

## RELAXATION AUDIO TRACKS ON YOUTUBE

Go to YouTube.com, and in the search box enter Emmett Miller Letting Go of Stress.

This will take you to a number of video/audio files. There are 4 you need to use:

- 1) “Tension Relaxation” - for relaxing your muscles. Best for physical pain and muscle tension including headaches
- 2) “Autogenic Stress Relief” – for deep breathing and lowering heart rate and blood pressure. This is best for anxiety, panic, fear control.
- 3) “A Trip to the Beach” – for general relaxation and sleep.
- 4) “Mental and Physical Relaxation” – for general relaxation.

**Before listening for the first time please read the Relaxation Training Instructions that follow.** There are some things you need to know for your comfort and safety before you start practicing.

To begin with, listen to 1 and 2 every day, during the day, but about 2 hours apart. You can listen to 3 or 4 as an extra practice session or at bedtime to help with sleep.

## RELAXATION TRAINING INSTRUCTIONS (6 PARTS)

### Part 1: Introduction

Pain and fear/anxiety serve as warning signals. When we are first injured pain tells us there is some harm or damage to our body that we need to pay attention to and take care of ourselves. When we are physically threatened we experience *fear*, or when emotionally threatened we feel *anxiety*. Part of our brain's response to these warnings is to trigger the "fight or flight" mechanism, activating our bodies to respond to threats. This causes increased muscle tension, faster heart rate, rapid and shallow breathing, and tightening of blood vessels. This is helpful when we need to fight or run away, but it is not helpful when it comes to managing pain or dealing with anxiety or stress. Unless we really need to fight or run, instead we need to calm down our brains and bodies. Also, when our muscles become tired, muscle tension increases which can worsen pain. Emotional distress also affects our bodies, creating physical tension that worsens pain and causes other symptoms like upset stomach, headaches, trembling, and tight feelings in the chest. Learning to control the brain's response, calm our bodies, relax our muscles, and control our breathing helps us cope more effectively and directly reduce our pain and other physical symptoms.

There are many skills or techniques we can learn to calm our bodies and minds. By learning and practicing these relaxation skills, we can calm our brains and our bodies. This improves our ability to control pain and emotional distress. There are several relaxation exercise audio tracks. Try them all - some will help more with physical tension or pain, others with reducing general stress or anxiety, and some with sleep. You may need to do each several times to see how they will help.

The ultimate goal is to be able to apply these skills quickly whenever you need them throughout the day. This gives you the ability to control and even prevent pain flare-ups and stress without needing the recordings. If you listen daily, within two to three weeks you will be able to do this using the "tension scan" technique described later in these instructions. While these relaxation exercises are subtle and may seem difficult at first, this process is not any different than learning to throw a ball, do a dance move, or ride a bike. With practice your brain will trigger the

physical relaxation responses more quickly and eventually nearly automatically. This does take daily practice so the sooner you get started the sooner you will be able to increase your control of your pain and stress!

## **Part 2: General Instructions for Relaxation Practice**

As when learning any new physical skill, regular, focused practice is important. You will need to set aside one to two times a day to listen to the relaxation exercises. Select a time that you can focus just on practicing the relaxation training. Based on the length of each recording, set aside enough time, allowing an extra few minutes before and after. Find a place that is quiet and where you will not be disturbed. Get in a comfortable position where all of your muscles can become completely relaxed. Most individuals will listen while reclining, but you need to find a position that is comfortable for you based on your pain. Most people concentrate better with their eyes closed, but it is *important that you remain awake* while listening to the audio recordings. If you fall asleep you will not be able to learn the skills and then be able to apply them on your own. If you find yourself falling asleep too often, practice with your eyes open and support yourself on pillows rather than lying flat. Also, only listen to one track each practice session. Trying to do more than one track at a time is more likely to put you to sleep.

Wear comfortable, loose fitting clothes, especially around your waist. This will allow you to breathe naturally with your stomach muscles rather than up in your chest. You should not be interrupted while practicing so set your phone so only the audio will play, with no calls or other notification sounds (“airplane mode” on most phones). Let other people in your home know you are practicing your pain control/relaxation and not to disturb you. Use ear phones or ear buds to shut out distracting noises and allow you to focus more deeply. You may find your mind wanders when you listen. That is normal and you will be able to stay focused better with repeated practice.

**Because you will become very relaxed when listening to these recordings, you will likely fall asleep sometimes. You should never listen to the recording anywhere it is not safe to go to sleep. It is very important that you never play the relaxation recordings while driving or doing anything else that requires your full attention for safety.**

### **Part 3: Muscle Relaxation Instructions**

The basic technique for relaxing your muscles is called 'progressive' or 'differential' muscle relaxation. There are a number of ways to perform this, and you will have to experiment to find which way gets you the most relaxed. By first tensing, then relaxing your muscles, you will notice more change and become more deeply relaxed. You can tense your muscles lightly, medium, or hard. *However you should be careful not to tense up so hard that it causes any increase in pain or muscle spasm.* It is usually best to start with a light tense, and then gradually increase tensing over several practice sessions depending on how your body feels. Be very careful in your injury areas, tensing too hard may increase your pain. If it hurts when you tense a muscle you are tensing too hard, just use a light tense, or no tension at all. When it is time to release each muscle, there are two ways to release. You can slowly let the muscle relax, or let it go limp all at once, as if you are turning off a switch and the power goes out. You will need to experiment with different combinations of tensing and releasing to find the combination that works best for you. You are looking for a sensation of looseness in your muscles, like a rag doll or wet noodle. Most people will also experience a feeling of either heaviness or lightness in their arms and legs when they relax. Some people feel as if their limbs are very heavy, like they weigh hundreds of pounds and can barely lift them. Other people feel like they are floating in water when they get relaxed. Experiment with different combinations of tensing and releasing until you find the combination that works best for you and produces the deepest feeling of relaxation. Again, if it hurts or you feel tenser at the end, you are tensing up too hard. There may be parts of your body you cannot tense at all without pain increasing. In those areas do not tense, just relax.

#### **Part 4: Breathing Relaxation Instructions**

It is important to understand how our body works to understand healthy, natural breathing patterns. Between our lungs and our stomach is a large muscle called the diaphragm. In order for our lungs to inflate, the diaphragm lowers and our abdomen rises and falls naturally. If you watch a baby or a child breathing, you will see this pattern. Sometimes this is called “belly breathing.” Many times we develop irregular breathing habits, using our chest muscles or holding our stomachs in. Also when we become anxious or fearful, we tend to breathe more rapidly and shallowly. This increases our feeling of stress and pain, since it reduces the oxygen our muscles need to feel their best. When we breathe naturally, we are more relaxed and maximize the amount of oxygen in our blood stream. This in turn reduces muscle pain and stress.

To breathe naturally, first be sure your clothing is not tight around your waist. Loosen your belt or waistband if needed. Next relax *all* your muscles in your chest and stomach. Breathe a little slower and deeper than normal, allowing your abdomen to rise and fall naturally. Think about your body as a container, with the air filling up from the bottom to the top. Breathe a little slower and deeper than normal, but do not hold your breath in between. If you do this correctly for a few minutes, you will get a bit sleepy. If you notice your chest moving more than your stomach, you may have developed a habit of chest breathing. The natural, belly breathing may feel awkward at first, but it will gradually improve with practice. Do not force your abdomen out, just allow it to rise and fall naturally. Deep natural breathing is the best techniques to combat feelings of anxiety, tension, or fearfulness, since it will lower your heart rate and blood pressure, and improve your oxygen levels quickly. This will also calm your reaction to pain.

### **Part 5: Guided Imagery/Visualization Relaxation Instructions**

Guided imagery, or visualization, involves creating mental images that produce a relaxed, calm physical and mental state. By imagining yourself in a peaceful, relaxing place, it is like taking an imaginary trip to that place. To do this you need to think about a place that when you are there you feel completely calm and physically relaxed. There are audio tracks to assist you in doing this. Some of the tracks have music and a guide creating the images. Other tracks just have music and you can create your own personal images. It is important that you pick a place or image that is personally relaxing to you. Completely immerse yourself in the experience when you visualize the scene, as if you are really there. Give the exercise your complete attention. Try to make it as real as possible, including sights, sounds, smells, and physical feelings of being in that place. Use the deep, natural breathing patterns as you perform the visualization exercises.

## **Part 6: Tension Scanning**

We may start our day feeling relaxed, and we feel relaxed after listening to the relaxation exercises. Once we start becoming active and use our muscles, they become tense and do not always fully relax when we are done with our activities. We may also experience various stresses over our day, whether physical or emotional. As a result, many people feel more tense and more pain as the day goes on. One way to control this is to stop throughout the day and perform “tension scans.” This is a quick break to check yourself for pain and stress, and use your relaxation skills to get relaxed again.

To perform a tension scan, stop what you are doing once every 30 minutes or so, when you have about 1-2 minutes to relax. Because you are going to tune in to your body it is very important that you can safely take your mind off your surroundings. *Do not do a tension scan while driving, using tools, or doing anything else that requires your full attention for safety.* Once you can take a break for 1-2 minutes just stop what you are doing. You do not have to sit or lie down, just do it wherever you are.

Start by taking a deep breath and letting it out slowly. If you have a relaxing image that you use, imagine that as well. Then from the top of your head to the bottom of your toes, check your body for any signs of muscle tension, pain, anxiety, or stress. If there are none there, you may return to whatever it was you were doing when you started. Chances are you will find some tension or pain somewhere, even if it is just small and you had not noticed it before you stopped. In that case use whichever relaxation skill works best to control *the symptoms you find at that moment.* If you notice your muscles are tight, or you are having pain, use the muscle relaxation skills, *but just in the areas that you need them right then.* If you are noticing stress, anxiety, tight chest, or increased heart rate, do a few cycles of the deep breathing exercise. Only work on the areas you find at that moment, that way it does not take too long and you can get back to what you were doing when you did the scan.

The goal of these tension scans is to stop often enough throughout the day so you can control any tension or pain *within 60 seconds.* It is difficult to find 15-30 minutes to listen to the audio recordings during a regular busy day, but there are many times you can find 30-60 seconds. Also

by stopping more often, the pain and tension is smaller and can be reduced more quickly. Depending on your day, you may find yourself needing to stop more or less often. A good rule of thumb is to stop at least once every 30 minutes to check yourself. This way you will catch any symptoms when they are small. The longer you wait between tension scans the more likely you are to have higher levels of pain and stress. You can still control those symptoms with your relaxation skills, but it will take more time. With practice over several weeks, tension scanning will become almost automatic, like scratching an itch. This will allow you to control your pain or stress throughout the day and sometimes even prevent it.