let yourself be totally in the present moment as you let yourself relax more and more. (Pause.)*

*You can feel relaxation moving into your neck now. All the muscles in your neck just unwind, smooth out, and relax completely. Just imagine the muscles in your neck loosening up just like a knotted cord unraveling. (Pause.)*

*Then soon, the relaxation can move into your chin and jaws. Allow your jaws to relax, letting your jaws loosen up. As they are relaxing, imagine relaxation moving into the area around your eyes. Any tension around your eyes can just dissipate and flow away as you allow your eyes to relax completely. Any eyestrain just dissolves*

*now and your eyes can fully relax. Now let your forehead relax too—let the muscles in your forehead smooth out and relax completely, noticing the weight of your head against whatever it's resting on as you allow your entire head to relax completely. (Pause.)*

*Just enjoy the good feeling of relaxation all over now—letting yourself drift deeper and deeper into quietness and peace—getting more and more in touch with that place deep inside of perfect peace and serenity.*

## The Peaceful Scene

After completing progressive or passive muscle relaxation, it's helpful to visualize yourself in the midst of a peaceful scene. Imagining yourself in a very peaceful setting can give you a global sense of relaxation that frees you from anxious thoughts. The peaceful setting can be a quiet beach, a stream in the mountains, or a calm lake. Or it can be your bedroom or a cozy fireside on a cold winter night. Don't restrict yourself to reality; you can imagine, if you want to, floating on a cloud or flying on a magic carpet. The important thing is to visualize the scene in sufficient detail so that it completely absorbs your attention. Allowing yourself to be absorbed in a peaceful scene will deepen your state of relaxation, giving you actual physiological results. Your muscular tension lessens, your heart rate slows down, your breathing deepens, your capillaries open up and warm your hands and feet, and so on. A relaxing visualization constitutes a light form of self-hypnosis.

Here are three examples of peaceful scenes.

### **THE BEACH**

*You're walking along a beautiful, deserted beach. You are barefoot and can feel the firm white sand beneath your feet as you walk along the margin of the sea. You can hear the sound of the surf as the waves ebb and flow. The sound is hypnotic, relaxing you more and more. The water is a beautiful turquoise blue flecked with whitecaps far out where the waves are cresting. Near the horizon*



*you can see a small sailboat gliding smoothly along. The sound of the waves breaking on the shore lulls you deeper and deeper into relaxation. You draw in the fresh, salty smell of the air with each breath. Your skin glows with the warmth of the sun. You can feel a gentle breeze against your cheek and ruffling your hair. Taking in the whole scene, you feel very calm and at ease.*

## **THE FOREST**

*You're snuggled in your sleeping bag. Daylight is breaking in the forest. You can feel the rays of the sun beginning to warm your face. The dawn sky stretches above you in pastel shades of pink and orange. You can smell the fresh, piney fragrance of the surrounding woods. Nearby you can hear the rushing waters of a mountain stream. The crisp, cool morning air is refreshing and invigorating. You're feeling very cozy, comfortable, and secure.*

## **AT HOME**

*Imagine yourself comfortably relaxing on a sofa or your bed at home. As you lie back, take some deep, abdominal breaths and set aside all of the worries and concerns of the day. The room is quiet and free of distractions. The phone is turned off and you are free of any obligations to do anything. Though people may be elsewhere in the house, they know to leave you alone. It's feeling good to be able to kick back, rest, and let your body and mind begin to slow down. You can feel your whole body starting to relax. As you continue to rest and relax, you find yourself becoming more deeply comfortable and at ease. In this quiet place, you are feeling very safe, secure, and at peace.*

Note that these scenes are described in language that appeals to the senses of sight, hearing, touch, and smell. Using multisensory words increases the power of the scene to compel you, enabling you to experience it as if you were actually there. The whole point of imagining a peaceful scene is to transport you from

your normal state of restless thinking into an altered state of deep relaxation.

### EXERCISE

Use a separate sheet of paper to design your own peaceful scene. Be sure to describe it in vivid detail, appealing to as many of your senses as possible. It may help to answer the following questions:

- What does the scene look like?
- What colors are prominent?
- What sounds are present?
- What time of day is it?
- What is the temperature?
- What are you touching or in physical contact with in the scene?
- What does the air smell like?
- Are you alone or with somebody else?

Just as with progressive muscle relaxation, you may wish to record your peaceful scene so that you can conjure it up without effort. You may find it helpful to record the instructions for progressive muscle relaxation before describing your peaceful scene. You can use the script below to introduce your peaceful scene when you make your own recording:

*Just think of relaxing every muscle in your body, from the top of your head to the tips of your toes. (Pause.)*

*As you exhale, imagine releasing any remaining tension from your body, mind, or thoughts ... just let that stress go. (Pause.)*

*And with every breath you inhale, feel your body drifting down deeper ... down deeper into total relaxation. (Pause.)*

*And now imagine going to your peaceful scene ... Imagine your special place as vividly as possible, as if you were really there. (Insert your peaceful scene.)*

*You are very comfortable in your beautiful place, and there is no one to disturb you. ... This is the most peaceful place in the world for you. ... Just imagine yourself there, feeling a sense of peace flow through you and a sense of well-being. Enjoy these positive feelings. ... Allow them to grow stronger and stronger. (Pause.)*

*And remember, anytime you wish, you can return to this special place by just taking time to relax. (Pause.)*

*These peaceful and positive feelings of relaxation can grow stronger and stronger each time you choose to relax.*

Once you have imagined your own ideal peaceful scene, practice returning to it every time you do progressive muscle relaxation, deep breathing, or any other relaxation technique. This will help to reinforce the scene in your mind. After a while, it will be so solidly established that you will be able to return to it on the spur of the moment—whenever you wish to calm yourself and turn off anxious thinking. This technique is one of the quickest and most effective tools you can use to counter ongoing anxiety or stress during the day. Fantasizing a peaceful scene is also an important part of imagery desensitization, a process for overcoming phobias described in chapter 7.

## Guided Visualizations

Many people enjoy listening to guided visualizations in order to relax. Like passive muscle relaxation, no effort is required. You simply lie down, close your eyes, and listen to a CD or MP3 file on your portable audio device for twenty to thirty minutes, preferably at the same time every day. Follow the guidelines for practicing any form of deep relaxation given earlier in this chapter. See “Guidelines for Practicing Progressive Muscle Relaxation (or Any Form of Deep Relaxation).”

There are many places on the Web where you can obtain relaxing visualizations. Some popular ones you can try are [drmilller.com](http://drmilller.com) and [soundstrue.com](http://soundstrue.com), or you can do a search for “relaxation CDs” at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com). It’s a good idea to purchase at least two or three different relaxation programs to see what works best for you. Also see appendix 3 for further resources.

## Meditation

From the time we awaken, until we go to bed, most of us are engaged almost continually in external activities. We tend to be only minimally in touch with our inner feelings and awareness. Even when we withdraw our senses and are falling asleep at night, we usually experience a *mélange* of memories, fantasies, thoughts, and feelings related to the preceding or coming day. Rarely do we get beyond all of this and experience ourselves “just being” in the present moment. For many people in Western society, in fact, the idea of doing nothing, or “just being,” is difficult to comprehend.

Meditation can bring you to this place of just being. It is the one process that allows you to completely stop, let go of thoughts about the immediate past or future, and simply focus on being in the here and now. It can be a helpful discipline to practice when you find that your mind is racing or excessively busy. For a detailed discussion of meditation, both as a relaxation technique and as a general strategy for coping with anxiety, please see chapter 18.

## Yoga

The word *yoga* means to “yoke” or “unify.” By definition, yoga is involved with promoting unity of mind, body, and spirit. Although in the West yoga is usually thought of as a series of stretch exercises, it actually embraces a broad philosophy of life and an elaborate system for personal transformation. This system includes ethical precepts, a vegetarian diet, the familiar stretches or postures, specific practices for directing and controlling the breath, concentration practices, and deep meditation. It was originally laid out by the philosopher Pantanjali in the second century BC and is still practiced throughout the world today.

Yoga postures, by themselves, provide a very effective means to increase fitness, flexibility, and relaxation. They can be practiced alone or with a group. Many people, myself included, find that yoga simultaneously increases energy and vitality while calming the mind. Yoga may be compared to progressive muscle relaxation (PMR), in that it involves holding the body in certain flexed positions for a few moments and then relaxing. Both yoga and PMR lead to relaxation. However, I personally find yoga to be more effective than progressive muscle relaxation in freeing up blocked energy. It seems to get energy moving up and down the spine and throughout the body in a way that doesn't happen as readily with PMR. Like vigorous exercise, yoga directly

promotes mind-body integration. However, in many ways, it is more specific. Each yoga posture reflects a mental attitude, whether that attitude is one of surrender, as in certain forward-bending poses, or of strengthening the will, as in a backward-bending pose. By emphasizing certain yoga postures and movements, you may be able to cultivate certain positive qualities or move through other negative, restrictive personality patterns. There is an entire school of yoga therapy that uses yoga as a methodology for addressing and working through personality issues.

If you are interested in learning yoga, the best place to start is with a class at a local health club or community college. If such classes are unavailable in your area, try working with a yoga video at home. The popular magazine *Yoga Journal* offers many excellent yoga videos.

## Calming Music

Music has often been called the language of the soul. It seems to touch something deep within us. It can move you into inner spaces beyond your anxiety and worries. Relaxing music can help you to settle down into a place of serenity deep within that is impervious to the stresses and problems of daily life. It may also uplift you from a depressed mood. Whether you use music while driving, as a background while at work, or in the foreground when you want to take time out to relax, it is one of the most powerful and time-honored methods for letting go of anxiety or worry. If you use music to assuage anxiety, be sure to select pieces that are genuinely relaxing rather than stimulating or emotionally evocative.

Your portable audio device with earphones can be particularly handy at night if you don't want to disturb others around you. You may find music to be a helpful background to relaxation techniques, such as progressive muscle relaxation or guided visualizations. See appendix 3 for a list of relaxing music selections.

## Some Common Obstacles to a Daily Program of Deep Relaxation

There are many difficulties you may encounter in trying to practice any form of deep relaxation on a regular basis. You may start out enthusiastically, setting aside time to practice every day. Yet after a week or so, you may find yourself "forgetting" to practice. In a fast-paced society that rewards us for speed, -

efficiency, and productivity, it's difficult to stop everything and simply relax for twenty to thirty minutes. We are so used to "doing" that it may seem like a chore just to "be."

If you find that you've broken your personal commitment to practice deep relaxation on a daily basis, take time to examine very carefully what you are *saying to yourself*—what excuses you make—on those days when you don't relax. If you just "don't feel like it," there is usually some more specific reason for feeling that way that can be found by examining what you're telling yourself.

Some common excuses for not practicing include

- "I don't have time to relax."

What this usually means is that you haven't given relaxation sufficient priority among all the other activities you've crowded into your schedule.

- "I don't have any place to relax."

Try creating one. You might let the kids watch their favorite TV show or play with their favorite toys while you go into another room, with instructions not to interrupt you. If you and the kids have only one room, or if they are too young to respect your privacy, then you need to practice at a time when they are out of the house or asleep. The same goes for a demanding spouse.

- "Relaxation exercises seem too slow or boring."

If you're telling yourself this, it's a good indication that you are too speeded up, too frantically pushing yourself through life. Slow down—it's good for you.

In some individuals, deep relaxation may bring up suppressed feelings, which are often accompanied by sensations of anxiety. If this happens to you, be sure to start off with relatively short periods of relaxation, working up gradually to longer periods. The moment you start feeling any anxiety, simply open your eyes and stop whatever procedure you're practicing until you feel better. With time and patience, this particular problem should diminish. If it doesn't, it would be helpful to consult a professional therapist

skilled in treating anxiety disorders to assist you in desensitizing yourself to relaxation.

- “I just don’t have the discipline.”

Often this means that you haven’t persisted with practicing relaxation long enough to internalize it as a habit. You may have made similar statements to yourself in the past when you were attempting to acquire a new behavior. Brushing your teeth didn’t come naturally when you first started. It took some time and diligence to reach the point where it became an honored habit. If you expend the effort to practice deep relaxation five to seven days per week for at least one month, it will likely become so ingrained that you won’t need to think about doing it anymore—you’ll just do it automatically.

Practicing deep relaxation is more than learning a technique: it involves making a basic shift in your attitude and lifestyle. It requires a willingness to give priority to your health and internal peace of mind over the other pressing claims of productivity, accomplishment, money, or status.

## Downtime and Time Management

This chapter on relaxation would not be complete without a discussion of the concepts of downtime and time management. In fact, fully appreciating and implementing these ideas in your life is *the most important thing you can do if you would like to achieve a more relaxed lifestyle*.

You can practice deep muscle relaxation or meditation every day and feel a pleasant respite for twenty to thirty minutes. These practices can definitely enhance your overall feeling of relaxation if you practice them regularly. Yet if you’re on a treadmill the rest of the time, with too much to get done and no breaks in your schedule, you’re likely to remain under stress, prone to chronic anxiety or panic attacks, and ultimately headed toward burnout.

### **Downtime**

*Downtime* is exactly what it sounds like—*time out* from work or other responsibilities to give yourself an opportunity to rest and replenish your energy. Without periods of downtime, any stress you experience while dealing with work or other responsibilities tends to become *cumulative*. It keeps building without

any remission. You may tend to keep pushing yourself until finally you drop from exhaustion or experience an aggravation of your anxiety or phobias. Sleep at night doesn't really count as downtime. If you go to bed feeling stressed, you may sleep for eight hours and still wake up feeling tense, tired, and stressed. Downtime needs to be scheduled during the day, apart from sleep. Its primary purpose is simply to allow a break in the stress cycle—to prevent stress you're experiencing from becoming cumulative. I recommend that you give yourself the following periods of downtime:

One hour per day   One day per week   One week out of every twelve to sixteen weeks

If you don't have four weeks of paid vacation per year, then be willing to take time off without pay. During these periods of downtime, you disengage from any task you consider work, put aside all responsibilities, and don't answer the phone unless it's someone you would enjoy hearing from.

There are three kinds of downtime, each of which has an important place in developing a more relaxed lifestyle: 1) rest time, 2) recreation time, and 3) relationship time. It's important that you provide yourself enough downtime so that you have time for all three. Often recreation and relationship time can be combined. However, it's important to use rest time for just that—and nothing else.

*Rest time* is time when you set aside all activities and just allow yourself to *be*. You stop action and let yourself fully rest. Rest time might involve lying on the couch and doing nothing, quietly meditating, sitting in your recliner and listening to peaceful music, soaking in a Jacuzzi, or taking a catnap in the middle of the workday. The key to rest time is that it is fundamentally passive—you allow yourself to stop doing and accomplishing and just *be*. Contemporary society encourages each of us to be productive and always accomplish more and more every moment of the waking day. Rest time is a needed counterpoint. When you're under stress, one hour of rest time per day, separate from the time you sleep, is optimal.

*Recreation time* involves engaging in activities that help to “re-create” you—that is, serve to replenish your energy. Recreation time brightens and uplifts your spirits. In essence, it is doing anything that you experience as fun or play. Examples of such activities might include puttering in the garden, reading a novel, seeing a special movie, going on a hike, playing soccer, taking a short trip, baking a loaf of bread, or fishing. Recreation time can be done during the workweek and is most important to have on your days off from work. Such time



can be spent either alone or with someone else, in which case it overlaps with the third type of downtime.

*Relationship time* is time when you put aside your private goals and responsibilities in order to enjoy being with another person—or, in some cases, with several people. The focus of relationship time is to honor your relationship with your partner, children, extended family members, friends, pets, and so on, and forget about your individual pursuits for a while. If you have a family, relationship time needs to be allocated equitably between time alone with your spouse, time alone with your children, and time when the entire family gets together. If you're single with a partner, time needs to be judiciously allocated between time with your partner and time with friends.

When you slow down and make time to be with others, you're less likely to neglect your basic needs for intimacy, touching, affection, validation, support, and so on (see the section called “Your Basic Needs” in chapter 14). Meeting these basic needs is absolutely vital to your well-being. Without sufficient time devoted to important relationships, you will surely suffer—and the people you most care about are bound to, as well.

How can you allow for more downtime (all three kinds) in your life? An important prerequisite is to get past workaholism. Workaholism is an addictive disorder in which work is the *only* thing that gives you a sense of inner fulfillment and self-worth. You devote all your time and energy to work, neglecting both your physical and your emotional needs. Workaholism describes an unbalanced way of life that often leads first to chronic stress, then to burnout, and ultimately to serious illness.

If you're a workaholic, it's possible to *learn* to enjoy nonwork aspects of your life, as discussed above, and achieve a more balanced approach in general. Deliberately making time for rest, recreation, and relationships may be difficult at first, but it tends to get easier and to become self-rewarding as time goes on.

Another important step is simply *to be willing to do less*. That is, you literally reduce the number of tasks and responsibilities you handle in any given day. In some cases, this may involve changing jobs; in others, it may merely involve restructuring how you allocate time for work versus rest and relaxation. For some individuals, this translates to a fundamental decision to make earning money less important and a simpler, more balanced lifestyle more important. Before you think about leaving your present job, however, consider how you can shift your values in the direction of placing more emphasis on the *process* of life (“how” you live) as opposed to accomplishments and productivity (“what” you

actually do) within your current life situation.

## EXERCISE

Take some time to reflect on how you might allocate more time for each of the three types of downtime discussed. Write your answers in the space provided below.

*Rest time:*

*Recreation time:*

*Relationship time:*

## Time Management

A very important skill to have if you want more time away from work and responsibilities is good time management. Time management describes the way in which you organize or structure your daily activities over time. Ineffective time management can lead to stress, anxiety, burnout, and, eventually, illness. Effective time management, on the other hand, will allow you more time for the three types of downtime described above: rest, recreation, and relationships.

Developing good time management skills may necessitate giving up some cherished habits. Are any of the following tendencies true for you? Check off any of the statements below that apply:

- “I tend to underestimate the amount of time it takes to complete an activity or task. By the time I finish, I’ve taken up time I needed for something else.”
- “I tend to squeeze too many things into too little time. As a result, I end up rushing.”
- “I find it difficult to let go of something I’m involved in, so I end up not leaving myself enough time to get to (or complete) the next activity I need to do.”
- “I have difficulty prioritizing activities—getting the most essential ones done before I attend to the less important ones.”
- “I have difficulty delegating nonessential tasks to others, even when it is possible to do so.”

If you checked off any of the above statements as true, you might benefit from

learning and cultivating effective time management skills.

The skills described below—prioritization, delegation, allowing extra time, letting go of perfectionism, overcoming procrastination, and saying no—can help you work with, rather than against, time.

## **PRIORITIZATION**

Prioritization means learning to discriminate between tasks or activities that are essential and those that are nonessential. You attend to what's most important and put everything else on hold (or delegate tasks to other people—see below).

You may find it useful to divide your daily tasks and responsibilities into three categories: *essential*, *important*, and *less important* or trivial. *Essential* tasks or activities include those that require immediate attention: they are absolutely necessary—such as getting the kids off to school. Alternatively, they can be activities that are very important to you—such as physical exercise, if you're working on reducing your anxiety. *Important* tasks and activities are those that have significant value but can be delayed for a limited time, such as spending quality one-on-one time with your spouse or partner. Important tasks cannot be delayed for a long time, however. Less important or trivial tasks can be postponed a long time without serious risk or can be delegated to others (tasks such as taking the stack of newspapers in the garage to the recycling center or deleting photos you don't want to keep on your computer).

You may find it helpful, perhaps when you first get up in the morning, to categorize the tasks facing you as *essential*, *important*, or *less important*. Actually divide a piece of paper into three columns and write everything down. Then start with tasks in the *essential* and *important* columns. Only move on to the tasks in the *less important* category when you're done with all the tasks in the first two columns. In general, I would advise postponing all the tasks in the *less important* column in favor of giving yourself more downtime.

If you're serious about achieving a more relaxed lifestyle, then you'll need to place downtime—time for rest, recreation, and relationships—into the *essential* category. When downtime becomes a regular and high-priority item in your schedule—something you refuse to postpone—you will begin to take life more slowly and easily. As a result, you'll feel less stressed, better able to sleep, and more capable of enjoying yourself in general. Making downtime essential requires giving up addictions to work, outer achievement, and success, as well as letting go of perfectionism.

You may also want to include under the essential column those activities that contribute to the achievement of your long-term ideals and life goals. Long-term ideals and life goals tend to remain just that for most people—postponed until the distant future—*unless* you take time to do something toward achieving them on a step-by-step basis in the present.

## **DELEGATION**

Skill in delegation means being willing to let someone else take care of a task or activity that has lower priority for you or is an important task that *you* don't have to do personally. By delegating, you free up more time for those tasks that are essential and require your personal attention. Often delegation means paying someone else to do what you might do yourself if you had unlimited time: housecleaning, car washing, cooking, child care, basic repairs, and so on. At other times, delegation simply means distributing tasks equitably among family members: your spouse and the kids do their fair share of household chores. A key to delegation is a willingness to trust and rely on others' capabilities. Give up the idea that only you can do an adequate job, and be willing to entrust responsibility for a task to someone else.

## **ALLOWING EXTRA TIME**

A common problem in time management is underestimating the amount of time required to complete a task. The result is that you end up rushing to try to get something done, or else run into overtime and encroach on time that was needed for the next activity in your schedule. As a general rule, it helps to allow a little more time than you would expect for each activity during the day. It's better to err in favor of overestimating the time required for a task, leaving yourself plenty of time to proceed in a leisurely manner to the next activity.

An important prerequisite for allowing extra time is to be *willing to do fewer things*—not to cram as many tasks or activities into a given time frame. This may be very difficult for people addicted to their own adrenaline, who seem to get a certain exhilaration and fulfillment from rushing around or feeling busy. However, allowing extra time has tremendous rewards in terms of letting you proceed through your day at a more relaxed and easy pace. To do so will save you a lot of stress.

## **LETTING GO OF PERFECTIONISM**

Perfectionism essentially means setting your standards and expectations too high: there is no allowance for the inevitable mistakes, frustration, delays, and limitations that come up in the process of working toward any goal. Perfectionism can keep you on a treadmill of overwork or overdedication, to the point that you don't allow time out for your own needs. Letting go of perfectionism requires a fundamental attitude shift. It becomes all right simply to do your best, to make some mistakes along the way, and to accept the results you get, even if your best efforts fall short. It also involves learning to laugh on occasion rather than despair at the limitations inherent to human existence. (For a more in-depth discussion about letting go of perfectionism, see chapter 10.)

### OVERCOMING PROCRASTINATION

Procrastination is always self-defeating when you leave yourself too little time. Whether preparing for an exam or preparing to go to work, putting off the inevitable leaves you harried and stressed in the end.

One reason for procrastinating can be that you really don't want to do whatever it is that needs doing in the first place. If this is your reason for stalling, the solution lies either in delegating or in prioritizing. If you can delegate an undesirable task to someone else, then by all means do so. If you can't, then get the undesirable task done *first*—in other words, prioritize it over the other things you need to do. Promising yourself to do something fun or interesting afterward as a reward for getting the undesirable task done often works well. In overcoming procrastination, the carrot usually works much better than the stick.

Another reason for procrastinating is perfectionism. If you feel that something has to be done perfectly, you may keep postponing getting started because you fear that you can't do it "just right." The solution here is to jump in and get started, whether or not you feel you're ready to do it right. An important principle to remember is that *motivation often follows behavior*. Just getting started on a task will often generate the motivation to follow through and complete it. Then you may have enough time left over to go back and rework or refine what you did during the first round. If you keep stalling, however, you can use up all the time needed to do the kind of job you'd like to do. The worst outcome is when you don't attempt the task at all because of your impossibly high standards.

### SAYING NO

There are many reasons why people have difficulty saying no. You may always want to be pleasing and responsive to family and friends, no matter what they ask of you, so you have difficulty setting limits, even when their demands or needs become more than you can handle. Or you may be so bound up with your work that it's your primary source of identity and meaning. No matter how demanding and time-consuming work responsibilities become, you keep taking them on, because not to do so would leave you feeling empty.

In short, difficulty saying no is usually tied up with your self-image. If your image of yourself requires you to be nice all the time and always available to everyone, then there is probably no limit to what others will ask of you. If your work is who you are, then it will be hard for you to say no to work demands in order to make time for your personal needs.

Learning to say no requires a willingness to relinquish cherished beliefs about yourself—which can be one of the hardest things for anyone to do. This may involve expanding your identity beyond taking care of others, or taking care of business, and learning to take the time to nurture and attend to your own needs. It means accepting the reality that taking care of yourself—even at the expense of what you do for others—isn't selfish. Can you really offer your best to others or your work if you are tired, stressed, or burned out?

In my own case, it was necessary to go to the edge of serious illness before the importance of saying no fully sank in. In many cases, illness—whether in the form of panic attacks, depression, or some other persistent problem—may force you to reevaluate the way you live your life. Illness can be the catalyst that makes you slow down, pay attention, and learn how to live in a simpler, more balanced fashion.

## Summary of Things to Do

1. Reread the section on abdominal breathing and decide which breathing exercise you want to work with. Practice the exercise you prefer for five minutes per day for at least two weeks. - Practice for one month or longer if you wish to change your breathing pattern from your chest downward toward your abdomen.

Use the abdominal breathing or the calming breath exercise whenever you spontaneously feel symptoms of anxiety beginning to come on.

2. Practice progressive muscle relaxation for twenty to thirty minutes per day (two practice periods per day is even better) for at least two weeks. For the first few times, have someone read you the instructions or record them—so that you can follow them effortlessly. Eventually, you'll memorize the instructions and can dispense with the recording.
3. Visualize going to a peaceful scene following progressive muscle relaxation. It may help to record a detailed description of such a scene following your recorded instructions for progressive muscle relaxation. Try going to your peaceful scene (along with doing abdominal breathing) at those times during the day when anxiety comes up.
4. After practicing progressive muscle relaxation for at least two weeks, you may enjoy its benefits so much that you decide to adopt it as your preferred deep relaxation technique. Alternatively, you may want to learn to meditate (see chapter 18). *The type of relaxation technique you use is less important than your willingness and commitment to practice some method of deep relaxation on a daily basis.*
5. If you encounter difficulties in maintaining your commitment to practicing deep relaxation over the long term, reread the section called “Some Common Obstacles to a Daily Program of Deep Relaxation.”
6. Spend some time considering the section “Downtime and Time Management.” Do you need to allocate more time in your life for rest, relaxation, and personal relationships? What changes would you need to make in your daily schedule to achieve this? Think about at least one change you could make, starting this week. Are you willing to commit to it?

## Further Reading

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