

## **MANAGING STRESS**

### **A. RELAXED BREATHING:**

The goal of this exercise is to slow down your breathing, especially breathing out.

#### **Steps:**

1. Sit in a comfortable chair with your back fully supported
2. Choose a relaxing word/phrase to say as you practice inhaling and exhaling slowly. (Examples: CALM or RELAX or PEACAEFUL or STAY CALM and SLOW DOWN)
3. Slowly inhale through your nose and exhale slowly through nose. Take normal breaths, not deep ones. Make sure that you exhale slowly and consciously.
4. While you breathe say the relaxing word you have chosen. Say it very slowly, like this, "c-a-a-a-a-l-m" or "r-e-e-e-l-a-a-x" or say one syllable when you inhale (e.g. re) and one syllable when you exhale(e.g. lax).
5. Pause after exhaling before taking your next breath. Try counting to four before inhaling each new breath.
6. Concentrate on your breath as it travels through the air passageways.
7. Repeat the entire sequence 10 to 20 times.
8. Gradually return to breathing normally. Sit quietly for a minute or two, focusing on your natural breathing.

### **B. MUSCLE RELAXATION:**

The goal of the technique is to gently stretch your muscles to reduce stiffness and tension. The exercises start at your head and work down to your feet. You can do these exercises while sitting in a chair.

## Steps:

1. Head rotation: Drop your head to one side. Gently roll it around in a wide circle. Repeat 3-5 times. Then reverse the direction and gently roll your head in a wide circle the other way. Repeat 3-5 times.
2. Shoulder shrugs: Lift both shoulders in a shrugging motion. Try to touch your ears with your shoulders. Hold the position for a few seconds. Let your shoulders down after each shrug. Hold the position for a few seconds Repeat 3-5 times.
3. Overhead arm stretches. Raise both arms straight above your head. Interlace your fingers, like you are making a basket, with your palms facing down towards the floor. Now stretch your arms towards the ceiling and hold this position for a few seconds. Then, keeping your fingers interlaced, rotate your palms to face upwards towards the ceiling. Stretch towards the ceiling again and hold this position for a few seconds. Repeat this sequence 3-5 times. If doing this exercise with your arms stretched overhead is uncomfortable, try it with your arms reaching out in front of you.
4. Knee rises. Reach down and grab your right knee with one or both hands. Pull your knee up towards your chest (as close to your chest as is comfortable). Hold your knee there for a few seconds, before lowering it and returning your foot to the floor. Reach down and grab your left knee with one or both hands and bring it up towards your chest. Hold it there for a few seconds before lowering it. Repeat the sequence 3-5 times.
5. Foot and ankle rolls. Lift your feet and stretch your legs out. Rotate your ankles and feet, 3-5 times in one direction, then 3-5 times in the other direction.

\* If it is not comfortable to do step#3 with your arms overhead, try it with your arms reaching out in front of you./

### **C. PEACEFUL IMAGERY:**

The goal of this technique is to “take yourself” from stress and picture yourself in a more relaxed, calm situation.

#### **Steps:**

1. Think of a scene that you find peaceful, calm and restful. If you have trouble thinking of a scene, consider the following:
  - Walking in the park
  - Sitting on a park bench
  - Walking up a mountain path
  - Sitting beside a river
  - On a farm
  
2. After choosing a peaceful scene, imagine as many details as possible, using all your senses.
  
3. What does the scene look like?  
What are the colors? Is it light or dark? What shapes are in the scene?  
If it's a nature scene, what kind of trees or flowers do you see?  
What are the sounds in your peaceful scene?  
Can you hear water or the sounds of waves?  
Are these sounds from animals or birds? From the breeze?
  
4. What could you feel with your sense of touch?  
Are these textures? Is it cool or warm? Can you feel a breeze?
  
5. What smells are there in your peaceful scene?  
Could you smell flowers? The smell of food cooking?
  
6. Disregard any stressful thoughts and keep your attention on the peaceful scene.  
Allow at least five minutes for this relaxation technique