

Scottish Muscle Network

Patient Information Leaflet

**The Wellness Journey Starts with
Relaxation**

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Many people with a neuromuscular disorder can experience pain or discomfort associated with postural imbalance. Whether you experience pain or discomfort on a regular basis, or occasionally feel anxious or perhaps just want to improve your overall health and well-being, **therapeutic relaxation** is an important part of your healthcare. The art of relaxation takes on board many different forms and discovering the form that you are best suited too, will most certainly enhance your journey to improving your overall health.

You may have heard of different ways to achieve relaxation in terms of listening to music, reading a book, or watching TV. Switching off your brain and deepening the mind body connection can help you relax as well as improve the body's ability to heal, focus and help you be the best version of you. However, relaxation can be difficult for some people to achieve; they just can't seem to relax and this inability to relax can often heighten the discomfort or pain that is felt. In these cases, it's often because we are trying too hard; we are trying to relax instead of letting it happen. We often catch ourselves focussing on the flight of a butterfly or watching a bird and in those small moments we have let ourselves go, in those small moments we have switched off and achieved relaxation. So how can we do that at a more conscious level?



By giving ourselves time to practise relaxation on a regular basis, we can learn to bring relaxation into our lives when we feel we need a moment to de-stress or focus better.

Sometimes, more formal relaxation programmes can help. There are many very good relaxation and mediation apps and videos on various platforms such as you tube that guide you through totally body awareness and help you switch off to the outside world. We are all busier now than we have ever been. Taking some time out to slow down is good for everyone.



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Some people have also found that learning to improve negative thought patterns through techniques such as mindfulness, meditation, cognitive behavioural therapy, neurolinguistic programming etc. is very beneficial. These techniques are now commonplace both in the healthcare space but also in the sporting world and as these techniques move into general circulation, many of us can also benefit from them. You may wish to explore some of these techniques to learn how they may help you. These techniques all have a similar theme; helping you improve the way you feel.



Many of these techniques focus on breathing and there is a good deal of research to tell us why slowing your breathing can help you to improve your well-being:

- helps deal with excess adrenaline and stress hormones
- lowers blood pressure
- slows the heart rate
- increases blood flow to major muscles and organs
- reduces muscle tension and chronic pain
- improves concentration and mood
- lowers fatigue
- reduces anger and frustration
- boosts confidence to handle problems and improves self esteem
- helps us focus inwards on our body and tune in to our body's needs

From the start of time, breathing techniques have been shown to be a powerful tool in our well-being and it is only now that science is catching up to help explain why this is so. Our ancestors were far more instinctive than us and just knew that deep, slow breathing was beneficial and now we have the science to tell us why.



Here is a simple technique that you can practise. The timings of your breath in and out may vary but these are general timings that most people feel comfortable with; please do adapt them to suit your own breathing cycle.

Throughout the breathing cycle, maintain an open glottis and we will have discussed this at class / clinic. This is when you take a breath in but don't close off the back of your throat; the back of your throat stays open throughout the breathing cycle. This helps to create an equal pressure throughout the chest. On your breath in, it is important that you feel your abdomen rise and, on the breath out, you should feel your abdomen fall. This is called diaphragmatic breathing.

Breathing Cycle

Find a comfortable space in sitting or lying.

Close your eyes. This will help you focus inwards and minimise distraction.

Place your hands on your heart. This helps bring your attention to your chest, the core of your breathing.

Breathe in for 4 seconds; feel your abdomen rise and maintain an open glottis. Hold for 3 seconds.

Breathe out for 7 seconds with a steady flow of air. Not too fast at the start as you will run out of air. The breath at the end should be at the same steady speed as the breath at the beginning. This is about control of the flow. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth.

During this relaxed breathing, turn your attention to the feeling of contentment. Your thoughts can focus on:

- appreciation - recognition and enjoyment of the good qualities of someone or something. The more we learn to appreciate and enjoy the feelings appreciation brings the more we will want to do it. In this area you may find it easier to appreciate things like a pet, your cosy bed, being inside and listening to the rain on the window. There is so much to appreciate.
- gratitude – the quality of being thankful; readiness to show appreciation for and to return kindness. You may want to think about all the people in your life you are truly grateful for and remind yourself of friendship, family, neighbours and even those people that you have had brief encounters with such as the check-out girl or driver who let you out of the side street in busy traffic.
- caring - the work or practice of looking after those unable to fully care for themselves, or the feelings you may experience when being cared for. This can be emotional caring such as phoning someone who is going through a hard time as well as physical caring. It can include caring for a child, a pet or a plant. People who care for their garden experience tremendous benefits from the feeling of caring.

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- compassion- this can often be a more challenging concept and encompasses not jumping to conclusions. Being able to imagine the bigger picture. If we can let go of feelings of anxiety about people around us, it does wonders for our physical health. Instead of making judgements, can we give them an excuse?

They must have been very busy and didn't mean to ignore me.
Their mind was elsewhere when they cut me off at that junction.
They were really busy with all their family chores when they snapped at me.
I am sure they didn't mean to be unkind; perhaps things are not going well for them now.

Over the years, we have become aware of the deep connection between our emotional state, well-being, and health; we know that how we feel has an impact on our quality of life. There is no separation. The way we feel, triggers chemical responses in our bodies and our bodies are so finely tuned that our bodies react immediately to these chemicals. To achieve balance within our bodies, first and foremost, our emotions require balance and despite what we may be led to believe it is not as difficult as we may think. Slowing our breathing whilst focussing our thoughts on pleasing circumstances has been scientifically proven to reduce stress, anxiety, low mood, worry etc. This can help boost our energy levels, focus our attention, and improve our wellbeing...but only if we practise it. The best time to start is right now.

For further information

Please contact Marina Di Marco,
Consultant Neuromuscular Physiotherapist - marina.dimarco@ggc.scot.nhs.uk