How to Relax With Anxiety

by ERIC PATTERSON

Finding Calm Within

Relaxation techniques work; they lower stress and anxiety, improve your cardiovascular and pulmonary health and they are free to use and easy to learn. Too many people suggest that relaxation techniques do not "work" for them and prefer to rely on medication to lessen anxiety and panic. These same medications are typically addictive and require higher doses over time to maintain the same level of relaxation. We'll be looking at relaxing with anxiety and how you can accomplish this.

Keys to Better Relaxation

Relaxing is not the easiest thing to do sometimes, but the risks associated with never relaxing make it worth trying and re-trying relaxation techniques until you produce the desired effects.

Consider these tips for mastering relaxation techniques:

- **Use them more often.** People with anxiety or high stress can make up their minds too quickly on relaxation techniques. Trying a breathing exercise for 10 minutes on several occasions is not enough. Like most things worth doing, relaxation techniques are difficult. You may need months to become proficient at even the simplest diaphragmatic breathing technique, but with practice comes improvement.
- **Use the best technique for you.** Relaxations usually begin with deep breathing exercises but they do not end there. Guided imagery, autogenic training, progressive muscle relaxation, mindfulness and meditation are also available to you. There are even more offered when you consider the near-endless variety. Are you feeling physically tense? Try progressive muscle relaxation. Are you feeling more pessimistic? Try guided imagery about a favorite destination. Is it very difficult for you to clear your mind? Autogenic training might be right for you. Talk to your therapist for the best options based on your symptoms.
- **Use them at different times.** Maybe first thing in the morning or last thing at night is not the best time for you to practice relaxation. Do not give up. Keep trying. Try lunchtime, during a commercial of your favorite show or after you talk to your best friend on the phone. In addition to trying at different times of day, try different lengths of time. Some may find benefit after five minutes of practice while others may need 25 minutes. There is no "right" or "wrong" or "good" or "bad". Focus on what is going to be best for you.
- **Use them in different settings.** As with the previous tip, variety will be your friend when learning relaxation. Test different areas and compare them to others you have tried. Try the bedroom, bathroom, closet or perhaps in a park. Relaxation can be found in strange places. You can put on some music and light candles or enjoy perfect silence in a pitch-dark room.
- **Use them as prevention.** Typically, beginners wait too long to use a relaxation technique. This ensures preemptive defeat and can distort your view of relaxation. Once you have mastered relaxation, you can avoid even the largest panic attacks. When you are a beginner, though, you must practice these techniques during periods of low stress and calm. It can seem counterintuitive to use relaxation when you are already relaxed, but this strategy will better prepare you for future stress. You can use relaxation for prevention, not just damage control.

Restoring Balance

Relaxation is not a "one size fits all" technique but low-risk and side-effect-free. Maybe you have not found benefits in the past. Luckily for you there are infinite possibilities and ways to modify relaxation techniques to fit your symptoms, schedule and life.