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More and more people are using relaxation techniques to make themselves feel better. The value of deep relaxation in achieving wellness is also being recognized increasingly by the medical community. Research shows that the benefits of practicing relaxation techniques increase dramatically over time.

Many studies have found that regular relaxation can speed psychotherapy, lessen chemical addiction, and decrease anxiety.

Guided imagery focuses your attention on relaxing and healing images. A detailed example is given below, but you can make up your own healing and peaceful scenarios. The important thing is to include as much sensory detail as possible. Try to include all five senses: touch, taste, smell, hearing, and sight.

Achieving Restful Relaxation through Guided Imagery

Tips before you begin:

Get in a very comfortable sitting or lying position. Make sure the room is a comfortable temperature and that you will not be interrupted by the phone, doorbell, or the needs of others.

Exercises:

- Stare at a spot above your head on the ceiling (if you're lying down) or stare straight ahead (if you're sitting).
- Take a deep breath to the count of eight, hold it for a count of four, and let it out for a count of eight.
- Again --- in for a count of eight; hold for a count of four; exhale for a count of eight.
- Again --- in for a count of eight; hold for a count of four; exhale for a count of eight.

Now close your eyes but keep them in the same position they were in when you were staring at a spot on the ceiling or in front of you. Breathe in to a count of eight; hold for a count of four; exhale for a count of eight.

Now, focus on your toes and let them completely relax. Move the feeling of relaxation up your legs, through your heels and calves to your knees. Let the warm feeling of relaxation move up your thighs. Feel your whole body relaxing.

Let this feeling of relaxation move very slowly through your buttocks, lower abdomen, and lower back. Now feel it moving, very slowly, up your spine and through your abdomen. Now feel the warm relaxation flowing into your chest and upper back. Let this relaxation flow from your shoulders, through your elbows and wrists, out through your hands and fingers. Now let the relaxation go slowly through your throat and up your neck, letting it all soften and relax. Let the feeling move up your face. Feel the relaxation move up your jaw and through your cheek muscles, and surround your eyes. Relax your eyes. Let the feeling of relaxation move up into your forehead. Now let your whole scalp relax and feel warm and comfortable. Your body is now completely relaxed, with the feeling of relaxation filling every muscle and cell of your body.



Visualization

You're walking down a long wooden stairway to a very beautiful, expansive beach. It looks almost deserted and stretches off into the distance as far as you can see. The sand is very fine and light ... almost white in appearance. You step onto the sand in your bare feet and rub it between your toes. It feels so good to walk along this beautiful beach. The roaring sound of the surf is so soothing that you can just let go of anything on your mind. You're watching the waves ebb and flow ... they are slowly coming in ... breaking over each other ... and then slowly flowing back out again.

The ocean itself is a very beautiful shade of blue ... a shade that is so relaxing just to look at. You look out over the surface of the ocean all the way to the horizon, and then follow the horizon as far as you can see, noticing how it bends slightly downward as it follows the curvature of the earth.

As you scan the ocean you can see, many miles offshore, a tiny sailboat skimming along the surface of the water. All of these sights help you to just let go and relax even more. As you continue walking down the beach, you become aware of the fresh, salty smell of the sea air. You take in a deep breath ... breathe out ... and feel very refreshed and even more relaxed.

Overhead you notice two seagulls flying out to sea ... looking very graceful as they soar into the wind ... and you imagine how you might feel yourself if you had the freedom to fly. You find yourself settling into a deep state of relaxation as you continue walking down the beach. You feel the sea breeze blowing gently against your cheek and the warmth of the sun overhead penetrating your neck and shoulders. The warm, liquid sensation of the sun just relaxes you even more ... and you're beginning to feel perfectly content on this beautiful beach. It's such a lovely day.

In a moment, up ahead, you see a comfortable-looking beach chair. Slowly, you begin to approach the beach chair ... and when you finally reach it, you sit back and settle in. Lying back in this comfortable chair, you let go and relax even more, drifting even deeper into relaxation. In a little while you might close your eyes and just listen to the sound of the surf, the unending cycle of waves ebbing and flowing. And the rhythmic sound of the surf carries you even deeper ... deeper still ... into a wonderful state of quietness and peace.