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Relaxation

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- Integrate exercise into your everyday life
- Find opportunities for relaxation at home and in the workplace

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MA(Ed)**

*Mindfulness Consultant, Keynote
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by Shamash Alidina

Foreword by Cary L. Cooper

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A John Wiley and Sons, Ltd, Publication

Relaxation For Dummies®

Published by
John Wiley & Sons, Ltd
The Atrium
Southern Gate
Chichester
West Sussex
PO19 8SQ
England
www.wiley.com

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Published by John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, Chichester, West Sussex

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ISBN 978-1-119-99909-6 (pbk); ISBN 978-1-119-95114-8 (ebk); ISBN 978-1-119-95116-2 (ebk); ISBN 978-1-119-95115-5 (ebk)

Printed and bound in Great Britain by TJ International, Padstow, Cornwall

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



About the Author

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this book to my wonderful grandma and grandpa who taught me so much about the value of culture, community and family. They both recently passed away. May they rest in peace.

Author's Acknowledgments

A tree doesn't grow from a seed alone – it needs soil, nutrients, warmth, water, sunshine and air. In the same way, I didn't write this book alone. Thousands of people helped to shape the content of this book, from the very close support of friends, family and colleagues, to the clients I have had the privilege to coach, the various lectures I've attended, the books and journals I've read, the online conversations on social networks and the authors and experts I've interviewed. This book has been a team effort.

I'd like to personally thank my immediate and extended family for their patience and support of this project: Fateh, Manju, Aneesh, Ashok, Parul, Vijay, Nirupa, Nikhil, Amisha, Amy and last but not least, Shona. I'd like to thank my friend Jo, who is so supportive of my work and always full of creative ideas and intelligent, positive suggestions; Margarita whose knowledge of psychology and spirituality helps me to put things into perspective; Garry, who's wisdom and sense of humour I always enjoy and deeply appreciate; Maneesh, who's wealth of knowledge in a wide variety of subjects is consistently enlightening and fascinating, and Rizwana, who's practical and perceptive suggestions aided me to speed up my writing. I'd also like to thank all the staff at my local Starbucks coffee shop – they were friendly, welcoming and encouraging for the hundreds of hours I spent typing away, drinking tea and eating porridge!

I've been thoroughly impressed by the support and professionalism of the *For Dummies* team at Wiley. I'd like to personally thank my project editor, Jo Jones, who has been incredibly patient and encouraging as I worked through writing the chapters for this book, from start to finish. I'd like to thank my commissioning editor, Kerry Laundon who was supportive of my passion to make this idea a reality, and always encouraging. I'd also like to thank my development editor, Colette Holden, my copy editor, Martin Key, my technical editor, Roger Henderson and proof-reader, Dawn Bates.

I'd like to thank some of the many supporters from my 'Relaxation For Dummies' and 'Learn Mindfulness' Facebook pages, and who have been closely following and encouraging me right from the ideas stage of this book. Those that come to mind, in no particular order, are: Caroline, Steven, Angel, Sarah, Andy, Mark, Anuk, Laura, Paul, Jenn, Mel, Amy, Stefka, Aseea, Meryl, Tracey, Lisa, Khurty, Mirja, Didi, Marie, Nancie, Gideon, Therese, Jacqueline,

Linda, Roisin, Nadia, Geoff, Maria, Aimee, Phil, Matthew, Claire, Carole, Alice, Ladio, Grethe, Carrie, Jen, Alastair, Hannah and Suki. I'm sure I've forgotten a few names and I'm so sorry for that – I certainly deeply value our online interactions and look forward to connecting with you online, if you like that sort of thing.

I'd like to thank one of the world's leading experts on stress management, Professor Cary Cooper, who took time out of his busy schedule to write the foreword to this book. And I'd finally like to thank Brian Tracy, personal development expert, for reading the script and offering his support for this book.

I'm deeply grateful for all your contributions.

Publisher's Acknowledgments

We're proud of this book; please send us your comments at <http://dummies.custhelp.com>. For other comments, please contact our Customer Care Department within the U.S. at 877-762-2974, outside the U.S. at 317-572-3993, or fax 317-572-4002.

Some of the people who helped bring this book to market include the following:

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Foreword

The fast moving pace of life, the everyday stresses and strains of trying to balance work and life and the greater mobility of individuals, which means that the social support systems of the community and extended family are no longer there, have all led to a depletion of people's mental capital. We no longer have time to create or sustain important relationships, or to reflect on our lives and our lifetime objectives. As Henry David Thoreau once wrote in 1853; "How prompt we are to satisfy the hunger and thirst of our bodies; how slow to satisfy the hunger and thirst of our souls".

In the workplace, for example, the pace of work life has surpassed an individual's ability to cope, which means that people are suffering and need some respite to be able to develop a personal coping strategy. Studs Terkel, in his acclaimed book *Working*, summarised this as; "Work is, by its very nature, about violence – to the spirit as well as to the body. It is about ulcers as well as accidents, about shouting matches as well as fistfights, about nervous breakdowns as well as kicking the dog around. It is, above all (or beneath all) about daily humiliations. To survive the day is triumph for the walking wounded among the great many of us". It may be a bit over exaggerated, but it highlights some of the pressures in the modern day workplace.

This book outlines approaches to helping people to unwind, providing them with the space to reflect on what they are doing, and what they might consider doing in the future to make their life more meaningful. It provides a range of relaxation techniques that individuals can use to get themselves in a state to be able to tackle the problems and issues in their lives. It is the most comprehensive, and the most comprehensible, book ever written on the wide variety of relaxation techniques in the field, and the role they can play in enabling people to get the most out of their lives. As the US President Abraham Lincoln once said, "It is not the years in your life which are important, but the life in your years". This book will go some way to help you achieve some peace and serenity, so that you can go on your life's journey with better inner awareness.

Cary L. Cooper



Introduction

For over a decade my work has given me the honour and privilege of helping adults reduce their stress. I've been fortunate enough to help thousands of people through personal consultations, workshops, books, audios and online classes – a truly humbling thought. In that time, one thing has stood out: most people don't know how to relax. Many of my clients use simple techniques such as belly breathing and guided imagery for the first time with pleasure and surprise. Others make exciting discoveries out of techniques such as mindfulness meditation, t'ai chi and mindful eating.

Chronic stress not only feels unpleasant but also plays havoc with your mind and body. Long-term stress increases your chances of having heart disease, depression, obesity, digestive problems and sleep issues, among other things. With chronic stress, your mind sees everything as a threat and focuses on the negative. Relaxing deeply, which you can do rapidly with regular practice, reverses the harmful effects of stress on your body and mind. Researchers have even shown that relaxation slows down your rate of ageing.

Relaxation is a skill. You may think you relax when you rest on your couch watching TV or even when you sleep, but that's not the deep or nourishing relaxation that is explored in this book. To effectively relax you need to switch on a part of your nervous system called the relaxation response, using specific techniques. Rarely is this skill of relaxation taught in schools or the workplace. I include a range of evidence-based techniques in this book to turn on your relaxation response.

Relaxation not only prevents disease but also promotes wellbeing. If you're under the right amount of pressure rather than overly stressed, the more intelligent and creative parts of your brain function effectively. You can process emotions well, thereby improving your relationships. You get fewer mood swings, you see things in a more light-hearted way, and you understand situations from a bigger perspective. You make better decisions and fewer mistakes.

In this book, I show you a whole range of different ways to relax. I include many relaxation techniques, which form the foundation of a balanced and relaxed life. Additionally, I encourage you to cultivate helpful attitudes so you don't stress about things unnecessarily. I also explain lifestyle choices, highlighting proven ways of reducing stress through exercise and socialising.

Some techniques in this book take less than a minute to do. Others are subtle processes that you can continue to fine-tune your whole life. In this sense, you can refer to this book again and again. There isn't *one* perfect relaxation technique for everyone. I suggest you pick and choose what suits your lifestyle, temperament and needs. You can also experiment, mix different techniques together, and enjoy the variety of ways to experience relaxation – be creative!

Ultimately, a well-balanced life combines effective, regular relaxation techniques together with a wise attitude to daily living. This wisdom is already within you, and learning to trust your inner intuition allows you to access this wisdom regularly.

About This Book

Relaxation For Dummies provides you with practical techniques to develop the skill of relaxation. Each chapter is packed with insights about the art of relaxation, how to relax quickly and easily and ways to relax deeply. This book is for people who have chronic stress and want to discover ways to relax that are simple and scientifically proven to be effective. The book also comes with an audio CD of guided relaxation techniques for you to try. By listening to the CD regularly, you can be guided into a deep state of relaxation and wellbeing and learn the techniques so that you can make yourself feel more relaxed whenever you need to.

Conventions Used in This Book

To help you get the most from this book, I follow a few conventions:

- ✓ *Italic* emphasises and highlights new words or terms that I define.
- ✓ **Boldfaced** text indicates the action part of numbered steps.
- ✓ `Monofont` text displays web addresses.

What You're Not to Read

You don't have to read everything in this book. From time to time you'll see grey boxes – sidebars – that contain interesting bits of info and stories that

may amuse or inform, but aren't crucial to your understanding of the fundamentals. Read them, or not, whatever you want.

I hope you'll get something from the True Story paragraphs, which help you put the learning content of the book into an everyday life situation. However, these do not make essential reading so feel free to ignore them if you want.

Foolish Assumptions

In writing this book, I made a few assumptions about who you are:

- ✓ You want more relaxation in your life, but don't know where to start.
- ✓ You're willing to try the various relaxation techniques and strategies I have suggested a few times, before judging if they'll work for you.
- ✓ You're interested in understanding the potential dangers of chronic stress and adopting a range of strategies to experience relaxation.
- ✓ You're willing to set aside some time in your day to practise a relaxation technique.

Beyond those, I've not assumed too much, I hope.

How This Book Is Organised

I've organised *Relaxation For Dummies* into six parts. Each part covers a range of subjects to help you learn and practise relaxation and is further divided into chapters containing all the information you need.

Part 1: Introducing Relaxation

Before you dive into the nitty-gritty of relaxation techniques and strategies, use this part to get a grip of the basics. In this part, I explain exactly what I mean by relaxation and how stress works to prevent you from feeling relaxed. I help you to discover effective ways to prepare yourself for relaxation so that you're in the best possible place to begin training yourself in the skill of relaxation.

Part II: Exploring Relaxation Techniques Using Your Body

In this part, I show you many ways to relax your body, which naturally goes on to calm your mind and make you feel at ease. I offer a whole bunch of cool techniques to encourage you to discover the art of chilling out such as belly breathing, self-massage, t'ai chi and yoga.

Part III: Discovering Relaxation Techniques Using Your Mind and Heart

If you like the idea of calming your mind, or are attracted to exploring meditation, prayer or spirituality, this part is the one for you. Here, I offer a load of different techniques to try out. From guided imagery to problem-solving techniques, gratitude journals to self-compassion exercises, you're bound to find something that works for you.

Part IV: Everyday Relaxation

Relaxation is most effective if you can integrate the approach into your everyday life using the various techniques when you feel the stress levels rising. Stress often arises at home or in the workplace. In this part, I explore both of these situations and offer tips to ease the pressure. I help you relax in those situations and offer ways to prevent stress creeping up in the first place. I also include a chapter on sleep if you're having trouble nodding off.

Part V: Managing Problems Using Relaxation Techniques

Long-term stress has been shown to be the culprit for a range of different illnesses. Then the illness itself can compound your stress to higher levels. If you're suffering from a mental or physical health issue, reading through this part gives you some helpful tools for finding rest and relaxation. In this part, I explain how relaxation can help with anxiety, depression, anger, chronic illness, preventing burnout, and more.

Part VI: The Part of Tens

Every *For Dummies* book has one of these parts. The Part of Tens offers four fun-sized chapters covering top tips for the golden rules of relaxation, quick and deep ways to relax, and many exciting sources for further study that I personally love, including books, CDs, movies and websites. Yummy!

Icons Used in This Book

Sprinkled through the book you see various icons to guide you on your way. Icons are a *For Dummies* way of drawing your attention to important and interesting stuff and things you really need to know not to do.



Handy tidbits to help you get the best from your relaxation studies. These little ideas summarise key relaxation concepts in bite-size chunks so you can access relaxation that little bit more easily.



This is stuff you need to know: whatever else you carry away from this book, note these bits with care.



Take careful note of the advice under this icon, and you'll avoid unnecessary problems.



These are examples of situations that I've encountered that I feel would help you to better understand how the techniques of relaxation can be used in everyday life.



This is a practical book. This icon offers you an opportunity to try certain relaxation techniques or strategies. By putting the theory into practice, you can begin to experience a greater sense of wellbeing.



Some of the concepts in this book can get a little tricky. If you'd like a little more explanation, look out for the tech stuff icon.



This icon indicates an audio track that guides you through the relaxation exercise.

Where to Go from Here

I've put this book together so you can dip in and out as you please. I invite you to make good use of the table of contents or the index and jump straight into the section you fancy. You're in charge and it's up to you of course. If you're a total beginner, or not sure where to start, begin with Part I and then you'll have a better idea how to proceed.

I wish you all the best in your quest for relaxation and hope that you find something of use within these pages. Above all, enjoy relaxing and, remember, you deserve it. Those close to you will also reap the rewards of your new-found sense of calm, so there's no need to feel guilty or selfish for giving yourself some 'me time'.

Part I

Introducing Relaxation

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



In this part . . .

In this part you get to know what true relaxation is all about, discover what's stressing you out and begin your journey to a life of focused calm and peace of mind. Yipee!