

# REDUCING PHYSICAL TENSION

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You may find that you feel tense a lot of the time. You may feel 'edgy' or 'jumpy'. Things may startle you easily. When you have time to yourself you may feel 'shaky' and find yourself unable to relax.

This isn't that surprising. As a child you may have had the experience of feeling continuously scared. You may have been always on the look out for the abuser's next move. Your body may have constantly expected danger to be just around the corner. When this happens in childhood the body becomes tense and learns to stay tense, even as an adult. After all, you may not have been given the opportunity to learn how to relax – it may simply not have been safe to let your guard down.

It is important to try and learn to relax now. This is because:

- **Long term, tension isn't good for your physical health.**
- **If we can't relax by ourselves we sometimes turn to other ways of 'relaxing' like alcohol or drugs which can cause even more problems than the tension we are trying to get rid of.**

Remember that learning to reduce physical tension isn't easy and won't happen overnight. Some techniques suit some people and don't suit others. Experiment and find out what works for you:

Here are some suggestions:

- **Do something physical. Walk. Run. Use a punch bag. Swim. Anything safe that gives you a physical release.**
- **Set time aside for rest whether this involves snoozing or just sitting back in a comfy chair.**
- **Laugh! Watch whatever TV makes you roar. Spend time with friends who make you laugh.**
- **Breathing exercises. Take long slow breaths, breathing deep from your belly rather than from your chest.**
- **Slow down if you are one of those people who seems to rush around like a 'headless chicken!'**
- **Try to avoid putting yourself under pressure by working to deadlines.**
- **Do things that you know you enjoy, whether it's listening to music, painting, reading...**
- **Relaxation tapes. They usually involve a combination of deep breathing, muscular relaxation, and imaging a pleasant scene. They can be very relaxing. But they're not for everyone. Bear in mind that**

**if you get deeply relaxed you can also feel like you are not in control. This can be frightening for Survivors who may want to stay in control in order to stay safe. They may also involve closing your eyes or holding your breath, two things which may trigger unpleasant memories of abuse.**

There are many ways to reduce feelings of physical tension. Find which ones suit you best. You'll need to keep working at it but it's worth it. After all your body and mind have had years of feeling tense – they deserve a rest!