

Highland  
Ante/  
Postnatal  
Illness & Depression  
Support

# H.A.P.I.S.



Scottish hazel  
a fragile survivor

## RELAXATION TRAINING TECHNIQUES

### INTRODUCTION

Many parents, both women and men, who suffer from postnatal depression feel tense, anxious and irritable. They snap at the children, explode over minor things or burst into tears at the slightest provocation. They may also suffer from panic attacks - sudden overwhelming feelings of panic and fear, accompanied by rapid heartbeat, dizziness and nausea (a separate sheet on dealing with panic attacks is available from HAPIS). These parents usually feel that they can't relax. They may find it difficult to get to sleep or they may wake early in the morning and be unable to go back to sleep again. They may also have racing thoughts which make them more anxious.

Relaxation is the opposite of tension. It is possible to learn to relax and once the relaxation techniques have been properly learnt and can be used to effect many of the symptoms of nervous tension should disappear. It should be easier to fall asleep and your sleep should be deeper and more restful. You will then have more energy and there should be an improvement in concentration and memory.

Relaxation is not an art which can be learnt in one go, it needs practise. You should practise this 15 minute relaxation programme once or twice a day, preferably at a time when you are feeling reasonably relaxed already (there is no point in trying it for the first time when you are in the middle of a panic attack, you simply won't be able to do it) and are not likely to be interrupted. Last thing at night, just before going to bed or even when you are in bed is a good time to practise.

Make sure that your clothing is loose so that your breathing and circulation are not restricted, if possible darken the room and perhaps play some quiet soothing music. Get as comfortable as you can, either sitting or lying down. If you choose to sit down, sit in a comfortable chair with your back and neck properly supported, if you lie down lie on your back facing upwards. Don't cross your legs and keep your arms at your side.

The exercises are designed to teach you the difference between tense and relaxed muscles so that you can learn to recognise the early signs of tension in everyday situations. You will then be able to relax the particular muscles involved there and then.

## INSTRUCTIONS

Get as comfortable as you can. Try and let go the tension in all the muscles in your body then starting with your toes, tense the muscles in each group as tightly as you can, hold the tension for a few seconds, so that you can feel how unpleasant it is, then relax and feel the difference. Take two deep breaths than repeat the exercise. After two more deep breathes move on to the next group of muscles.

1. Begin by curling your toes downwards into a tense position, hold and feel how unpleasant it is then relax and feel the difference.
2. Arch your toes up towards you face, making your shins tense, hold, then relax.
3. Press your feet and toes away from your face, tensing your calf muscles, hold, then relax.
4. Tense your thighs by pressing down on your heels as hard as you can, hold, then relax.
5. Tighten your stomach muscles as though someone was about to punch you in the stomach, hold, then relax.
6. Draw your stomach muscles right in as if you were trying to make your stomach touch your spine, hold, then relax

*Relax completely for a while and concentrate on breathing evenly.*

7. Arch up your back, make your lower back hollow, hold, then relax.
8. Clench your fists, bend your arms at the elbow, hold, then relax.

*Relax your feet, legs, back and stomach. let go completely.*

9. Bend your arms at the elbows, raising your hands about six inches -do not tense up, just notice the subtle tension.
10. Take in a deep breath and tense up, hold the breath and tension for a few seconds then breathe out and relax.

*Check for any tension in your feet, thighs and stomach muscles. Relax completely from the waist down and breathe evenly.*

11. Press your head back as far as it will go, hold, then relax.
12. Bend your head forwards, touch your chest with your chin, hold, then relax.
13. Stretch your arms out, press your hands down, hold, then relax.

*Relax completely.*

14. Bite your teeth together to tense the jaws, hold, then relax.
15. Open your mouth as wide as you can, hold, then relax.
16. Push your tongue hard against the roof of your mouth, hold, then relax.
17. Screw up your eyes tightly, hold, then relax.
18. Wrinkly up your forehead, hold, then relax.

Let go completely, check toes, feet, ankles, shins, calves, knees and thighs to ensure they are completely relaxed. Relax hips, stomach, lower back chest, shoulders, upper back and neck, arms, hands and face.

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