

## **Tense and Release Relaxation**

This practice is very simple to do and will probably take no more than a couple minutes (longer if it is comfortable). The basic practice is simply to tense muscle groups, and then release the tension. You may find it comfortable to go through the sequence only one time, or to go through it several times.

Do both the tensing and the releasing with full awareness. There is no need to tense at 100% of your capacity--about 50% of your capacity to tense will be sufficient.

It is best to maintain breath awareness as you do the practices. You will come to experience the way in which breath is a manifestation of energy, and how that energy flows throughout your being.

- First, tense all of the muscles of the face, including forehead, cheeks, mouth, and upper neck. Then release with full awareness. You will notice the relaxation.
- Gently roll the head from side to side, with awareness of the tightening muscles, and the feeling of release.
- Tighten the shoulders, pulling them upwards and forwards. Then release.
- Tense the entire right arm, from the shoulder down through the fingers. Do this without making a fist or lifting your arm off of the floor. Allow your attention to be deep inside the arm, not just on the surface. Then release slowly, with awareness.
- Tense the left arm in the same way, and observe the release.
- Gently tense the muscles of the chest and the abdomen, while continuing to breathe without holding the breath. Then release.
- Tense and release the right hips and the buttocks.
- Tense and release the right leg, down through the feet and toes in the same way that the right arm was tensed and released.
- Tense and release the left hips and buttocks.
- Tense and release the left leg.
- While no longer tensing any muscles, allow your attention to drift back up through the legs, through the abdomen and chest, through the arms, and back to the face.

After completing the Tense and Release practice, you might want to do it again, go on to the Complete Relaxation, or proceed to the next phase of Yoga Meditation, which is working more directly with the breath, such as starting with breath awareness or diaphragmatic breathing.

## Complete Relaxation

The Complete Relaxation is an excellent practice to do before meditation. It is subtler than the Tense and Release practice above ([Body survey is online](#)).

Following is one of many versions of this practice:

Lie in the corpse posture with your eyes closed. Lie in such a way that your head, neck, and trunk are aligned. You want your spine to be straight, not turned left or right anywhere along the length of the spine. It is most comfortable to be lying on a soft surface, such as a folded blanket placed on top of a rug. To lie in a bed may not give enough support to your back and body. A thin cushion, maybe an inch or two, makes a nice support for your head. Allow the breath to be smooth, slow, and with no noise or pauses.

- Allow your attention to move through your head and face, including the top of the head, forehead, eyebrows, eyes, cheekbones, and nostrils.
- Be aware of the breath at the nostrils for several breaths.
- Continue to survey mouth, jaws and chin.
- Then survey the neck and throat, shoulders, arms, elbows, wrists, hands, fingers, and fingertips.
- Feel as though you are inhaling from the tips of the fingers up to the shoulders, and then exhaling back to the finger tips. Do this several times.
- Then move your attention from the fingers, back through the hands, wrists, lower arms, upper arms, shoulders, upper back and chest.
- Concentrate at the center of the chest, and exhale and inhale completely several times.
- Be aware of the stomach, abdomen, lower back, hips, thighs, knees, calves, ankles, feet, and toes.
- Exhale as if your whole body is exhaling, and inhale as if your whole body is inhaling. As you exhale, let go of all tension, worries, and anxieties. Inhale as if you are inhaling new energy, as well as a sense of peace and relaxation. Exhale and inhale several times.
- Then move your attention from the toes to the feet, ankles, calves, thighs, knees, hips, lower back, abdomen, stomach and chest.
- Concentrate at the center of the chest, and exhale and inhale completely several times.
- Survey the upper back, shoulders, upper arms, lower arms, wrists, hands, fingers, and fingertips.

- Feel as though you are inhaling from the tips of the fingers up to the shoulders, and then exhaling back to the finger tips. Do this several times.
- Then move your attention from the fingers, back through the hands, wrists, lower arms, upper arms, shoulders, neck, throat, chin, jaws, mouth, and nostrils.
- Be aware of the breath at the nostrils for several breaths.
- Move your attention to the cheekbones, eyes, eyebrows, forehead and the top of the head.
- For about one minute, allow your attention to be aware of the smooth, slow, serene flow of the breath. Let your mind make a gentle, conscious effort to guide the breath so that it is smooth, calm, deep, and without any noise or jerkiness.

The Complete Relaxation can be done in a broad range of time frames. To learn to do this as slow as the length of time for one exhalation down, and one inhalation up, is very useful. To do the practice in about 3-4 minutes can be very relaxing, whether for a quick break in daily life, or preparation for meditation. If it is comfortable, spending a much longer amount of time can bring tremendous insights about the nature of your inner being, as well as deep relaxation, and preparation for deep meditation.