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Relaxation Exercise

1) Sit or lie in a comfortable position.

2) Close your eyes and focus your attention on your breathing. Start by exhaling completely, emptying out all the air from your lungs. The breath that you take in will be deep and full. Continue to exhale completely, and inhale deeply. Ten deep breaths are good before you move on to next step.

3) As you continue to breathe slowly and evenly, mentally scan your body looking for areas of tension. The face, jaw, neck, shoulders and back are common trouble spots. When you find an area that is tense, deliberately tighten the muscles in that area, hold the tension for a few seconds then release the muscles. After a breath or two, do it again – tighten, hold, release. This will leave your muscles feeling more relaxed than when you began. Keep doing this until you have finished scanning all of the tension in your body.

4) Now relax each of those areas of your body by imagining that it's very heavy. As you envision gravity's pull, let you muscles relax and let the tension dissipate.

5) Next, imagine that each of those muscle areas is very warm. Imagine that you are basking in the sun, or sitting near a warm, relaxing fireplace. As you grow warmer, even more tension will flow away.

6) Continue to relax by envisioning a place that is especially safe and restful to you. Maybe it is a warm beach, a quiet mountaintop, or a secluded forest. Stay in this place for a few minutes, noticing the details of your surroundings, enjoying its peace and solitude. Try and include what each of your five senses would experience. What does it sound like, for example? Each time you do this exercise, your image of this setting will come more easily to you. Soon, simply thinking of it may help you to automatically relax.

Ideally, you should set out about 20 minutes for this exercise each and every day.