

# Stress Reduction Exercises

Listed below are four stress management exercises that can be done in just a few minutes each day. Nearly every stress reducing activity has immediate benefits. But you will have much greater benefits if you start an activity and stick with it.

## **Relaxation: Clearing Your Mind**

This forms the basis for other relaxation procedures such as meditation. To accomplish this technique:

- Reduce distractions, noise, and interruptions as much as possible before you begin.
- Sit comfortably, loosen any tight clothing, kick off your shoes, relax, and begin to breathe deeply.
- Mentally focus on one peaceful word, thought, or image. If other thoughts enter your mind, don't be discouraged -relax, breathe deeply. and try again.
- Stretch and exhale as you complete the exercise. With practice, "Clearing Your Mind" can help you feel refreshed, have more energy, and be ready to meet the next challenge.
- Practice 5-10 minutes each day.

## **Autogenics**

If you have heard of the expression "mind over matter," then you have a basic idea of what autogenics training is all about.

- Begin by sitting comfortably. Loosen any tight clothing, close your eyes, and try to empty your mind of all thoughts. You may want to breathe deeply for a few minutes and repeat a peaceful suggestion such as "I feel quiet", "My mind is at rest," or something similar.
- Concentrate on a suggestion such as "My left arm feels heavy and warm. As you think of this "command" try to actualIy feel your arm getting heavier and warmer. Then repeat the same command focusing

on your right arm, left leg, right leg, etc.

- Breathe deeply and stretch as you finish the exercise and notice how you feel. As you become better at help your body relax, anywhere and at any time. Try to practice this exercise for about 10 minutes each day, or whenever you feel stressed.

### **Progressive Muscular Relaxation**

- First tighten your hand muscle and make a fist; then notice how it feels. Your muscles are taut and strained and your hand may even be trembling slightly. You may feel tension in your hand, wrist, and lower arm. Hold this tension for a few seconds before relaxing.
- Release your hand, relax your fist, and let the tension slip away. You may notice your hand feels lighter than it did while your muscle was tensed and that your wrist and forearm are also relieved of pressure.
- It is most helpful to try this exercise on each of the major muscle groups of the body. The basic technique remains the same for each group: tighten the muscle. release the tension. then notice the difference. You can start with your hands then progress to other muscles, or you can begin the exercise moving from "head to toe" tightening and relaxing the muscles in your face. shoulders. arms. hands. chest. back. stomach. legs and feet.

### **Visualization**

Unlike the exercise on Clearing your Mind, where you try to focus on one single image, visualization allows your imagination to run free.

- Try to visualize yourself warm, calm, and relaxed.

Picture a setting that has particular appeal to you. Try to imagine all of the details. Are you lying on a warm beach? How does the sun feel on your back? Do you hear waves lapping on the sand? Just use your imagination. You can give yourself a mental vacation whenever and wherever you feel the need to relax.