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TIP SHEET: RELAXATION STRATEGIES

Deep Breathing

Place a hand on your upper chest and a hand on your stomach. Notice how you breathe normally. Most people will notice they breathe shallowly: The hand on their chest is moving more than the hand on their stomach. Now concentrate on breathing deeply, all the way into your lungs, so that the hand on your stomach moves more than the hand on your chest. Breathe in for 4 counts through your nose, and out for 4 counts with your (open) mouth. Repeat. Some people like to think the word "Relax" when breathing deeply: "Re-" when breathing in, and "-lax" when breathing out. Practice deep breathing 10 minutes a day and then try using it in stressful situations.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

WARNING: DO NOT USE THIS STRATEGY ON ANY AREA OF YOUR BODY THAT SUFFERS FROM CHRONIC PAIN, INJURY OR MUSCLE SPASMS. IF YOU FEEL ANY CRAMPING, STOP TENSING AND MOVE TO THE NEXT MUSCLE GROUP

Sitting in a comfortable chair, spend a total of 20 to 30 minutes tensing and relaxing the major muscle groups in your body. Start with your feet and toes. Tense those muscles by pointing and curling your toes and turning your feet inward. Describe what the tension feels like. Hold the tension for about 5 to 10 seconds. Then relax the muscles in your feet and toes. Describe the feeling of relaxation in those muscles to yourself, and how it feels different than the feeling of tensed muscles in that area. Study the relaxation for 30 to 40 seconds. Progress in this way through the other major muscle groups: Feet (described above)

Calves (pull toes towards head; hold for 3-4 seconds to avoid cramping)

Thighs

Stomach Muscles (Make your abdomen hard by clenching those muscles)

Hands and lower arms (Clench your fists)

Upper Arms (Push elbow down against chair)

Chest, shoulders & upper back (Clench shoulder blades together)

Neck (Pull your chin towards your chest, without letting it touch your chest)

Face (Bite hard and pull back corners of mouth, then squint and scrunch your nose, and lift eyebrows as high as possible to tense each muscle group in your face)

Many people prefer to move through this cycle twice, and then when finished determine if any areas of tension remain; if so, focus on tensing and relaxing those muscles until tension is gone. Enjoy the state of relaxation for a few minutes.

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