

Deep Relaxation Meditation

From: *Anger: Wisdom for Cooling the Flames* by Thich Knat Hanh

This is an example of how to guide yourself or others in Deep Relaxation. Allowing your body to rest is very important. When your body is at ease and relaxed, your mind will also be at peace. The practice of Deep Relaxation is essential for your body and mind to heal. Please take the time to practice it often. Although the following guided relaxation may take you thirty minutes, feel free to modify it to fit your situation. You can make it shorter—just five or ten minutes when you wake up in the morning, before going to bed in the evening, or during a short break in the middle of the busy day. You can also make it longer and more in-depth. The most important thing is to enjoy it.

Lie down comfortably on your back on the floor or on a bed. Close your eyes. Allow your arms to rest gently on either side of your body and let your legs relax, turning outwards.

As you breathe in and out, become aware of your whole body lying down. Feel all the areas of your body that are touching the floor or the bed you are lying on; your heels, the backs of your legs, your buttocks, your back, the back of your hands and arms, the back of your head. With each outbreath, feel yourself sink deeper and deeper into the floor, letting go of tension, letting go of worries, not holding on to anything.

As you breathe in, feel your abdomen rising, and as you breathe out, feel your abdomen falling. For several breaths, just notice the rise and fall of your abdomen.

Now, as you breathe in, become aware of your two feet. As you breathe out, allow your two feet to relax. Breathing in, send your love to your feet, and breathing out, smile to your feet. As you breathe in out, know how wonderful it is to have two feet, that allow you to walk, to run, to play sports, to dance, to drive, to do so many activities throughout the day. Send your gratitude to your two feet for always being there for you whenever you need them.

Breathing in, become aware of your right and left legs. Breathing out, allow all the cells in your legs to relax. Breathing in, smile to your legs, and breathing out, send them your love. Appreciate whatever degree of strength and health is there in your legs. As you breathe in and out, send them your tenderness and care. Allow them to rest, sinking gently into the floor. Release any tension you may be holding in your legs.

Breathing in, become aware of your two hands lying on the floor. Breathing out, completely relax all the muscles in your two hands, releasing any tension you may be holding in them. As you breathe in, appreciate how wonderful it is to have two hands. As you breathe out, send a smile of love to your two hands. Breathing in

and out, be in touch with all the things your two hands allow you to do: to cook, to write, to drive, to hold the hand of someone else, to hold a baby, to wash your own body, to draw, to play a musical instrument, to type, to build and fix things, to pet and animal, to hold a cup of tea. So many things are available to you because of your two hands. Just enjoy the fact that you have two hands and allow all the cells in your hands to really rest.

Breathing in, become aware of your two arms. Breathing out, allow your arms, to fully relax. As you breathe in, send your love to your arms, and as you breathe out, smile to them. Take the time to appreciate your arms and whatever strength and health are there in your arms. Send them your gratitude for allowing you to hug someone else, to swing on a swing, to help and serve others, to work hard-cleaning the house, mowing the lawn, to do so many things throughout the day. Breathing in and out, allow your two arms to let go and rest completely on the floor. With each out-breath, feel the tension leaving your arms. As you embrace your arms with your mindfulness, feel joy and ease in every part of your two arms.

Breathing in, become aware of your shoulders. Breathing out, allow any tension in your shoulders to flow out into the floor. As you breathe in, send your love to your shoulders, and as you breathe out, smile with gratitude to them. Breathing in and out, be aware that you may have allowed a lot of tension and stress to accumulate in your shoulders. With each exhalation, allow the tension to leave your shoulders. With each exhalation, allow the tension to leave your shoulders, feeling them relax more and more deeply. Send them your tenderness and care, knowing that you do not want to put too much strain on them, but that you want to live in a way that will allow them to be relaxed and at ease.

Breathing in, become aware of your heart. Breathing out, allow your heart to rest. With your in-breath, send your love to your heart. With your out-breath, smile to your heart. As you breathe in and out, get in touch with how wonderful it is to have a heart still beating in your chest. Your heart allows your life to be possibly, and it is always there for you, every minute, every day. It never takes a break. Your heart has been beating since you were a four-week-old fetus in your mother's womb. It is a marvelous organ that allows you to do everything you do throughout the day. Breathe in and know that your heart also loves you. Breathe out and commit to live in a way that will help your heart to function well. With each exhalation, feel your heart relaxing more and more. Allow each cell in your heart to smile with ease and joy.

Breathing in, become aware of your stomach and intestines. Breathing out, allow your stomach and intestines to relax. As you breathe in, send them your love and gratitude. As you breathe out, smile tenderly to them. Breathing in and out, know how essential these organs are to your health. Give them the chance to rest deeply. Each day they digest and assimilate the food you eat, giving you energy and strength. They need you to take the time to recognize and appreciate them. As you breathe in, feel your stomach and intestines relaxing and releasing all tension. As you breathe out, enjoy the fact that you have a stomach and intestines.

Breathing in, become aware of your eyes. Breathing out, allow your eyes and the muscles around your eyes to relax. Breathing in, smile to your eyes, and breathing out, send them your love. Allow your eyes to rest and roll back into your head. As you breathe in and out, know how precious your two eyes are. They allow you to look into the eyes of someone you love, to see a beautiful sunset, to read and write, to move around with ease, to see a bird flying in the sky, to watch a movie-so many things are possible because of your two eyes. Take the time to appreciate the gift of sight and allow your eyes to rest deeply. You can gently raise your eyebrows to help release any tension you may be holding around your eyes.

Here you can continue to relax other areas of your body, using the same pattern as above.

Now, if there is a place in your body that is sick or in pain, take this time to become aware of it and send it your love. Breathing in, allow this area to rest, and breathing out, smile to it with great tenderness and affection. Be aware that there are other parts of your body that are still strong and healthy. Allow these strong parts of your body to send their strength and energy to the weak or sick area. Feel the support, energy, and love of the rest of your body penetrating the weak area, soothing and healing it. Breathe in and affirm your own capacity to heal, breathe out and let go of the worry or fear you may be holding in your body. Breathing in and out, smile with love and confidence to the area of your body that is not well.

Finally, breathing in, become aware of the whole of your body lying down. Breathing out, enjoy the sensation of your whole body lying down, very relaxed and calm. Smile to your whole body as you breathe in, and send your love and compassion to your whole body as you breathe out. Feel all the cells in your whole body smiling joyfully with you. Feel gratitude for all the cells in your whole body. Return the gentle rise and fall of your abdomen.

If you are guiding other people, and if you are comfortable doing so, you can now sing a few relaxing songs or lullabies.

To end, slowly stretch and open your eyes. Take your time to get up, calmly and lightly. Practice to carry the calm and mindful energy you have generated into your next activity and throughout the day.