

Relaxing

Meditation is the practice of quietening the mind, in order to reach a deep sense of calm and relaxation. Some types of meditation involve focusing on an external object (such as a candle flame), others focus inwardly, on the rhythm of the breath or on a word or phrase (a 'mantra') repeated over and over again; still others simply involve sitting quietly while you allow your thoughts to float away.

So how do you get started? Well, you need at least 5 minutes in which you won't be disturbed – ideally twice a day. Find a quiet, comfortable place and sit down (crossed legs are not essential – a comfortable chair is fine). Don't lie down – you want to be relaxed but not asleep!

Close your eyes and spend the next few minutes doing, thinking and saying nothing. Try to completely empty your head. As thoughts come in, acknowledge them and then let them go. Don't worry or get frustrated if you feel you aren't getting it 'right' – just carry on relaxing and freeing your mind. As you get more adept, you'll be able to meditate for longer.

Progressive muscle relaxation (PMR)

This is a relaxation technique used to release stress and muscular tension. All you do is tense and release each muscle group of the body, one at a time – often starting at the toes and working up to the head. The whole process is done slowly, so that by the end you feel completely relaxed.

Get your ZZZs in

It's no secret that a lack of sleep leaves you less able to deal with the challenges of the day – but did you know that it is associated with weight gain? While experts still haven't agreed on a definitive figure for how much sleep we need, (and it does vary from person to person), the guidelines generally fall between 7-8 hours. Here's how to make sure you get a good night's sleep.

- Establish a regular routine of what time you go to sleep and get up – the body likes consistency
- Sleep in a completely dark and well-ventilated room
- Avoid stimulants such as caffeine in the latter part of the day. Caffeine taken within 6 hours of bedtime can affect your sleep

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- Keep the bedroom clear of clutter and don't watch TV in bed!
- Take a warm (not hot) shower or bath to help you relax
- A milky drink can help make you feel sleepy