

# Relaxation

A patient leaflet to accompany the  
Relaxation CD

National Spinal Injuries Centre  
Stoke Mandeville Hospital

Safe & compassionate care,

every time

### **What is Relaxation?**

Relaxation is a skill that can be of benefit in a number of situations. Relaxation is particularly important when we feel under stress, anxious or in pain. Stress reactions can exacerbate the experience of pain, headaches, negative mood and backache.

### **What can I do to relax?**

There are many different things that people do to relax. For example, taking a bath, listening to music and painting to name a few. The autohypnotic relaxation CD provides a structured way to help you learn to relax your body and mind, and is particularly useful when someone feels under stress, anxious or in pain, or when it seems hard to do the usual things you do to help you to relax. The first part of the CD talks you through some breathing exercises to begin with, then focuses on relaxing different parts of your body and then your mind. It is about giving you some time out from your worries or concerns, and helping your body to relax.

Relaxation is something you can learn to do just like driving a car. As a skill, it requires practice to master it effectively; the more you practice, the easier things generally become. Therefore, the more you practice relaxation, the more able you will be to relax.

### **Learning to relax**

In learning how to relax we need to become aware of the tension in our bodies and then practice relaxing when we feel this tension. However, as with any skill it is best learnt at times when you feel slightly tense, rather than very tense to begin with, because it is something your body needs to get used to trying at different times of the day. It is also helpful to listen to the CD first in a quiet environment when you are not likely to be interrupted, and try to make yourself as comfortable as possible. Although people often like to use it to help them get to sleep, when first learning relaxation it helps if you practice the CD at other periods in the day so that your body starts to learn how to feel relaxed as part of your usual routine.

### **How to focus on relaxation**

Often people find a difficult part of relaxing is allowing oneself to focus solely on relaxation without wandering onto other thoughts. The best way to approach this is to accept that minds tend to be active and try not to criticise yourself for not concentrating. Instead, each time you notice your mind has wandered, gently bring it back to the theme of relaxation.

### **Developing a relaxing image**

Another helpful way to relax and quieten the mind is to develop a relaxing image. Imagine yourself back in some situation that you found very relaxing or one which you think would be very relaxing. Conjure up this image in as much detail as you can using all your senses. A warm, sunny day or a beautiful garden; the CD talks you through how to do this. In time, when people are practised at relaxation they find that using such an image, together with a cue word such as 'relax' or concentrating on deep breathing, is enough to help them feel relaxed without listening to the CD.

### **Further support**

This is a short handout to accompany the CD to give you some pointers about how to get the most out of it. It has been designed specifically for people with spinal cord injury and the voice is that of Professor Paul Kennedy, Trust Head of Clinical Psychology. The Department of Clinical Psychology has a number of other patient leaflets available that can help with specific problems such as anxiety, depression, pain or memory difficulties, which may also be of use. Copies of these leaflets can be found on the NSIC wards or alternatively can be obtained from the department direct. If you are currently an inpatient at the NSIC, please contact the Department of Clinical Psychology should you have any questions or concerns about the CD or the relaxation process. It may be that your concerns require more specialist help or support and therefore if you are living in the community, contact Spinal Outpatients or speak to your GP about your concerns and the availability of local psychological support.

## Concerns

If you have any concerns about the treatment and rehabilitation you receive, or about your experience at the NSIC, please raise them with a member of staff.

If you are particularly happy about the service you have received at the NSIC, you are welcome to let us know, preferably in writing. All NHS Trusts have a commitment to monitor and improve the quality of their services, and therefore comments from users of those services are especially helpful.

### **How can I help reduce healthcare associated infections?**

Infection control is important to the well-being of our patients and for that reason we have infection control procedures in place. Keeping your hands clean is an effective way of preventing the spread of infections. We ask that you, and anyone visiting you, use the hand sanitiser available at the entrance to every ward before coming in to or after leaving the ward. In some situations hands may need to be washed at the sink using soap and water rather than using the hand sanitiser. Staff will let you know if this is the case.

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