



## ECHO Idaho: Behavioral Health in Primary Care

# Relaxation Training

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# Learning Objectives

- Introduction of research on efficacy and clinical application of relaxation training
- Identify opportunities for the usage of relaxation training in a clinical setting
- Increase familiarity with implementation of several relaxation techniques

# Relaxation training

- Various techniques aimed at inducing the body's natural relaxation response
- Techniques include:
  - Deep breathing
  - Progressive muscle relaxation
  - Guided imagery
  - Self-hypnosis
  - Bio-feedback
  - Meditation
  - Yoga
  - Tai Chi
- Shown effective in the management and improvement of many mental and physical health problems, including [5]:
  - Anxiety-related disorders
  - Depression
  - Heart disease
  - High blood pressure
  - Insomnia
  - Pain
  - Nausea related to chemotherapies



# The Research

- Research indicates that relaxation training is associated with improvements in physical health. Many times, the objective of relaxation is the reduction of anxiety related to physical illness. However, relaxation techniques are also used to reduce perceived pain or somatic symptoms, such as nausea or hypertension [1]
- In many studies, the efficacy of the relaxation treatment increases with the duration of the protocol. Repetitive training over a longer period produced significantly higher results. In one study, effect size increased significantly with the addition of having the patients practice the exercises at home [1]
- A large meta-analysis that compared relaxation techniques found that, while all relaxation techniques reduced anxiety, applied relaxation, progressive relaxation and meditation showed greater effect sizes than other techniques. [1]
- In several studies, applied relaxation was shown to be equally as effective in treating Generalized Anxiety Disorder as Cognitive therapy [2,3]



# Breathing

- Deep breathing, relaxation breathing, diaphragmatic breathing, belly breathing, etc.
- Primary goal is to decrease heart rate and counteract sympathetic nervous system activation
- Must be both DEEP and SLOW
- Target respiratory rate of 4-6 breaths per minute
- Regular exercise of the technique is key

# Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- Systematic tightening and relaxing of major muscle groups with intentional awareness of both states
- Increases overall awareness of muscle tension in the body
- Builds association between internal verbal cues and the build up of tension
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ClqPtWzozXs>



# Visualization

- “Happy place” visualization
- Guide the patient to create their own safe, peaceful place in their mind
- Encourage utilization of all senses to increase depth of experience
- Identify connection between internal visual and cognitive cues and emotional state



# Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

- Technique developed by Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn in the late 1970's through his work at University of Massachusetts Medical School
- Initially developed for stress management, now has expanded and is often included in the treatment of a number of health related disorders
- Involves mindfulness meditation to alleviate suffering associated with physical, psychosomatic and psychiatric disorders [4]
- 2.5 hours per week for 8-weeks, with a 1-day retreat
- Intensive training in mindful meditation techniques and yoga practices
- There is evidence that individuals with chronic illnesses such as diabetes, hypertension, cancer, immune disorders, chronic pain, sleep disorders, clinical depression, stress and anxiety may benefit from MBSR [4]
- MBSR introduces very little risk and can increase an individual's control over their pain and mood, as well as enhance the general quality of their life [4]



# Key Points

- Relaxation training has been shown to be effective for the maintenance and treatment of many physical and psychological disorders
- Relaxation training involves very little risk to the patient, and a high potential for reward
- Relaxation training requires less demand from a provider than many other psychological treatment modalities
- Techniques must be taught and practiced regularly!

# Resources

- Applications
  - Sanvello
  - Calm
  - Headspace
  - Youtube
- UMass Memorial Center for Mindfulness

# References

1. Manzoni, G.M., Pagnini, F., Castelnuovo, G. *et al.* Relaxation training for anxiety: a ten-years systematic review with meta-analysis. *BMC Psychiatry* **8**, 41 (2008)
2. Ost LG, Breitholtz E: Applied relaxation vs. cognitive therapy in the treatment of generalized anxiety disorder. *Behav Res Ther.* 2000, 38 (8): 777-790
3. Arntz A: Cognitive therapy versus applied relaxation as treatment of generalized anxiety disorder. *Behav Res Ther.* 2003, 41 (6): 633-646
4. Niazi, A. K., & Niazi, S. K. (2011). Mindfulness-based stress reduction: a non-pharmacological approach for chronic illnesses. *North American journal of medical sciences*, 3(1), 20–23
5. <https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/relaxation-techniques-for-health>



# Ongoing Resources List

- Resources from today's session and past sessions can be found in our ongoing resource list.
- <https://iecho.unm.edu/sites/uidaho/download.hns?i=85>



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