RELAXATION STRATEGIES

Mini-Quickie Relaxation Strategies

These exercises are designed to help you learn to let yourself relax-to de-stress. Relaxation takes practice, and it is important to use strategies that fit you.

Here are four steps you are encouraged to follow in choosing your particular combination of mini quickie relaxation strategies:

1. As you read further in this section, try each technique as you read about it.
Read through the description of the exercise. Then try it! See how it "fits" you.

2. On a 3 x 5 card (or something you can slip into a pocket or purse) list each of the techniques. Use just a title or enough of a phrase to help you remember the exercise.

3. Try out two or three strategies several times each day. Do this for a week or for long enough to get a feeling for which ones seem most helpful to you-long enough to choose your own particular strategies.

4. Then, use the ones you select.

Breathing:

1**. Abdominal (Diaphragmatic) Breathing.** Put one hand on your chest and the other and on your navel ("belly button"). Now, breathe so that only the hand on your navel moves-as you breathe in the hand moves out and moves in as you exhale. The upper hand on your chest does not move. Inhale and exhale like this 10 times.

2. **Alternate Nostril Breathing**. Sit with you back straight. Use your index finger to close one nostril, and breathe in to a count of six. Hold for three. Then release that nostril and close the alternate nostril to exhale for six. Continue for six times.

3. **Cool Air In, Warm Air Out**. With your eyes closed, shift your attention to the tip of your nose. As you breathe in, become aware of the cool air coming in your nostrils. As you breathe

out, be aware of the warm air passing back out. Continue to breathe slowly, focusing your awareness on cool air in, warm air out.

4. **Equalized Breathing**. Inhale slowly or 4 seconds, and then exhale slowly for 4 seconds. Count "1 one-thousand, 2 one-thousand, 3 one-thousand, 4 one thousand." Do this 4 or 5 times.

Muscle Tension:

- **Tense-Release**. Tense yourself all over, one part at a time. Pull your toes up as if to touch your shins and hold it. Tense your thigh muscles… your buttocks… tense your fists and your arms… take a deep breath and hold it. Clench your jaws and close your eyelids tight. Hold yourself tense all over for four or five seconds… Then let go all at once. Don't ease off, let go. And feel the tension leave your body.

- **Breathing Tensions Away**. Gently focus your attention on your feet. As you take in a slow, deep breath, imagine collecting all the tensions from your feet and legs, breathing them into your lungs and expelling them as you exhale. Then with a second deep breath, all the tensions from your trunk, hands, and arms expel that. With a third breath, collect and expel all tension from shoulders, neck, and head.

Visualization:

- **Heavy Feet**. Breathe slowly and imagine that your feet and legs are getting heavier and heavier with each breath out. It's almost as if you are wearing lead boots. Just imagine that your feet are very, very heavy for a few seconds.

- **Hand Warm**. Visualize your hands as warm: relaxed and warm. You might imagine them in a bucket of warm water, near a fire, or in warm, wooly gloves.
  Perhaps you can even begin to feel the blood flowing down your arms into your hands. Hands are warm… relaxed and warm.

- **Ideal Relaxation**. With your eyes closed, take a moment to visualize an ideal spot for relaxation. You can make it any place, real or imagined. See yourself in comfortable clothes. Now, once you have created it, go back there for 15 seconds or so—whenever you feel the need to relax.

- **The Ultimate Mini-Quickie**. First, smile and make your eyes sparkle. Yes, you can do it. Smile and make your eyes sparkle. Then, take a deep breath. As you let it out, let you jaw hang slack, shoulders sag, and forehead smooth out. Go ahead, do it again: Smile with sparkling eyes, deep breath, let it out and feel your jaw go slack, shoulders sag, and forehead smooth out.