

RELAXATION IMAGERY: A STRESS MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUE.

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Could these 9 steps help you to manage stress and relax? Adriana explains how.

Evidence-based techniques are effective in reducing stress:

If not managed, prolonged stress can undermine our physical and mental health (see Issue 1, Why is it important to manage stress?). Research shows that a variety of evidence-based cognitive, behavioural and psychological techniques can be effective to reduce stress. Examples of these techniques include mindfulness approaches, muscle relaxation, eliciting the relaxation response, imagery based techniques and cognitive behavioural therapy^[1]. However, it is important to learn stress reducing techniques from a reliable source or a qualified professional to ensure the quality and integrity of the stress management technique. In addition, it is essential to choose one that you feel comfortable with practicing. Whatever technique you decide is right for you, make sure you practice it regularly to obtain long lasting results.

Imagery:

The stress reduction strategy that will be explored in this article is relaxation imagery. But first, what is

imagery and why does it help? Imagery is to have a mental representation of a place, event or situation. In other words, imagery means creating a picture, visualizing something or practicing an activity in your mind. It works because, as research has shown, imagery can activate the same brain mechanisms used in emotion, motor control, memory, breathing and heart rate. In fact, imagery can activate the autonomic nervous system, the system that is activated during the stress response. In short, imagery has much the same effects in the body as actually seeing, perceiving or performing an activity^[2].

Relaxation Imagery:

Research has found that relaxation imagery is effective in reducing stress^[3,4]. Relaxation imagery involves visualizing a relaxing, peaceful place. For example, watching the sea, lying down on the grass in park, sitting on top of a mountain, your grandma's house, or any of your favorite relaxing places.

Practicing relaxation Imagery:

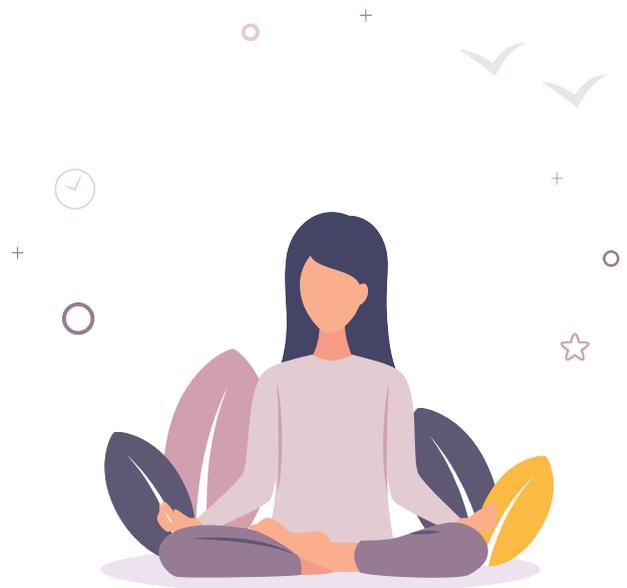
To practice this technique, follow the next steps^[5]:

- 1 Go to a quiet place, where you can be for a few minutes without being interrupted.
- 2 Choose a comfortable position, either sit on chair or lie down
- 3 Relax and close your eyes.
- 4 Picture your relaxing place.
- 5 Focus on the colours you see in your relaxing place.
- 6 Now, focus on one colour in particular.
- 7 Focus on the sounds you hear in your relaxing place.
- 8 Focus on the smells in your relaxing place.
- 9 When you are ready, open you eyes.

Practicing relaxation imagery will help you to reduce stress and be relaxed and calm. Gradually, you could perform this exercise wherever you are, even with your eyes open.

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