



Self Hypnosis and Meditation Practical-Handbook

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Hypnosis basics

History

The origins of hypnosis extend back to the ancient temples of Aesculapius, the Greek god of medicine, where advice and reassurance uttered by priests to sleeping patients was interpreted by the patients as the gods speaking to them in their dreams.

What's hypnosis

Hypnosis is a social interaction in which one person responds to suggestions given by another person (the hypnotist) for imaginative experiences involving changes in perception, memory, and the voluntary control of action.

Can Anyone be Hypnotized?

There are large individual differences in response to hypnosis. Hypnosis has little to do with the hypnotist's technique, and very much to do with the individual's capacity, or talent, for experiencing hypnosis. Most people are at least moderately hypnotizable. However, while relatively few people absolutely cannot be hypnotized, by the same token, relatively few people fall within the highest level of responsiveness (so-called hypnotic virtuosos).

There is some controversy over whether hypnotizability can be modified. Some clinical practitioners believe that virtually everyone can be hypnotized, if only the hypnotist takes the right approach. However, there is little evidence favoring this point of view. Similarly, some researchers believe that developing positive attitudes, motivations, and expectancies concerning hypnosis can enhance hypnotizability.

However, there is also evidence that such interventions may only affect behavioral compliance with suggestions, not the subjective experiences that lie at the core of hypnosis. As with any other skilled performance, hypnosis is probably a matter of both aptitude and attitude: negative attitudes, motivations, and expectancies can interfere with performance, but positive ones are not by themselves sufficient to create hypnotic virtuosity.

Typical hypnosis session

A **typical hypnosis session** begins with an induction procedure in which the person is asked to focus his or her eyes on a fixation point, relax, and concentrate on the voice of the hypnotist. Although suggestions for relaxation are generally part of the hypnotic induction procedure, people can respond positively to hypnotic suggestions while engaged in vigorous physical activity. The hypnotist then gives suggestions for further relaxation, focused attention, and eye closure. After the person's eyes are closed, further suggestions for various imaginative experiences are given.

For example, individuals might be asked to extend their arms and imagine a heavy object pushing their hands and arms down or to hear a voice asking questions over a loudspeaker. Or, the hypnotist might suggest that when they open their eyes, they would not be able to see some object that has been placed in front of them. Posthypnotic suggestions may also be given for responses to occur after hypnosis has been terminated, including posthypnotic amnesia, the inability to remember events and experiences that took place during hypnosis.

What Happens During Hypnosis?

Researchers have been interested in biological correlates of hypnotizability as well as in those that can be measured by paper-and-pencil tests. Although hypnosis is commonly induced with suggestions for relaxation and even sleep, brain activity in hypnosis more closely resembles that of a person who is awake. The discovery

of hemispheric specialization, with the left hemisphere geared to analytic and the right hemisphere to nonanalytic tasks, led to the speculation that hypnotic response is somehow influenced by right-hemisphere activity. Studies employing both behavioral and electrophysiological mechanisms have been interpreted as indicating increased activation of the right hemisphere of the brain among highly hypnotizable individuals, but positive results have proved difficult to replicate and interpretation of these findings remains controversial.

Can Hypnosis Improve Recall?

A special case of performance enhancement has to do with hypnotic suggestions for improvements in memory -- what is known as hypnotic hypermnesia. Hypermnesia suggestions are sometimes employed in forensic situations, with forgetful witnesses and victims, or in therapeutic situations, to help patients remember traumatic personal experiences or the events of early childhood. While field studies have sometimes claimed that hypnosis can powerfully enhance memory, these anecdotal reports have not been duplicated under laboratory conditions.

A 1994 report by the Committee on Techniques for the Enhancement of Human Performance, a unit of the U.S. National Research Council, concluded that gains in recall produced by hypnotic suggestion were rarely dramatic, and were matched by gains observed even when individuals are not hypnotized. In fact, there is some evidence that hypnotic suggestion can interfere with normal hypermnesic processes. To make things worse, any increases obtained in valid recollection are met or exceeded by increases in false recollections. Hypnotized individuals (especially those who are highly hypnotizable) may be especially vulnerable to distortions in memory produced by leading questions and other subtle, suggestive influences.

Hypnosis is sometimes used therapeutically to recover forgotten incidents, as for example in cases of child sexual abuse. Although the literature contains a number of dramatic reports of the successful use of this technique, most of these reports are anecdotal in nature and

fail to obtain independent corroboration of the memories that emerge. Given what we know about the unreliability of hypnotic hypermnesia, and the risk of increased responsiveness to leading questions and other sources of bias and distortion, such clinical practices are not recommended. Similar considerations obtain in forensic situations. In fact, many legal jurisdictions severely limit the introduction of memories recovered through hypnosis, out of a concern that such evidence might be tainted. The Federal Bureau of Investigation has published a set of guidelines for those who wish to use hypnosis forensically, and similar precautions should be employed in the clinic.

Similar conclusions apply to hypnotic age regression, in which individuals receive suggestions that they are returning to a previous period in their lives (this is also a technique that is used clinically to foster the retrieval of forgotten memories of child abuse). Although age-regressed individuals may experience themselves as children, and may behave in a childlike manner, there is no evidence that they actually lose adult modes of mental functioning, or return to childlike modes of mental functioning. Nor do age-regressed individuals retrieve forgotten memories of childhood.

Can Hypnosis help with Weight Control?

In the Kirsch study, the prospects for hypnosis appeared to be especially favorable in the treatment of obesity, where individuals in the hypnosis group continued to lose weight even after formal treatment had ended. In one study, for example, women who received personally tailored hypnotic suggestions for specific food aversions, in the context of a traditional self-monitoring and goal-setting treatment, lost approximately twice as much weight as a comparison group. This comparison group received the behavioral treatment alone (no hypnotic suggestion). However, the actual weight lost by the hypnosis group was only about 14 lb. on average. Given that the patients were approximately 50% overweight at the outset, it is not clear that the treatment actually improved their clinical status. Studies that document the clinical efficacy of hypnosis should pay careful attention to the terms in which outcome is

assessed. While hypnosis may seem to offer an advantage over some other treatments, it is not clear that the statistical significance or experimental results translates into meaningful clinical significance or real results for individuals.

Can Hypnosis Help People Stop Smoking or Quit bad habits?

There have been many attempts to use hypnosis for habit control, however, hypnosis has no coercive power. That is, one cannot be hypnotized against his or her will, and even deeply hypnotized individuals cannot be made, by virtue of hypnotic suggestions, to do things that run against their own or others' interests. You cannot cajole a smoker to the local hypnotist and expect him or her to stop smoking. However, where the patient is appropriately motivated, as in the obesity study described earlier, hypnosis may offer a boost to treatment.

One popular hypnotic treatment for smoking involves a single session in which patients are taught to repeat a simple persuasive message during self-hypnosis. In one large-scale study of this technique, about 50% of patients stopped smoking immediately after treatment; at follow-up one and two years later, however, this figure had dropped to about 25%. Although this study did not include a nonhypnotic control group, this is about the same success rate as achieved with other cognitive-behavioral interventions. However, these other treatments are typically more intensive, so that the single-session hypnotic treatment may have some advantage in terms of efficiency. Interestingly, long-term abstinence was not related to traditional measures of hypnotizability, suggesting that the success of the treatment may have had more to do with the persuasive message than with hypnosis per se.

How can I Hypnotize myself?

Can I Hypnotize Myself?

Hypnosis is influenced by verbal suggestions, which must be interpreted by the individual in the course of responding. Therefore, the role of the left hemisphere of the brain should not be minimized. One proposal is that hypnotizable individuals show greater flexibility in using the left and right hemispheres in a task-appropriate manner, especially when they are actually hypnotized. Because involuntariness is so central to the experience of hypnosis, it has also been suggested that the frontal lobes (which organize intentional action) may play a special role. A better understanding of the neural substrates of hypnosis awaits studies of neurological patients with focalized brain lesions, as well as brain-imaging studies (e.g., PET, fMRI) of normal individuals.

The role of individual differences makes it clear that, in an important sense, all hypnosis is self-hypnosis. The hypnotist does not hypnotize the individual. Rather, the hypnotist serves as a sort of coach or tutor whose job is to help the person become hypnotized. While it takes considerable training and expertise to use hypnosis appropriately in clinical practice, it takes very little skill to be a hypnotist. Beyond the hypnotist's ability to develop rapport with the person, the most important factor determining hypnotic response is the hypnotizability of the individual.

Step-by-Step Method

Here is what you have to do step-by-step:

1. Sit on a couch in the upright position and close your eyes and your arms at your side or in your lap. Do not move around. Just sit there and relax for a minute.
2. Clear your mind of all thoughts. How do you do this?... simply imagine a big Dumpster or a very large metal box on your mental screen. Then see it open and put all your thoughts and worries in it one by one.... bills... your lovelife problems.... your children.... your job... everything you can think of. Then close the lid and lock it! Then push it off your mental screen.
3. Now sit there quietly with no thoughts for a minute. When you are ready to start... do not forget to tell yourself as you go through each part of the body that you are becoming more and more relaxed as you go. You must tell yourself this!
4. Now... start with your head.... imagine every part of your head relaxing... start with your eyes.... then go to your ears.... the mouth... all your facial muscles. Spend time with each part to make sure it is fully relaxed.
5. Now go to your neck and do the same.
6. Now go to you whole chest and stomach region and start with your heart... slow it down and make it at peace. Relax all you chest muscles and then your stomach area.
7. Now relax you arms feeling them going limp. Relax every muscle in your arms one by one including your fingers.
8. Next go to the groin area and relax all the muscle there.
9. Now it is time to do your legs.... start with the thighs and work you way down to the feet relaxing even every toe.

By this time you should be like a big lump of silly putty... totally relaxed and at peace. Now here comes the fun part. This is where you will get to hypnotize yourself and see if it really works.....

1. Sit there with your arms in your lap and or at your side and tell yourself that your right arm is getting very light. It is getting very, very light. Keep telling yourself this and feel how it is getting lighter. Tell yourself that it is getting so light that it is starting to raise up off your lap. Feel it getting light as you keep telling yourself this and feel it raising up off your lap. It is getting lighter by the second and it is raising up higher and higher until it is up in the air.

2. Once you have achieved this and your arm is up in the air you may tell yourself it is getting heavy again and lower it to your lap. You will now tell yourself that you will awaken fully refreshed with energy and a clear mind.

3. Open your eyes and evaluate what you have done. Write down your experience in your magickal journal. If you did not have success... try again later that day and keep trying until you are satisfied. If it never works for you.... you may be one of those who cannot be hypnotized.

Can I hypnotize somebody else?

Now.... this method can be used on someone else. Try it on your best friend... except you are the one who will be telling them to relax each part of their body. Then do the arm raising stunt with them and see if it works. Remember.... as you go through each part of the body with them... tell them they are getting more and more relaxed and sleepy. If this works then you can try more difficult things like making them do funny things...Remember... Do not make people do things that will hurt them or others!

Reprogramming the Subconscious and Internal Dialogue

The voice in the back of your mind that chatters away about useless and random things throughout the day is known as the internal dialogue. It says things like "I'm hungry; wow that person is attractive; ouch my back hurts; maybe I should go to the store later on; I wonder what my friend is doing right now" etc. Such mental chattering to oneself is really a huge waste of energy and only serves to maintain one's focus on the physical realm and everyday life.

Most people don't bother to take the time to discipline their minds enough to keep it from rambling on in a random manner. What is so bad about this seemingly normal mental activity? If you are constantly sending yourself false negative messages about yourself, then you will continue to perpetuate a negative outlook on reality while believing your own erroneous thoughts.

The way the subconscious picks up on these negative messages is simple. Example: A person might think to himself "I'm lonely." Or, "I'm worthless." Then, his undisciplined internal dialogue will pick up on this false message about himself if it is repeated often enough or on that person's mind, and eventually it will become a regular part of a mental tape-loop constantly repeating the message. The person then hears or feels these negative messages about him/herself and then forgets that he is the person who put them there in the first place! Because the individual doesn't remember how those messages got in there, he will now start to believe those negative messages about himself as though they are true.

It is possible to reprogram one's subconscious and internal dialogue through a very simple mantra exercise. Use this exercise if you're constantly depressed, tense, upset, or simply wish to make a change in the way you view life or react to situations.

Here's what you have to do:

Use POSITIVE PRESENT-TENSE PHRASES and tell yourself that you are something you might not believe yourself to currently be, but wish to be. If you are depressed and hate yourself, then you will choose a phrase that asserts that you are happy and love yourself, for example.

It doesn't matter if you believe these positive messages about yourself or not, because your internal dialogue will pick up on them and start to repeat them back to you later regardless. Try to keep the phrases you use short and simple for most effectiveness. The subconscious does not speak the language of intellectual thought; it communicates through pictures and feelings.

Keep the messages you send it basic and to the point. I prefer flowing short phrases for myself when I do this exercise, and I try to convey the essence of what I really need to say using powerful and sometimes emotional words.

Examples of phrases:

I am confident. (Very basic and to the point.)

I am relaxed. I am free. (Creates a very calm open feeling from which to operate in magick and in everyday life.)

I am psychic. (Believe it or not, this one actually helps to eliminate doubt about one's own abilities.)

I love myself. I am loved. (For people with a low self-image.)

Don't use words like 'NOT' or 'doesn't' or anything with a negative connotation to it on its own. Just the feeling of the word 'NOT' is enough to possibly ruin your message to yourself since it's a small amount of negativity in itself and the subconscious might pick up on it and use it somewhere else.

I've found phrases with the word 'NOT' in them to be less effective on myself regardless of how positive the meaning was intended to be. If your problem is a tense feeling in your chest, don't say to

yourself, "I'm not tense." That will only keep the message of tension and a slight feeling of negativity in your mind due to the words 'not' and 'tense.' Instead, find the opposite message to those feelings and try to express it in a completely positive way, e.g. "I am relaxed."

In actual practice, you would first sit or lay in a comfortable position. It's best to do this exercise when your mind is most receptive, such as just before sleep or just after you wake up (but before you get out of bed). Breathe slowly and deeply just as in meditation. Then, begin to repeat your chosen phrase over and over in a constant rhythm, just like a mantra. You may chose to leave a slight pause after each sentence if it feels more comfortable.

After several minutes, you can try repeating the phrase only in your mind rather than out loud. Do this for several minutes, or up to an hour if you can. You should have no other thoughts in your mind but the phrase you are concentrating on. Within about 20 minutes, it should feel automatic to repeat the phrase to yourself and you might even find yourself thinking about other things while the phrase CONTINUES to be repeated in the back of your head. This is ok if it happens in this case, since that shows that the new program is already becoming a part of your normal internal dialogue.

You should do this exercise for each phrase several times a day or throughout the day, FOR AT LEAST A WEEK for best results. It doesn't matter if you actually believe the 'lies' you're telling yourself. The results will still start to show within a few days since you're reprogramming the messages that you send to yourself subconsciously. This method has never failed as long as the person doing it has actually practiced the exercise often enough.

Relaxation Techniques

People with increased levels of anxiety and nervous tension often need to develop more effective ways of dealing with day to day stresses the minor everyday pressures that women with a healthy emotional balance handle easily but that can be overwhelming for women whose anxiety responses are easily triggered.

Such stress can include riding in an elevator, being in crowds, going to the dentist, or any situation, place, or person that sparks a woman's emotional charge. Often these charged issues evoke anxiety, fear, or upset feelings. Moreover, significant lifestyle changes death of a loved one, divorce, job loss, financial problems, major changes in personal relationships can be almost impossible to handle.

Being unable to cope with stress effectively can also damage the self esteem and self confidence.

How Stress Affects the Body

Your emotional and physical reactions to stress are partly determined by the sensitivity of your sympathetic nervous system. This system produces the fight or flight reaction in response to stress and excitement, speeding up and heightening the pulse rate, respiration, muscle tension, glandular function, and circulation of the blood.

If you have recurrent anxiety symptoms, either major or minor lifestyle and emotional upsets may cause an overreaction of your sympathetic system.

If you have an especially stressful life, your sympathetic nervous system may always be poised to react to a crisis, putting you in a state of constant tension. In this mode, you tend to react to small

stresses the same way you would react to real emergencies. The energy that accumulates in the body to meet this "emergency" must be discharged in order to bring your body back into balance. Repeated episodes of the fight or flight reaction deplete your energy reserves and, if they continue, cause a downward spiral that can lead to emotional burnout and eventually complete exhaustion. You can break this spiral only by learning to manage stress in a way that protects and even increases your energy level.

Techniques for Relaxation

I have included relaxation and stress reduction exercises in this Guide to help you in life.

The feedback has been very positive; many people report an increased sense of well being from these self help techniques. They also note an improvement in their physical health.

This chapter includes stress reduction exercises. They will take you through a series of specific steps to help alleviate your symptoms.

The exercises will teach you the following helpful techniques: focusing and meditation, grounding techniques (how to feel more centered), exercises that help you to relax and release muscle tension, erasure techniques (how to erase old programs), healing the inner child, visualizations, and affirmations. These techniques will help you cope with stress more efficiently, make your thoughts more calm and peaceful, and help you learn to relax, while you build self esteem and self confidence. Try them all; then decide which ones produce the greatest benefits for you. Practice these on a regular basis.

Quieting the Mind and Body

Throughout the day your conscious mind may be inundated with thoughts, feelings, and fantasies that trigger feelings of upset. Many of these thoughts replay unresolved issues of health, finances, or personal and work relationships. This relentless mental replay of

unresolved issues can reinforce the anxiety symptoms and be exhausting. It is important to know how to shut off the constant inner dialogue and quiet the mind.

The first two exercises require you to sit quietly and engage in a simple repetitive activity. By emptying your mind, you give yourself a rest. Meditation allows you to create a state of deep relaxation, which is very healing to the entire body. Metabolism slows, as do physiological functions such as heart rate and blood pressure. Muscle tension decreases. Brain wave patterns shift from the fast beta waves that occur during a normal active day to the slower alpha waves, which appear just before falling asleep or in times of deep relaxation. If you practice these exercises regularly, they can help relieve anxiety by resting your mind and turning off upsetting thoughts.

Exercise 1: Focusing

Select a small personal object that you like a great deal. It might be a jeweled pin or a simple flower from your garden. Focus all your attention on this object as you inhale and exhale slowly and deeply for one to two minutes. While you are doing this exercise, try not to let any other thoughts or feelings enter your mind. If they do, just return your attention to the object. At the end of this exercise you will probably feel more peaceful and calmer. Any tension or nervousness that you were feeling upon starting the exercise should be diminished.

Exercise 2: Meditation

Sit or lie in a comfortable position.

Close your eyes and breathe deeply. Let your breathing be slow and relaxed.

Focus all your attention on your breathing. Notice the movement of your chest and abdomen in and out.

Block out all other thoughts, feelings, and sensations. If you feel your attention wandering, bring it back to your breathing.

As you inhale, say the word "peace" to yourself, and as you exhale, say the word "calm." Draw out the pronunciation of the word so that it lasts for the entire breath. The word "peace" sounds like p-e-e-a-a-a-c-c-c-e-e-e. The word "calm" sounds like: c-a-a-a-l-l-l-l-m-m-m. Repeating these words as you breathe will help you to concentrate.

Continue this exercise until you feel very relaxed.

Grounding Techniques

When anxiety episodes occur, it often takes a concentrated effort just to get through the day, accomplishing such basic daily tasks as cooking, housecleaning, taking care of children, or getting to work or school. The next two exercises teach you grounding techniques that will help you feel more centered and focused. Practicing either of these exercises will allow you to organize your energies and proceed more effectively with your daily routine.

Exercise 1: Oak Tree Meditation

Sit in a comfortable position, your arms resting at your sides. Close your eyes and breathe deeply. Let your breathing be slow and relaxed.

See your body as a strong oak tree. Your body is solid like the wide, brown trunk of the tree. Imagine sturdy roots growing from your legs and going down deeply into the earth, anchoring your body. You feel solid and strong, able to handle any stress.

When upsetting thoughts or situations occur, visualize your body remaining grounded like the oak tree. Feel the strength and stability in your arms and legs.

You feel confident and relaxed, able to handle any situation.

Exercise 2: Grounding Cord Meditation

Sit in a comfortable position, your arms resting comfortably at your sides.

Close your eyes and breathe deeply. Let your breathing be slow and relaxed.

Imagine a thick wide cord attaching itself to the base of your spine. This is your grounding cord. It can be a thick piece of rope, a tree trunk, or any other material that feels strong and stable. Make sure your cord is wide and sturdy enough. Then imagine a thick metal hook attaching itself to the end of your cord.

Now visualize your grounding cord dropping down two hundred feet below the earth and hooking on to the solid bedrock below the earth. Continue to breathe deeply and notice the sense of peace and stability that your grounding cord can bring you.

Replace the cord with a new one each day or whenever you feel your emotions getting out of control.

Releasing Muscle Tension

The next three exercises will help you get in touch with your areas of muscle tension and then help you learn to release this tension. This is an important sequence for women with emotional symptoms of anxiety and nervous tension since habitual emotional patterns cause certain muscle groups to tense and tighten.

For example, if a person has difficulty in expressing feelings, the neck muscles may be chronically tense. A person with a lot of repressed anger may have chest pain and tight chest muscles. Contracted muscles limit movement and energy flow in the body, since they tend to have decreased blood circulation and oxygenation and accumulate an excess of waste products, such as carbon dioxide and lactic acid. Therefore, muscle tension can be a significant cause of the fatigue that often accompanies chronic stress.

The following exercises help release tension and the blocked emotions held in tight muscles.

Exercise 1: Discovering Muscle Tension

Lie on your back in a comfortable position. Allow your arms to rest at your sides, palms down, on the surface next to you.

Raise just the right hand and arm and hold it elevated for 15 seconds.

Notice if your forearm feels tight and tense or if the muscles are soft and pliable.

Let your hand and arm drop down and relax. The arm muscles will relax too.

As you lie still, notice any other parts of your body that feel tense, muscles that feel tight and sore. You may notice a constant dull aching in certain muscles.

Exercise 2: Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Lie on your back in a comfortable position. Allow your arms to rest at your sides, palms down, on the surface next to you.

Inhale and exhale slowly and deeply.

Clench your hands into fists and hold them tightly for 15 seconds. As you do this, relax the rest of your body. Visualize your fists contracting, becoming tighter and tighter.

Then let your hands relax. On relaxing, see a golden light flowing into the entire body, making all your muscles soft and pliable.

Now, tense and relax the following parts of your body in this order: face, shoulders, back, stomach, pelvis, legs, feet, and toes. Hold each part tensed for 15 seconds and then relax your body for 30 seconds before going on to the next part.

Finish the exercise by shaking your hands and imagining the remaining tension flowing out of your fingertips.

Exercise 3: Release of Muscle Tension and Anxiety

Lie in a comfortable position. Allow your arms to rest at your sides, palms down. Inhale and exhale slowly and deeply with your eyes closed.

Become aware of your feet, ankles, and legs. Notice if these parts of your body have any muscle tension or tightness. If so, how does the tense part of your body feel? Is it viselike, knotted, cold, numb? Do you notice any strong feelings, such as hurt, upset, or anger, in that part of your body? Breathe into that part of your body until you feel it relax. Release any anxious feelings with your breathing, continuing until they begin to decrease in intensity and fade.

Next, move your awareness into your hips, pelvis, and lower back. Note any tension there. Notice any anxious feelings located in that part of your body. Breathe into your hips and pelvis until you feel them relax. Release any negative emotions as you breathe in and out

Focus on your abdomen and chest. Notice any anxious feelings located in this area and let them drop away as you breathe in and out. Continue to release any upsetting feelings located in your abdomen or chest.

Finally, focus on your head, neck, arms, and hands. Note any tension in this area and release it. With your breathing; release any negative feelings blocked in this area until you can't feel them anymore.

When you have finished releasing tension throughout the body, continue deep breathing and relaxing for another minute or two. At the end of this exercise, you should feel lighter and more energized.

Getting rid of Stress and Tension

Often the situations and beliefs that make us feel anxious and tense look large and insurmountable. We tend to form representations in our mind that empower stress. In these representations, we look tiny and helpless, while the stressors look huge and unsolvable. You can change these mental representations and cut stressors down to size. The next two exercises will help you to gain mastery over stress by learning to shrink it or even erase it with your mind. This places stress in a much more manageable and realistic perspective. These

two exercises will also help engender a sense of power and mastery, thereby reducing anxiety and restoring a sense of calm.

Exercise 1: Shrinking Stress

Sit or lie in a comfortable position. Breathe slowly and deeply.

Visualize a situation, person, or even a belief (such as, "I'm afraid of the dark" or "I don't want to give that public speech") that makes you feel anxious and tense.

As you do this, you might see a person's face, a place you're afraid to go, or simply a dark cloud. Where do you see this stressful picture? Is it above you, to one side, or in front of you? How does it look? Is it big or little, dark or light? Does it have certain colors?

Now slowly begin to shrink the stressful picture. Continue to see the stressful picture shrinking until it is so small that it can literally be held in the palm of your hand. Hold your hand out in front of you, and place the picture in the palm of your hand.

If the stressor has a characteristic sound (like a voice or traffic noise), hear it getting tiny and soft. As it continues to shrink, its voice or sounds become almost inaudible.

Now the stressful picture is so small it can fit on your second finger. Watch it shrink from there until it finally turns into a little dot and disappears.

Often this exercise causes feelings of amusement, as well as relaxation, as the feared stressor shrinks, gets less intimidating, and finally disappears.

Exercise 2: Erasing Stress

Sit or lie in a comfortable position. Breathe slowly and deeply.

Visualize a situation, a person, or even a belief (such as, "I'm afraid to go to the shopping mall" or "I'm scared to mix with other people at parties") that causes you to feel anxious and fearful.

As you do this you might see a specific person, an actual place, or simply shapes and colors. Where do you see this stressful picture? Is it below you, to the side, in front of you? How does it look? Is it big or little, dark or light, or does it have a specific color?

Imagine that a large eraser, like the kind used to erase chalk marks, has just floated into your hand. Actually feel and see the eraser in your hand. Take the eraser and begin to rub it over the area where the stressful picture is located. As the eraser rubs out the stressful picture it fades, shrinks, and finally disappears. When you can no longer see the stressful picture, simply continue to focus on your deep breathing for another minute, inhaling and exhaling slowly and deeply.

Visualization

The next two exercises use visualization as a therapeutic method to affect the physical and mental processes of the body; both focus on color.

Color therapy, as it applies to human health, has a long and distinguished history. In many studies, scientists have exposed subjects to specific colors, either directly through exposure to light therapy, or through changing the color of their environment.

Scientific research throughout the world has shown that color therapy can have a profound effect on health and well-being. It can stimulate the endocrine glands, the immune system, and the nervous system, and help to balance the emotions. Visualizing color in a specific part of the body can have a powerful therapeutic effect, too, and can be a good stress management technique for relief of anxiety and nervous tension.

The first exercise uses the color blue, which provides a calming and relaxing effect. Blue calms such physiological functions as pulse rate, breathing, and perspiration, and relaxes the mood. If you experience chronic fatigue and are tense, anxious, or irritable, or carry a lot of muscle tension, the first exercise will be very helpful.

The second exercise uses the color red for anxiety and upset. Red stimulates all the endocrine glands, including the pituitary and adrenal glands. It heightens senses such as smell and taste.

Emotionally, red is linked to vitality and high energy states. Even though the color red can speed up autonomic nervous system function you can benefit from visualizing this color. I often do the red visualization when I am tired and need a pick me up. You may find that you are attracted to the color in one exercise more than another. Use the exercise with the color that appeals to you the most.

Exercise 1: Tension Release Through Color

Sit or lie in a comfortable position, your arms resting at your sides. As you take a deep breath, visualize that the earth below you is filled with the color blue. This blue color extends 50 feet below you into the earth. Now imagine that you are opening up energy centers on the bottom of your feet. As you inhale, visualize the soft blue color filling up your feet. When your feet are completely filled with the color blue, then bring the color up through your ankles, legs, pelvis, and lower back.

Each time you exhale, see the blue color leaving through your lungs, carrying any tension and stress with it. See the tension dissolve into the air.

Continue to inhale blue into your abdomen, chest, shoulders, arms, neck, and head. Exhale the blue slowly out of your lungs. Repeat this entire process five times and then relax for a few minutes.

Exercise 2: Energizing Through Colour

Sit or lie in a comfortable position, your arms resting easily at your sides. As you take a deep breath, visualize a big balloon above your head filled with a bright red healing energy. Imagine that you pop this balloon so all the bright red energy is released.

As you inhale, see the bright red color filling up your head. It fills up your brain, your face, and the bones of your skull. Let the bright red color pour in until your head is ready to overflow with color. Then let the red color flow into your neck, shoulders, arms, and chest. As you exhale, breathe the red color out of your lungs, taking any tiredness and fatigue with it. Breathe any feeling of fatigue out of your body.

As you inhale, continue to bring the bright, energizing red color into your abdomen, pelvis, lower back, legs, and feet until your whole body is filled with red. Exhale the red color out of your lungs, continuing to release any feeling of fatigue. Repeat this process five times. At the end of this exercise, you should feel more energized and vibrant. Your mental energy should feel more vitalized and clear.

Sound

Music can have a tremendously relaxing effect on our minds and bodies. For women with anxiety and nervous tension, I recommend slow, quiet music classical music is particularly good. This type of music can have a pronounced beneficial effect on your physiological functions. It can slow your pulse and heart rate, lower your blood pressure, and decrease your levels of stress hormones. It promotes peace and relaxation and helps to induce sleep.

Nature sounds, such as ocean waves and rainfall, can also induce a sense of peace and relaxation. Play relaxing music often when you are aware of increased emotional and physical tension.

Putting Your Stress-Reduction Program Together

This chapter has introduced you to many different ways to reduce anxiety and stress and make each day calm and peaceful. Try each exercise at least once. Then find the combination that works for you. Doing the exercise you most enjoy should take no longer than 20 to 30 minutes, depending on how much time you wish to spend. Ideally, you should do the exercises daily. Over time, they will help you gain insight into your negative feelings and beliefs while changing them into positive, self-nurturing new ones. Your ability to cope with stress should improve tremendously.

Meditation

General Meditation

The breath:

1. Empty the lungs of air completely. With the lungs empty, slowly count to 4.
2. Inhale slowly while counting to 4.
3. When the lungs are full to the neck, hold, and slowly count to 4.
4. Exhale slowly while counting to 4.

Repeat the entire process for several minutes until you feel very relaxed. Don't allow other miscellaneous thoughts to enter the mind. When they do, calmly ignore them or push them out, and continue counting. With time, the internal dialogue (your own mental talking to yourself) can be stopped at will by using this and similar techniques.

A Basic Meditation Technique

Meditation can be intimidating to those first starting out. Especially if you are from a western upbringing where sitting down and relaxing is put last on the list of things we have to do. The first thing to do is relax; the harder you try the harder it is. Make sure that you are not too tired, and have not eaten in about 2-3 hours; you should not be hungry but also not full or in the middle of digestion. During your first few attempts set an alarm for about 20 min. in case you fall asleep. Keep track of how successful you are: record the time, environment etc.

Step One: Create your environment

- Turn off most of the lights
- turn off the phone
- put pets away
- set soft drumming or music
- put up a do not disturb sign on the door

Step Two: Begin to Relax

- Lay down in a comfortable position (either on your back, front or side). Use a pillow if you need one for your head or back.
- Begin a relaxing exercise.
- Take deep breaths. Concentrate on each body part, one at a time, beginning with your feet, then moving into the calves, thighs, and so on upwards.
- Feel the tension melt away and relaxation set in. Let your mind's worries disappear.
- Part begin to feel heavy, maybe even tingle. As you move up the body do not be surprised if you feel like the room is spinning. *If you're really tense, try tensing every muscle, one at a time, from your feet to your head. It may take more than one pass.
- Begin by visualizing yourself somewhere else, like on a forest path or sailing up into the sky.
- Start your meditation.