



Relaxation and Pain

Relaxation can be used to help you manage your pain. It can help to reduce tension and break the vicious cycle of anxiety, stress and pain. Like any skill it takes practice to learn well.

Relaxation is not just doing nothing, reading a book, watching TV or sitting down for a bit, although you may enjoy doing some of these things. Relaxation is an active process.

Relaxation involves changing your body's responses to pain and painful experiences. The benefits of changing these responses include:

- ✓ Reduced muscle spasms
- ✓ Releasing endorphins (our natural painkillers), which reduce pain
- ✓ Reduced effects of stress
- ✓ A lower breathing rate
- ✓ Lower blood pressure
- ✓ A lower heart rate
- ✓ Improved sleep
- ✓ A calm mind, so thinking becomes clearer and more effective
- ✓ Helping you to feel more in control

Read on to find out more. If you need more information, you can visit the 'Get Information' section of the patient online platform, if you're registered with the Pain Service. This is accessible at <http://somersetpain.co.uk>. If you're not registered, then the website also has information under the 'Get more information/resources' section.

Things to think about when practicing relaxation

- ✓ **Routine.** Set aside 20 minutes at the same time each day when you know that you won't be disturbed
- ✓ Go to the toilet before you start relaxation
- ✓ Be on your own in a quiet, warm room
- ✓ Close the curtains and put the light out
- ✓ **Clothing.** Loosen any tight clothing and remove shoes and glasses
- ✓ Make yourself **comfortable** either lying or sitting with your legs uncrossed and your arms by your side
- ✓ **Sleep.** Do not practice after a heavy meal or just before going to bed, as you are likely to fall asleep. Once you have mastered a technique, by all means use relaxation to help you sleep, but whilst you are still learning you need to stay awake so that you become very familiar with the relaxation process
- ✓ Some people prefer one technique to another. Others regularly use one or more techniques depending on how they are feeling at the time
- ✓ You need to give yourself **time** to practice relaxation techniques, and Ideally you should practice at least once a day
- ✓ Some people find immediate benefit from relaxation and others take a lot longer to notice any effect
- ✓ Do not give up; it may take you time to learn these new skills.
- ✓ Breathing and Relaxation CDs and DVDs are widely available.

Patients' experiences of relaxation

"I was not convinced about some of the relaxation; however, I have learnt to give things a try. I have really been surprised at the results. I have also used the relaxation techniques during the working day, especially if the work environment is frantic. A few moments in a meeting relaxing helped me to cope with the pain"

Relaxation monitoring form

You may like to use the **relaxation monitoring form** on the next page to help you record the progress you make. Relaxation is a skill that needs to be learned through regular practice at least once a day. Record the date and time of your relaxation practice and your level of tension before and after you practice the techniques.

Scale = 0 – 10 (where 0 is extremely relaxed and 10 is extremely tense or anxious).



Relaxation monitoring form

Day	Time	Tension before practice on scale of 1-10	Tension after practice on a scale of 0 - 10