

## Relaxation guide

We live primarily in our minds, caught up in worrisome and anxious thoughts about the future, or bogged down by rumination about the past. We hardly relate to the physical body as it is – we just want it to look good and therefore exercise becomes something we do to beat the body into a desired shape, or we may ignore it as long as it does not disturb us with pain or illness.

Living at a distance from our bodies is a recipe for stressful living. Learning to come home to the body is a skill we can all cultivate to relieve ourselves of unnecessary stress. Paying attention to our breath and bodily sensations immediately puts our busy minds at rest, and calms the nervous system to facilitate healing responses essential for recovery and recharge. Quieting down the nervous system can also help to lessen our sensitivity to pain.



- 1** Set aside 5 – 10 mins each day to facilitate the relaxation response. You may wish to set a timer.
- 2** Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet placed about hip-distance apart, resting the inner knees against each other. You may do this on a firm mattress or a yoga mat, with a thin pillow cushioning the head.

- 3** Rest your hands on your low ribs where your diaphragm sits under. Relax the weight of your elbows and shoulders.
- 4** Feel the weight of your contact points: back of the head, upper back, shoulder blades, buttocks and soles of the feet.
- 5** Pay attention to your breath. Feel the rib cage expand under your hands as you take a full breath in. Feel the rib cage relax as you breathe out fully.
- 6** Start to time your breath at a pace you can manage without any sense of strain. For most people it will be around 4 – 5 secs in and 4 – 5 secs out.
- 7** Feel your body sinking further every time you breathe out.
- 8** Keep your mind's attention resting gently on the breath sensations and on counting the breath cycles. In – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5; out – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5.

If you find your mind drifting away, gently bring your attention back to belly breathing.

You may also do this exercise sitting upright at any time of the day when you feel like you need a moment to give space to your body-mind. Be kind to yourself.