

"Knowledge Dispels Fear"

The Depression Self Help Plan



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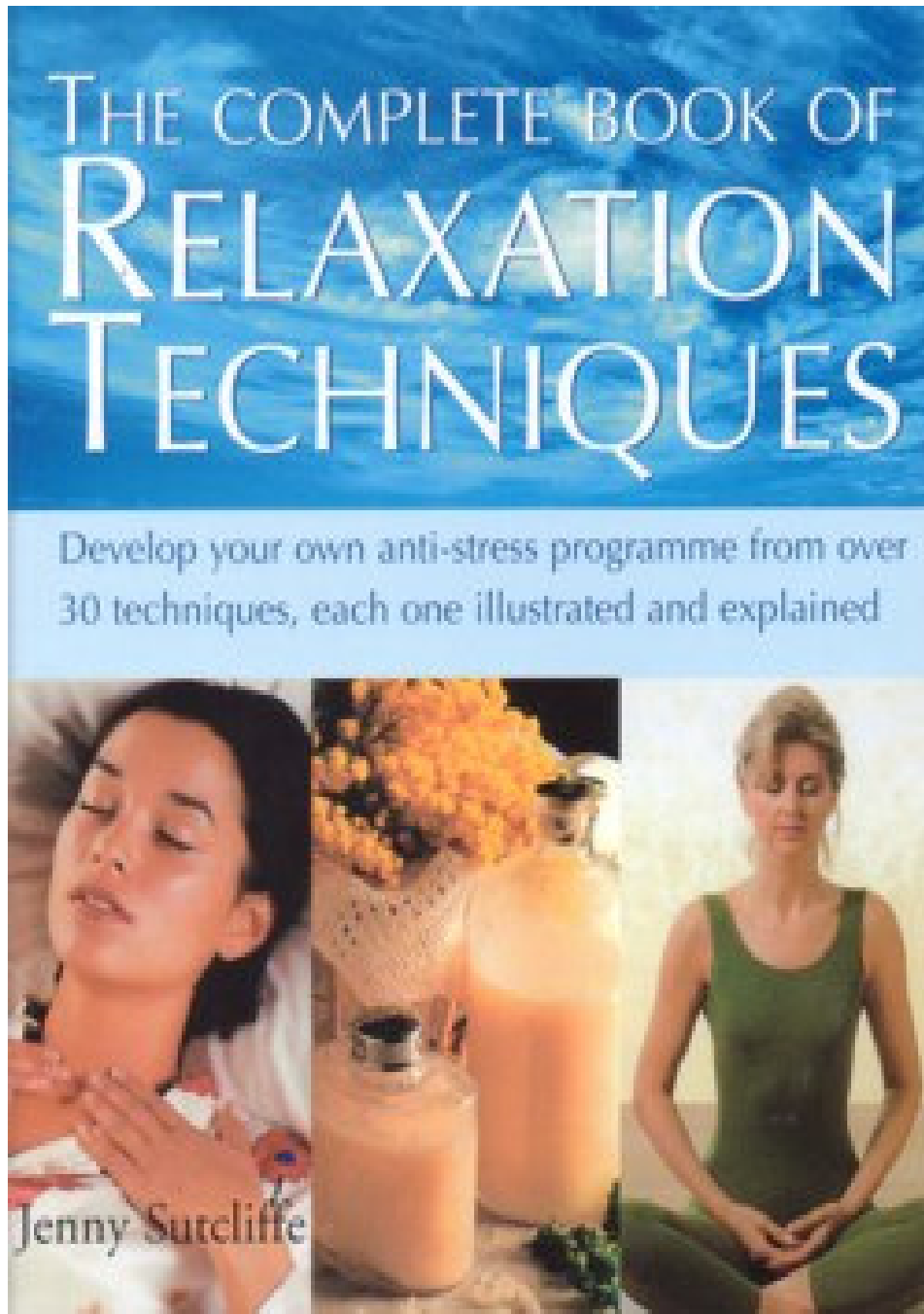
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Session (4) Relaxation Training

Caution

The Depression Self-Help Plan is designed as a self-help tool for clinical Depression. It is important that you do not diagnose yourself as suffering depression but see your Doctor for an assessment and diagnosis, because there are some medical conditions whose symptoms can mimic those of depression such as thyroid gland problems, pernicious anaemia etc, and if this is the case then it is vital to get it diagnosed and treated by your doctor. If you have any health problems and/or are taking any form of regular medication, are pregnant, then discuss with your doctor before using the depression self-help techniques outlined in this course. The techniques outlined in this course are designed to be used in conjunction with any treatment from your Doctor, not as an alternative to standard treatment by your doctor. The techniques outlined in this self-help plan, such as relaxation, exercise, etc. may cause a few people on long-term medication to require a reduction to their medication; this should not be done by the individual but by their doctor. Do not practise techniques like relaxation while driving a car, or doing any other activity that needs concentration for safety and do not drive immediately after using a relaxation technique, acupuncture or any other technique that makes you drowsy. We also advise that you do not make any life changing decisions such as leaving a job or ending a relationship until you have recovered from your depression, otherwise you may make a mistake that you later regret.

Recommended Reading: Relaxation



Sutcliffe J. (2004) *The Complete Book of Relaxation Techniques*, Quantum.

Introduction

"Controlled scientific studies have established that relaxation can help relieve depression, fatigue and anxiety" (Dr Paul Martin, PhD)

Relaxation Therapy has been successfully used to reduce depression. Research by leading government organisations, such as the National Institutes of Mental Health, has revealed that clinical depression is partly caused because the branch of the autonomic nervous system that triggers the fight/flight response is overactive which leads to heightened levels of stress hormones in the blood stream. One of these stress hormones is cortisol and research has shown that chronically elevated levels of cortisol interfere with the brain's manufacture of the mood lifting neurotransmitter serotonin, which has been implicated in depression. Relaxation Training is one Stress Management technique that induces the opposite of the fight/flight response – the Relaxation Response, which helps to switch off the fight/flight response causing the levels of stress hormones in the blood stream to fall.

When we become tense one of the actions of the fight-flight response is to cause the muscles in our body to become tense. This is useful in the short term (ie to deal with the threat), however it can cause problems in the long term. When we become chronically stressed the fight/flight hormones remain elevated and this can cause chronic muscle tension resulting in pain. Chronic muscle tension can cause headaches, neck and back pain, plus it also maintains our anxiety even after the original difficult event has been resolved. One useful strategy, to help us turn-off the fight/flight response, make us more aware of and reduce our muscle tension, and help us increase our depression resistance, is learning relaxation techniques. Relaxation helps to reduce the arousal of the sympathetic nervous system creating the opposite biochemical and physiological effect to the fight/flight response. Relaxation works because it is impossible to be relaxed and tense at the same time.

We all experience pressure and stress at some time in our lives. Fortunately, for most, these are brief episodes, but we cannot keep over-taxing ourselves without it affecting us at some time. If the flight-flight response is triggered too frequently or goes on for too long it can put us at higher risk of developing a number of different stress related health problems such as clinical depression.

There is a lot of research linking depression to chronic stress. Research has suggested that depression is partly caused by a heightened background level of anxiety and this causes the part of the nervous system that triggers the fight/flight response to be overactive; if we can get excess anxiety under control this will help us to reduce our depression.

Research by Professor Herbert Benson and colleagues, on people under stress who practiced regular relaxation, showed that their body organs were less affected by stress hormones than people under stress who did not practice relaxation.

Sometimes people say they haven't got the time to relax. If this is the case, then it's exactly the time to make time to practice relaxation. Our lives have speeded up; we barely have time to take a breath from finishing one task before we have to start another task. People who live in urban areas even walk faster than people in rural areas. Our fight/flight response has become overactive. Some people are taught that you must always be active, busy and productive and that to sit down doing nothing is almost a sin. Sitting down doing relaxation is not sitting down doing nothing and is not being unproductive. In fact, the opposite is true; if you regularly practice relaxation it will actually make you more efficient and productive.

Relaxation training is a skill and like any other skill it takes time to gain the maximum benefits from it; it needs to be practiced on a regular basis, not just when we are having difficulty. The benefits of relaxation are cumulative; it can take a few weeks before we start to feel the benefits and regular relaxation practise supplies the greatest benefits. Relaxation is a chance to re-charge our batteries and is an important technique for helping to improve our stress and depression resistance.

Relaxation is an excellent cushioning technique. There are some stressors that are impossible to remove from our lives but that doesn't mean there is nothing we can do to reduce their impact. Practicing relaxation techniques on a regular basis can help to reduce the impact of these stressors.

There are a whole host of different types of relaxation techniques that induce the relaxation response. We will be discussing the more common forms of relaxation techniques later in this session.

Free MP3 Relaxation Files

The University of Texas has produced 10 free mp3 files of different relaxation techniques; you can download these relaxation files free. In order to download them just click on the link below.

www.utexas.edu/student/cmhc/RelaxationTape/

- Track 01 MP3: Deep Breathing
- Track 02 MP3: Muscle Relaxation
- Track 03 MP3: Muscle Relaxation
- Track 04 MP3: Muscle Relaxation
- Track 05 MP3: Cruise Imagery
- Track 06 MP3: Cruise Imagery
- Track 07 MP3: Cruise Imagery
- Track 08 MP3: Forrest Imagery
- Track 09 MP3: Forrest Imagery
- Track 10 MP3: Forrest Imagery

What is the Relaxation Response?

"Regular elicitation of the relaxation response has been scientifically proven to be an effective treatment for a wide range of stress related disorders. In fact, to the extent that any disease that is caused or made worse by stress, the Relaxation Response can help." (Prof. H. Benson MD)

The Relaxation Response is a physical state of deep relaxation. From earlier parts of the Depression Self Help Plan you will be aware of the fight/flight response, which is triggered by the sympathetic nervous system when we are under excessive pressure. Fortunately there is another branch of the autonomic nervous system called the parasympathetic nervous system, which has an opposite response to the fight/flight mode, called the Relaxation Response. This turns off the fight/flight response returning the body and its biochemistry back to pre-stress levels.

Turning off the fight/flight response and turning on the relaxation response results in decreases in heart rate, blood pressure and muscle tension. As soon as you decide that a situation is no longer threatening the brain stops sending emergency signals to the brain stem, which in turn stops sending panic messages to the nervous system. A few moments after you stop sending your body danger messages, the fight/flight response burns out and your physiology and biochemistry return to pre-stress levels.

The term The Relaxation Response was coined in the late 1960's by Cardiologist, Professor Herbert Benson MD, who spent more than 30 years researching stress, stress management, the relaxation response and it's health benefits. The Relaxation Response is the counterbalance mechanism to the Fight/Flight Response. Professor Benson's research found that stimulating an area of the hypothalamus gland in the brain results in the triggering of the fight/flight response, he also found that the opposite occurs (the relaxation response) when the hypothalamus is stimulated in relaxation. The relaxation response can be stimulated by any relaxation technique such as, progressive muscle relaxation, massage, tai chi, guided imagery etc.

Contrary to popular belief, relaxation does not simply mean doing nothing. Many people mistakenly believe relaxation is sitting with our feet up and that watching the television, listening to music or reading a book are relaxation techniques. But this is not so, they are more forms of distraction activities, and although useful they will not induce true relaxation. The relaxation response is a totally different state (the sleep state is also different to relaxation.) You do not get the same beneficial biochemical and physiological changes while watching TV or reading a book as you do when practising relaxation techniques. Research using EEG monitors to show brainwave patterns of people watching television and others using relaxation techniques, show that practising relaxation causes the brain to switch to alpha type brain waves that indicate relaxation.

We are often told to learn to relax but we are not taught how to relax. Relaxation involves carrying out a relaxing, but purposeful activity; specific techniques such as relaxation breathing or muscle relaxation can produce rapid results when used properly. They can be used just before or after a stressful incident, to produce a calming effect.

Comparison Between the Fight/Flight Response and Relaxation Response

Fight-Flight Response

Sympathetic Nervous System

- Prepares body for fight-flight
- Blood pressure increases
- Muscle tension increases
- Pupils widen
- Air passages widen
- Blood flow to muscles increases
- Bladder sphincter constricts
- Perspiration increases
- Pulse rate increases
- Salivary glands decrease saliva
- Blood clotting increases
- Gastrointestinal activity decreases
- Brain highly alert
- Metabolic rate increases
- Breathing rate increases
- Blood glucose and fats increase
- Lactic acid levels increase
- Anxiety levels increase

Relaxation Response

Parasympathetic Nervous System

- Prepares body for rest
- Blood pressure decreases
- Muscle tension decreases
- Pupils get smaller
- Air passages narrow
- Blood flow to muscles decreases
- Bladder sphincter relaxes
- Perspiration decreases
- Pulse rate decreases
- Increased saliva flow
- Blood clotting normalises
- Gastrointestinal activity increases
- Brain relaxed
- Metabolic rate decreases
- Breathing rate decreases
- Blood glucose and fats normalise
- Lactic acid levels decrease
- Anxiety levels decrease

Types of Relaxation Techniques

“The time to relax is when you don’t have time for it.”

(Unknown)

There are many different types of relaxation technique that can be used to induce the relaxation response such as autogenics, guided imagery, various forms of meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, passive muscle relaxation, t’ai chi, yoga, floatation and many more. We will be discussing a few of these relaxation techniques later in this session. One type of relaxation technique does not suit everybody, so we recommend you try the different techniques and select one that you find works for you. Some are mind-based relaxation techniques such as guided imagery and some are physically based relaxation techniques such as progressive muscle relaxation. Which of the techniques you should use is dependent on your own choice and any relevant medical factors.

For example you shouldn’t use progressive muscle relaxation if you have high blood pressure, or any other cardiovascular problem without discussing it first with your doctor. There are scientific studies that have shown that progressive muscle relaxation can actually help to lower blood pressure but it is wise to discuss this with your doctor before using it.

If you have a lot of thoughts going through your mind you may prefer a guided imagery relaxation because this will help stop the busy thoughts. So we recommend that you try each type of relaxation technique and choose the one that most suits you as an individual.

Types of Relaxation Techniques

A whole host of techniques have been found to induce relaxation such as:

- Acupressure
- Acupuncture
- Aromatherapy
- Autogenics
- Relaxation Breathing
- Floatation
- Guided Imagery
- Head Massage
- Laughter
- Massage
- Meditation
- Music
- Passive Muscle Relaxation
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- Self Hypnosis
- Self Massage
- T’ai Chi
- Yoga

We shall now discuss in more detail a few of the most common relaxation techniques.

Autogenic Training

“Autogenic training is a series of mental exercises which brings about profound relaxation similar to certain meditation states. The exercises allow the mind to calm itself by switching off the body’s stress response.”

(The Royal London Homoeopathic Hospital, University College London Hospitals NHS Trust)

The word Autogenics comes from the Greek meaning internally generated. Autogenic Training combines a number of techniques that induce relaxation such as self-hypnosis, imagery and autosuggestion (suggesting feelings of relaxation, heavy muscles and warmth). Autogenic Training is similar to hypnosis without having to induce hypnosis. It has been described by some as a western version of Yoga.

When it was first developed in Germany in the 1920’s by Psychiatrist Johannes Schultz, Autogenic Training was in its long form, however due to the fact it took too long to practice, a shorter, modern version was developed. Autogenic Training has been extensively researched with over 3,000 studies carried out that prove it can help a number of physical and psychological health problems such as high blood pressure, anxiety, infertility, insomnia, stress, depression, etc.

Autogenic training has been shown by research to be one of the most effective types of relaxation techniques. It has not only been shown to help reduce anxiety and depression but studies have revealed it can also help a wide range of health problems.

In a study published in the journal Stress Medicine in 2000, a research team from the University of Bologna in Italy, studied people with symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression, the results from this study showed that the people who practiced Autogenics had improved mood but those in the control group who did not practice Autogenics did not experience improved mood. The researchers concluded that Autogenic training can help people with stress related anxiety and depression.

The leading organisation in the United Kingdom for Autogenic Therapy is the British Autogenic Society. They hold a list of qualified Autogenic Therapists and can be contacted on 0207 383 5108.

In 1992 Dr Ann Bowden of the British Autogenic Society, carried out a clinical audit at The Royal London Homeopathic Hospital, London, on the variety of health problems that people presented with for Autogenic Training; she also looked at the effectiveness of Autogenics in helping these health problems. In the table on the next page find the variety of health problems treated by Autogenics and the effectiveness of Autogenic Therapy in helping these conditions.

Benson's Relaxation Technique

■

Sit quietly in a comfortable position.

■

Close your eyes.

■

Deeply relax all your muscles,
Beginning at your feet and progressing up to your face.
Keep them relaxed.

■

Breathe through your nose.
Become aware of your breathing.
As you breathe out, say the word, "ONE",
silently to yourself. For example,
breathe IN . . . OUT, "ONE", - IN . . . OUT, "ONE", etc.
Breathe easily and naturally.

■

Continue for 10 to 20 minutes.
You may open your eyes to check the time, but do not use an alarm.
When you finish, sit quietly for several minutes,
at first with your eyes closed and later with your eyes opened.
Do not stand up for a few minutes.

■

Do not worry about whether you are successful
in achieving a deep level of relaxation.
Maintain a passive attitude and permit relaxation to occur at its own pace.
When distracting thoughts occur,
try to ignore them by not dwelling upon them
and return to repeating "ONE."
With practise, the response should come with little effort.
Practise the technique once or twice daily,
but not within two hours after any meal,
since the digestive processes seem to interfere with
the elicitation of the Relaxation Response.

(www.ucop.edu/humres/eap/relaxationresponse.html)

Guided Imagery

“Guided imagery has been found to be very effective for the treatment of stress. Imagery is at the centre of relaxation techniques designed to release brain chemicals that act as your body’s natural brain tranquillisers, lowering blood pressure, heart rate, and anxiety levels. . . .”

(www.holistic-online.com/guided-imagery.htm)

Guided Imagery is another technique for inducing the relaxation response. Guided imagery or Visualisation, as it is sometimes, otherwise known, is a mind based relaxation technique that induces relaxation by focusing the minds eye on pleasant imagery. In guided imagery you use all your senses – smell, touch, temperature, etc, to build up a relaxing mental picture. The scene can be any safe, pleasant place, like imagining a tropical beach or island, floating on a cloud, in a beautiful garden, a balloon trip, etc.

Our thoughts and images in our minds eye have been shown to influence our brain chemistry in a positive or negative way, depending on the images. Studies have revealed that just thinking about a stressful situation can trigger the fight/flight response increasing the levels of stress hormones in our blood stream. For example, people who watched horror films or distressing images on war films unsurprisingly showed increased levels of stress with increased levels of stress hormones in their blood stream; whereas watching a relaxing film or a relaxation video reduced stress, lowered the levels of stress hormones in the blood stream and induced relaxation. This shows that it is not just an event that causes us stress but also if we have a recurring picture or image in our minds of a stressful event this can trigger the fight/flight response; so if we look at or try to think of more pleasing images, as with Guided Imagery, this can help to lower our fight/flight response and induce the Relaxation Response.

A 1997 study by University of Miami researchers found that Guided imagery helped improve mood, reduce stress and lower the levels of the stress hormone cortisol. Research has also shown that guided imagery is useful in not only helping to reduce stress but is also useful for a variety of psychological and physical health problems like high blood pressure, multiple sclerosis, cancers, anxiety, depression, insomnia, etc.

Guided imagery is a technique that has been successfully used to help both physical and psychological conditions including depression. A study was carried out by researchers at the University of Mexico, and published in the 1993 issue of the Journal of Holistic Nursing, to examine the effectiveness of relaxation with guided imagery in helping to reduce anxiety and depression in new mothers. The results from this study revealed that the anxiety and depression declined in both experimental and control groups, however the decline in anxiety was greater in the group using relaxation and guided imagery than the control group.

Muscle Relaxation

“One of the most simple and easily learned techniques for relaxation is progressive muscle relaxation (PMR).” (www.experiencefestival.com)

When the fight/flight response is triggered one of the physiological changes that occurs is the stress hormone adrenalin causes our muscles to tense ready to fight or run away. The problem is that psychosocial stressors in today’s modern world keep our muscles in a state of chronic tension and when the muscles remain chronically tense it sends a signal to the brain that we are still under threat even after the stressful event has passed. It has been known for many years that the mind cannot be relaxed if our muscles are tense and vice versa.

Often we are not aware of our own tense muscles; try to pay attention to your own muscle tension, consider your own forehead, feel if you are holding muscle tension there; you probably did not realise how much muscle tension you were holding, but once you become aware you will realise that you are probably holding tension in muscles all over your body. Learning muscle relaxation techniques can teach us to be aware of our own muscle tension.

Muscle tension can be dissipated by the use of muscle relaxation techniques such as passive and progressive muscle relaxation, which will help to switch off the fight/flight response. Progressive Muscle Relaxation is a relaxation technique that was developed in the 1920’s and 1930’s by Dr Edmund Jacobson. It is often referred to as tense/release relaxation. In this form of relaxation individual muscle groups are tensed for 5 – 10 seconds and then quickly released and relaxed for 30 seconds; you concentrate on the difference between the tension and the relaxation in the muscle. Do not practice this form of relaxation if you have high blood pressure and/or cardiovascular illness without discussing it with your GP, as it can cause elevations in blood pressure.

There is another form of muscle relaxation developed by Dr Edmund Jacobson called Passive Muscle Relaxation that does not involve physically tensing and relaxing muscles. In this type of relaxation, you imagine in your own mind that your muscles are relaxing. Research has shown that just thinking about a stressor can cause muscles to tense, and thinking about relaxing them sends a signal to the brain to relax the muscles. This is a better form of relaxation for those with high blood pressure or any other cardiovascular condition and is often helpful for those with chronic pain problems as it aims to avoid muscle tension.

In a study, from the Hebrew University School of Nursing in Jerusalem, Israel, and published in December 2002 issue of Cancer Nursing, researchers looked at the effects of relaxation on anxiety, depression and quality of life in people with advanced cancer. A group of people split into 4 groups, group 1 received Progressive Muscle Relaxation training, group 2 received Guided Imagery Training, group 3, received both Muscle Relaxation and Imagery and group 4 acted as a control group. The study revealed that significant positive change occurred for depression and quality of life.

Mini Relaxation Exercises (Mini's)

"I have had patients who use minis over a hundred times in a single day."

(Dr Alice Domar PhD)

When stressful events occur in our lives, at home or at work, we can help to calm ourselves and reduce our stress by practising shortened forms of relaxation that take only a minute or so called Relaxation Mini's.

We often encounter difficult, uncomfortable situations like going for interviews, queuing up, traffic jams, red lights, waiting for dental treatment, receiving uncomfortable medical/dental procedures, difficult work meetings, being on hold on the telephone, etc., where the events are short but quite stressful none the less. In these short-term situations we can help ourselves cope and reduce our tension by practicing a relaxation mini, which is a shortened relaxation technique.

The aim of the mini relaxation is to switch our breathing from a fight/flight style of breathing to relaxed, abdominal breathing. When we are in an anxious situation our breathing switches to chest breathing and this is like throwing petrol on the fire. By doing the mini we voluntarily switch the breathing back to relaxed breathing and this reduces our anxiety and tension.

Research has shown that it's not the big stressors, ie life events, that cause us a problem, because fortunately they are quite rare; but it's the daily hassles we face many, many times a day that cause us problems. By using the mini relaxations we can help to keep our stress under control. Minis are useful because they are so easy to do, they can be used in any difficult situation we find ourselves in and nobody knows we are doing them.

The Mind Body Medicine Institute recommends the following method for inducing a mini relaxation.

1. In a mini relaxation exercise you can have your eyes open or closed, however obviously don't close your eyes if you are driving, operating machinery or in a situation where you need to maintain safety.
2. Switch your breathing to relaxation style, diaphragmatic breathing. On breathing in, your stomach should rise about 1", your stomach should fall on breathing out.
3. As you inhale count very slowly up to 4 as you exhale count slowly back to 1, thus, as you inhale you say to yourself, 1-2-3-4, and as you exhale you say to yourself, 4-3-2-1. Do this several times.

Although the mini relaxation exercises are useful, it is important that we still continue to use the longer forms of relaxation exercises.

Resources Session (4)

Action Plan: Relaxation Training

- | | Yes | No |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| ▪ If you have not already done so download the ten free MP3 Relaxation files from www.utexas.edu/student/cmhc/RelaxationTape/ | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ▪ Start to practise the different relaxation techniques and decide which one you enjoy the most, start to practise it on a daily basis. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ▪ Look at the web sites in the resources section. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ▪ Carry on practising the techniques from the previous sections of the course. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ▪ Start to practise the mini relaxation technique. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ▪ Borrow the recommended reading book for this session The Complete Book of Relaxation Techniques | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Useful Self Help Books, Websites: Relaxation Training

Books

Autogenic Therapy

- Bird J. (2002) Autogenic Therapy: Self Help for Mind and Body, Newleaf

Guided Imagery

- Naparstek B. (1994) Staying Well with Guided Imagery, Warner Books inc.
- Epstein G. (1989) Healing Visualizations, Bantam
- Rossman M.L. (2001) Guided Imagery for Self-Healing, HJ Kramer.

Relaxation

- Benson H. (2000) The Relaxation Response, Bantam.
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Websites

- www.mbmi.org
- www.healthjourneys.com
- www.calming.org
- www.academyforguidedimagery.com

Addresses

Autogenic Therapy

British Autogenic Society, The Royal London Homoeopathic Hospital,
Greenwell Street, London W1W 5BP, Tel: 0207 383 5108, Fax: 0207 383 5108
Email: admin@autogenic-therapy.org.uk, Web: <http://www.autogenic-therapy.org.uk>

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