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RELAXATION AND YOU

A six lesson course to follow in the comfort of your own home
by Eileen Hewitson

LESSON ONE

Many, many people say that relaxation is one of the main strategies they use to manage their tinnitus. It could be that relaxation classes are being run by your local Adult Education Centre, Health or Tinnitus Clinic, but if that is not the case or you find it difficult to attend such classes, you may be interested in helping yourself to relax within the comfort of your own home.

Rather than start with long-winded explanations as to why we should relax, let us start with a simple exercise and we can explore the whys and wherefores later.

So for a quiet moment

Bear in mind that there is only one rule in relaxation and that is FIND THE TIME. Reading books, talking about it, resolving to do it are all quite empty efforts unless you ACTUALLY DO SET THE TIME ASIDE TO RELAX.

The aim of this exercise is to let go as much as you can in the time available. So, find two minutes - just TWO minutes - preferably three times a day, when you can sit down in a comfortable chair - one with a high back would be ideal. Get your body nicely settled into it, resting your head on the back of the chair, with your arms and hands where they are comfortable on the arms of the chair or in your lap. Have your feet on the floor and a little bit apart. Now tell your muscles to relax, to let go, to become soft and at ease.

You can work through the body systematically, starting at the top of your head and working down the body, directing your attention to the forehead, eyes, cheeks, lips, jaw, neck, shoulders, arms, hands, fingers and thumbs; then the back, chest, abdomen, legs, feet, and toes. You could, if you prefer, reverse the process and start at your toes and work UP through the body, it really does not matter. But do concentrate on those areas of the body where you feel you may have unnecessary tension, whether this be the jaw, shoulders, neck or abdomen.

You may have been taught (in class or on tape) to tighten up groups of muscles before relaxing them, but this is a different and much lengthier exercise and you may not always have the time to do it. So just tell your muscles to LET GO.

It is important to spend no longer than two minutes doing this exercise, and when it is complete you can get up and carry on with your normal routine. You may, if you wish, continue to sit for a moment or two enjoying being still and at ease. Do not concern yourself if you do not achieve much at first - like any other skill, relaxation has to be learned gradually, a step at a time. Do not worry either if you forget to practise, or if circumstances prevent you from doing so. Concentrate on today and on what you can do today.

Above all, be gentle with yourself and remember that anything worth acquiring was not gained overnight.

Now let us consider some of those whys and wherefores. The benefits of relaxation will begin straightaway, although you may not be aware of them for a few months. Sometimes, it is someone else who notices them first! Just as someone who gives up smoking does not notice the improvement in breathing or general health for months or even years, the benefits of not smoking will actually start from the very first day. So it is with relaxation - there is an accumulative effect.

THERE IS NO WRONG WAY IN WHICH TO RELAX. If you want to play music, burn incense, whatever helps you, then do what is right for you. Try different techniques and exercises, then work out your own preferences, to make up your own "programme". Think of it like the pick & mix sweet counter, where you can pick and choose what you like, but you cannot know what you do or do not like, until you have tried them all.

When we talk of relaxation, we do not mean watching the television, or reading, or gardening etc. These have

their place and help you feel better in yourself. What we are aiming to learn is **deep relaxation**. Here, you are aiming to do **ABSOLUTELY NOTHING**. Deep relaxation will help you to enjoy your other leisure activities all the more. Then after each session of deep relaxing, you take with you the benefits of having relaxed and this affects the way you respond to all the situations in your everyday life.

Relaxation is not something to be kept in a separate compartment of your life, like supporting your favourite football team. Relaxation is to be used ALL THE TIME, no matter where you are, or who you are with or what you are doing. But to practise and learn this skill, **time must be set aside**. So give yourself this time and we will go more deeply into the subject of relaxation when we meet again.

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