

Guided Relaxation

In this last episode of the stress podcast, stress expert Dr. Gloria Deckro is going to lead you on a 10-minute guided relaxation. Use this exercise before you go to sleep or any time you feel stressed out or overwhelmed. Try to do this quick relaxation exercise at least a few times a week. You may be surprised at how effective it is in helping you manage stress and feel calmer and more in control.

We're going to start with a face massage and then follow that with a physical relaxation. Because if your body is tense, then it's very hard to relax your mind. And then we'll move on to using the imagination to take the relaxation a step deeper. And I'm going to ask you to imagine a beautiful beach but those of you who may not like the beach; you can imagine another place of your choice that you'd like to be. And then finally we'll use the word ocean as a focus. Thinking a word with the breath, which is another technique that is commonly used in meditation to help people relax. So as we go through this, if anything doesn't feel comfortable to you, then please don't do it and you may like to close your eyes or some people prefer to just focus their eyes on a point on the floor.

So why don't you begin by finding a comfortable position in the chair where your body is supported as much as possible. We're going to start with a face massage. So I'd like you to just take your fingertips and start in the forehead with your fingers in the center of your forehead and just use your fingertips to gently smooth your brow. Imagine as you're doing this that you're clearing away any tension because this next ten minutes is going to be a vacation from the day for you. A time when you don't have to worry about anything. A time when you can just enjoy being peaceful and relaxed. And as your fingers move to the temples, you might find some little tight places there, some places that feel tender and you can just use your fingertips to gently loosen any tension you discover. And with relaxation it's good to remember there's no right or wrong way to do this. As you're ready, you can move your fingers to your jaw and very often as we're going through the day, you want to yell at somebody and we clench our jaw, your jaw can become very tight. Some people even grind their teeth. So just feel for those jaw muscles, the muscles at the back between your upper and lower teeth and just loosely loosen them up with

your fingertips. And if you like, move to your cheeks, around your nose. Just noticing where there are any tender places. And you're moving up to the scalp. For most of us, washing your hair is a very relaxing experience because we get a good scalp massage and there are actually points on the head, which are used in Chinese medicine and acupuncture to bring about relaxation. So as you massage your scalp, you can probably feel that there's some little tender places and places that feel more sensitive and you can just focus, gently massage those with your fingertips. And then you can work around the back of your neck and there's a line where the skull meets the neck at the back of your neck and you can just massage that area gently.

We hold a lot of tension. Many people get tension headaches and just doing a little bit of this massage regularly can help you to avoid getting those headaches. And don't forget to breathe as you're doing this. Sometimes as we're concentrating, we hold our breath. And that's not very relaxing. So then you might like to move to the shoulders and just one at a time, you can take your right hand and just knead the muscles of your left shoulder. Just squeezing gently and noticing if there's tension in that shoulder. The shoulders are another place that we tend to hold a lot of tension and you can walk around through life not realizing that it's there until you slow down. And then you can move to the other shoulder and I hope everybody has found some muscle tension by now because we're trying to be aware of the way we hold the tension in our body.

And then as you're ready, you can just let your hands drop to your lap and if you'd like to, you could close your eyes because we're going to turn our attention inwards now. And we're going to go through a body scan just noticing where there's tension and releasing it with our breath. So we'll start with the face where we just did the massage and I'd like you to just notice how your forehead is feeling right now. And then as you exhale, just release any tension with your out breath. You could imagine the tension is just washing away with your breath. And you can treat your thoughts in the same way as you treat the muscle tension. Just let your thoughts clear as you breathe out. Just letting go of any worries. And with the next breath, noticing your eyes and just letting the little muscles around the eyes soften as you exhale. Now letting this feeling of relaxation spread to your cheeks, letting your cheeks soften. Letting your jaw release. And you might like to imagine the warmth of the sun now on the top of your head, helping the muscles in

your scalp to relax and release. And for the back of your head and into your neck. And then being aware of your shoulders and as you breathe in, just be aware of your shoulders and then as you breathe out, let them release. We carry around heavy responsibilities like a backpack all the time and as you exhale, just imagine you're letting that backpack go. That your shoulders can just relax. Putting down those schoolbooks. And then letting that feeling of warmth and heaviness and relaxation spread into your arms. Down through your arms all the way to your hands. If you're hands are clenched, just let them relax into your lap. And it's good to yawn. Yawning is a form of relaxation. It stretches the jaw and helps you to breathe deeply. So just as we're relaxing, notice how your breathing is right now. Is it more in your chest or in your belly? Is it shallow or is it deep? And just notice without judgment. There's no right or wrong answer.

And then you can begin to breathe into any places that feel tight in your chest and then release the tension as you exhale. Just letting your chest rise and fall gently with each breath. Each out breath is your chance to let go. To release more tension. And then noticing how your belly is moving as you breathe. And in the same way releasing any tension as you exhale. So that your belly can rise and fall with each breath. Now bringing awareness to your back. Letting your back relaxing in the chair. Letting the back muscles soften so there is a feeling of warmth and relaxation spreading down through your back. Just allowing that to go down through your hips into your legs. Letting the legs find a comfortable position. Allowing this feeling of warmth and relaxation to spread right down through your legs, through your thighs and calves, right down to your feet.

Now you might like to take a moment and if there's any part of your body that still feels tense, any place that's sore today, you could just take a few breaths and breathe into that area releasing any soreness or tightness as you exhale. So we're going to take this relaxation a step further by using our imagination to think of a really beautiful, safe beach. And this could be somewhere that you visited or seen in a picture or just somewhere that your imagining for the first time right now. So you could imagine that you're on a hilltop overlooking this beautiful beach on a sunny warm day. There's a cool breeze coming in off the ocean and you can see the reflection of the sun sparkling on the ocean far into the distance. And there's a path leading down onto the beach. A gentle path. And as you're ready, you can start down that path. And you'll notice as you

descend, you start to feel the warmth of the sun reflected in the sand and hear the sound of the waves on the beach. And smell the smell of the ocean. And as you reach the sand, you might like to have bare feet so that you can feel that warm sand under your feet massaging, warming, relaxing your feet. If you'd like to, you could walk towards the edge of the water and just notice how the sand becomes cooler and firmer under your feet as you get close to the water. You could even walk to the water's edge and just let the edge of the waves gently wash over your toes.

And this is a good time if you're still holding onto any worries, even any resentments, to just let them go. To let the ocean wash them away. And then as you're ready, you can find a place on the sand to lie down and you have with you everything you need. A beach towel, umbrella, whatever you need is right there. You could lie down on the warm sand and just let the warmth of the sand completely support your body. And as you hear the sound of the ocean, it's like your breath rising and falling. So your breath becomes like a wave, rising and falling.

You could use the word ocean on your breath to help you to relax a little further. Just thinking "o" on the in breath and "cean" on the out breath and just feeling that breath rising and falling like a wave. As your mind wanders off, you can just gently bring it back to the word ocean and the breath. And your thoughts can become light little puffy clouds that just blow on overhead without bothering you. Thinking "o" on the in breath and "cean" on the out breath and just feeling that breath, rising and falling like a wave.

In a moment, it will be time to get up from this place on the beach. And as you do, you can bring this feeling of peacefulness with you. So as you're ready, you could get up and start to walk back to the path that you came down feeling the warmth of the sand under your feet as you do so. And you can start up the path leaving the beach behind and just feeling how the air becomes cooler as you climb back up the hill. And the sound of the waves become softer. Until you find yourself back at the place you started and, again, you can see far into the distance over the ocean. And as you let go of this image of the beach, realize that you can come back here whenever you want in your imagination. As you're ready, you could let the image of the beach fade away and feel yourself sitting on the chair, begin to notice the sounds around you in the room. And as you're ready, you can bring your attention back to the room feeling refreshed and peaceful.

