



LIFESTYLE BALANCE

To Support Your IBS



Challenge 2 - Relaxation

There will always be a degree of stress in your lives. That's where relaxation techniques come into play. They can help counter the build-up of adrenaline which is released when under stress and bring you back to a state of calm. Relaxation is more than a state of mind; it physically changes the way your body functions. When your body is relaxed, breathing slows, blood pressure and oxygen consumption decrease, and some people report an increased sense of well-being. The benefits of using a relaxation technique are overwhelming.

Relaxing keeps your heart healthy

Stress can seriously up your risk of high blood pressure, heart attacks and other heart problems. Relaxing lowers your heart rate, blood pressure and respiration rate.



Relaxing reduces your risk of stroke

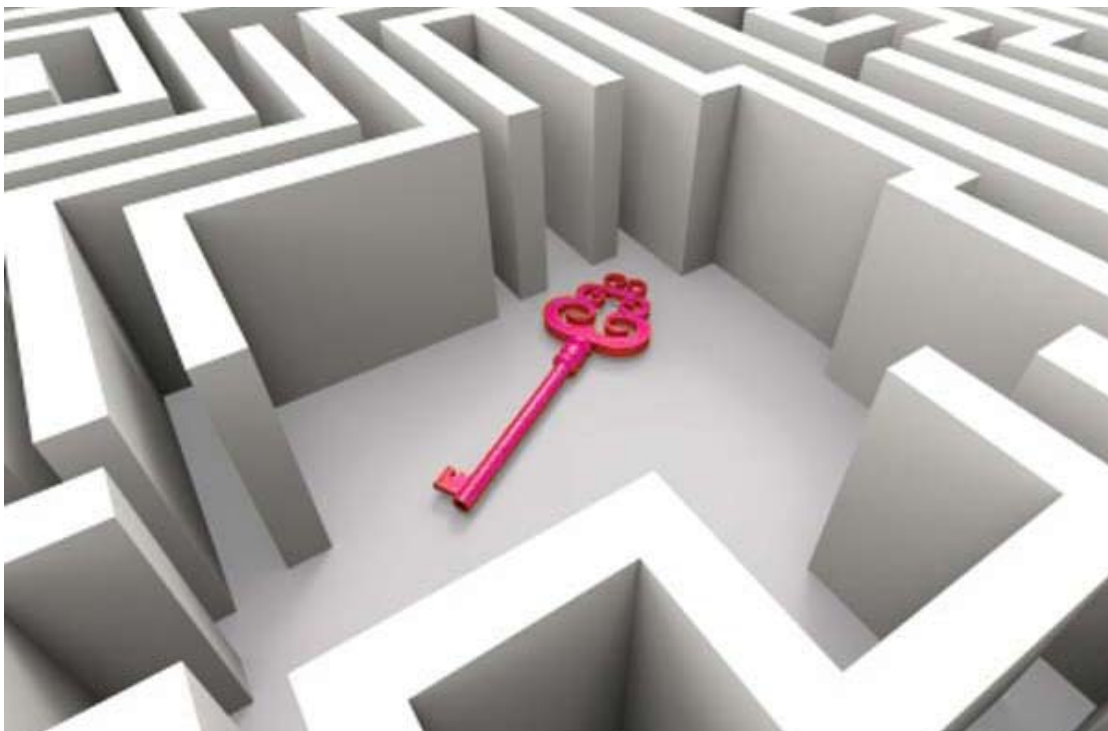
Studies have shown that people who coped with stress the best had a lower risk of strokes. A 2011 study examined the specific effects of work-related stress, and found that among middle- and upper-class men, psychological stress caused about 10 percent of strokes.

Relaxing Lowers Your Risk Of Catching A Cold

Chronic stress lasting more than a month but less than six months doubled a person's risk of catching a cold. It appears that stress hampers the body's ability to fight inflammation by making immune cells less sensitive to the hormone that "turns off" inflammation.

Relaxation improves your memory

Chronic stress impairs the prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain involved in abstract thought, cognitive analysis and detecting the appropriate behaviour for a given situation. Shorter bursts of stress impair the centres of the brain involved in memory and learning. A number of studies have also found that stress increases the amount of certain proteins in the brain that have been linked to Alzheimer's.



Relaxing lifts your mood

In humans, the prolonged presence of the stress hormone cortisol can reduce levels of serotonin and dopamine, which are linked to depression. Studies have shown that chronic stress can kill brain cells, and even prevent the creation of new ones in the hippocampus, a part of the brain involved in a healthy response to stress.



Relaxing helps us make better decisions

A 2012 study found that stress seems to actually change how we weigh risks and rewards and can cloud our judgment when we are faced with important decisions. Counterintuitively, stressed-out people actually tend to focus on the positive, and may ignore the cons of the decision they're about to make and hence make a bad decision.

Relaxing keeps off the weight

Cortisol (a stress hormone) increases the appetite and may even specifically encourage junk food cravings. Stress makes it harder to resist comfort foods which are high in fat and sugar.



Relaxing relieves irritable bowel symptoms

Some studies have indicated that relaxation techniques may prevent or relieve symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome in some participants.

Relaxation Techniques

Guided Imagery

This is a technique which uses guided imagery, creating mental images.

[Ocean Retreat](#)

[Trip to the Beach](#)

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

This involves tensing one muscle group at a time and then relaxing it until you have covered all the muscles in the body. This is great for tense, tight muscles.

[Head to Toe](#)

[Toe to Head](#)

Deep Breathing

This forces you to breathe more deeply, rather than with the short, shallow breaths that stress creates.

[Deep breathing](#)



10+ mins a day relaxation

Your challenge:

1. Schedule a time every day for 10 minutes (lengthen the time gradually). Be consistent, you will see results in a couple of weeks.
2. Find a quiet place without distractions or noise. If needed use earplugs to block sound and an eye pillow to block light.
3. Loosen or remove any jewellery or clothing that could distract you.
4. Sit or lie down (don't lie down if this tends to send you to sleep) in a comfortable position.
5. Choose one of the three techniques above, click on the link and run the tape and let your body relax and empty your mind. Don't try too hard though – it will come with time.

