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Published on *Explorable.com* (<https://explorable.com>)

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## Relaxation Techniques

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Relaxation techniques are a natural way to calm your mind and reduce physical tension. They aid sleep and mental health, which is why it is an excellent idea to use them, instead of sleep medication.

Once you've achieved an adequate state of relaxation, going to bed becomes an expected, soothing experience. Instead of a task that makes you anxious and fills your mind with worrying –or even random but unstoppable– thoughts.

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## Don't Let Relaxation Scare You

If you're not familiar with meditation practices or, in general, you don't consider yourself a thoughtful person, don't let the words "relaxation technique" put you off. You don't have to become a new-age spiritual leader (unless that's your thing, of course). What we're encouraging, however, is that you go to sleep in an anxiety-free state.

## Aid the Process

Most people report that their sleep problems are a reaction to an overactive mind, along with stress and anxiety. Think about it: you're already committed to supporting your body's natural

rhythms, to fall back on track, by following this guide and keeping a record of your sleep patterns and progress. All the information you've read so far has proven to be effective; but unless you learn how to unwind, sleep will still be out of reach on stressful days. Don't let your effort go to waste.

Before you master your relaxation techniques, let's start with the very basics.

## **Physical Relaxation:**

### **Exercise**

The body is made to move and be active. Regular physical activity can improve the symptoms of sleep disorders. It energizes you during the day, reducing drowsiness and mental fatigue. Physical activity also increases the restorative properties of sleep at night. If you're not really into cardio or strength training, simply go out for a walk. Practicing a team sport can be another way to go, or perhaps you would enjoy dancing, skating or rock-climbing.

You can start out small. If you're not used to exercising, the last thing you need is to feel pressured for significant achievements.

Engage in a physical exercise for at least 15-20 minutes a day. Once you're used to it, increase the amount of time, preferably to 30 minutes of daily, regular activity. At first, while you are still getting acquainted with exercise, you can go easy. However, remember that exercise is most beneficial when you have sweated at least a bit.

### **Stretch**

Incorporate some light stretches into your nightly routine. Stretch your arms, legs, neck. Give your muscles a treat so your body is relaxed at nighttime. Besides, this will take just about five minutes. Stretching also keeps your muscles from getting sore or tense and keeps you in good physical health.

## **Mental Relaxation:**

### **Count**

Yes, counting. That old trick works because it distracts you from anxious thoughts and is yet not engaging enough, to send you on another stress-filled thought path. You can count backward from a hundred and visualize the numbers, or you can count objects you like and picture them mentally (your favorite books or songs, for example). This way, your mind won't be occupied by cognitive distortions. Plain and simple counting, no imaginary sheep involved, works just as well. Make sure you count calmly and evenly, breathing slowly as you go.

### **Prepare for the Next Day**

If you take a couple of minutes before going to bed and write down your "to-do" list for the next day, it will take some of the edges off. That way, trivial things are already sorted out, and you don't have to think about them while trying to fall asleep. You can make other small

preparations for the next day as well - select your outfit, choose what you'll have for breakfast, etc. Your mind will be less cluttered, and you will, therefore, have a better chance of falling sound sleep.

## **Do Something You Enjoy.**

What makes you feel lighter?

Perhaps you'd enjoy compiling a soothing playlist, to listen to during evenings, or maybe you'd feel liberated by taking the time to read a book for a while. Take a warm bath, sketch, color, complete a puzzle - do something calming that you enjoy. Incorporating this habit into your nighttime ritual will allow you to finish your day on a comforting note and prepare you for a restorative sleep session.

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