

Tension Control: Quick Tips

The ability to relax under stress is an essential part of personal safety

The main purpose of tension is to put us in a state of readiness to respond to danger, threat or risk. Our senses receive an alarm signal of some sort, which triggers a series of changes to the body. These reactions are generally unpleasant (e.g. racing of the heart, muscle tension, headache, sweating and nausea) but they are useful; they let us know it is time to take action to manage or control the tension before it becomes damaging.

Once our alarm buttons have been pressed, it is difficult to relax our internal organs and racing brain by will-power alone. The following quick relaxation technique will help stop the tension from taking over and help you react in a positive way. The idea is that after practicing you will be able to relax your muscles at will, as you will know what the difference feels like. However, this might take some time.

General practice (sitting in a chair)

- Clench your hands into fists until you can feel your nails digging into your palm and you can see the whiteness of your knuckles
- Release completely, including your arm, shoulders, jaw and neck. Breathe out as you release
- Stretch your fingers along your thighs until they rise at the tips
- Release as above
- Push your shoulders down
- Release
- Push your back down into the chair
- Release
- Push your heels into the floor
- Release
- Expel all breath as a sigh and relax so that your lungs fill with air. Repeat if necessary
- This can be progressed to standing, facing another person, talking to someone, facing aggression

GUIDANCE SHEET

Breathing to release tension

If you find yourself holding your breath in a difficult situation:

- Let your breath go, blowing out forcibly; feel your shoulders drop
- Slowly breathe in, one long breath, filling your lungs
- Breathe out slowly, imagining yourself deflating
- Do not repeat immediately

These relaxation techniques are a means of managing tension. They allow us to:

- Think more clearly about the situation
- Make appropriate assessments of the situation
- Make appropriate decisions about the situation
- Take an appropriate course of action

Bear in mind that practice of these techniques is essential. Try practising on your own at first, whenever you feel tense, then progress to standing, facing another person, talking to someone, facing an aggressive situation.

One way to practice it is to think it, not do it.

You can practice anywhere, anytime.