

1. Deep breathing is an effective way of slowing down the body's natural response to stress. It slows down the heart rate, lowers blood pressure and gives the feeling of being in control. This simple technique can be done by anyone, simply breathe in deeply, hold the breath and release it slowly. Repeat the deep breathing until you feel relaxed.

2. Progressive muscle relaxation is a wonderful relaxation technique that is accomplished by tensing and then relaxing different muscle groups in your body. Your Family Clinic offers excellent instructions on guiding young children in the technique of progressive muscle relaxation. Detailed instructions for performing this technique for older children and adults can be found on the HypnoGenesis website.

3. Visualization, also known as [[Free Guided Relaxation|visual guided imagery]], uses your imagination to calm and relax your mind. Children should imagine their favorite calm, peaceful place or focus on beautiful places. Encourage them to think of happy memories of loved ones. Visualization slows down the chatter of the mind and helps release negative thoughts and worries. Often this technique follows progressive muscle relaxation, which first relaxes the muscles and then calms the mind. A great technique to use with a child involves imagining their favorite relaxing color. The color should be one that makes them feel peaceful and safe. Have the child imagine taking in the color with each breath and sending it throughout their body as they exhale until they are filled with their special beautiful, relaxing color. A soothing sound, a special aroma or the feeling of warmth or light can be used in place of the color.

4. Exercise is a great form of relaxation. Walking, running and playing are all ways to exercise that children love. However, do not overlook exercising to music. There are many excellent exercise CDs and DVDs for all age groups.

5. Laughter is a wonderful stress reliever and helps the body to relax tense muscles. It releases chemicals in the body that reduce tension and pain.

6. Listening to calming music helps to calm and focus the mind regardless of age. Even very young children may enjoy listening to relaxing classical music or the music of Enya or Arkenstone.

7. Stretching relaxes built up tension in the muscles. Teach your child how to stretch each muscle group and feel muscles relax.

8. Meditation techniques, such as yoga or transcendental meditation, relax the mind and body.

9. Cuddle with a pet or hug a loved one. The relaxation response is automatic when you cuddle or pet your dog or cat or give an unexpected hug to a loved one. Blood pressure lowers and stress hormones decrease.

10. Toe tensing draws tension down from the rest of the body. This simple exercise involves laying on your back and allowing yourself to sense your toes. Use your toe muscles to pull all ten toes back in the direction of your face and hold to the count of ten. Relax your toes and hold to the count of ten. Repeat the exercise ten times.

