



Autogenic Training: A 4-Part Course Delivered by Craig Trafford;
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Part 2 Muscular Tension and Relaxation Training

This is a 4-part training course in techniques of Stress Management Training. In this instance, techniques that lead up to and include Autogenic Training. The course is designed to teach you how to better manage the stresses in your life. S2 Autogenic Training Information Giving

Muscular tension and Relaxation Training

Long-term stress can contribute to the development of muscular tension. The parts of the body where such tension is generally held are the neck, the upper back, the jaw and the shoulders. This tension can cause chronic muscle pain, tension headaches, sleeplessness and irritability. Muscular tension also leads to chronic fatigue; holding muscles in a tense position is actually very hard work.

These habits of tension are acquired over many years of reacting to stress. When we feel under threat, we tense our muscles for fight or flight. When there is no danger to respond to, our bodies contract, they can only react to the alarm signal, causing our muscles to remain tense for long periods of time. Such habits of muscular tension can, with practice, be reversed. The physical effects that accompany relaxation are opposite to those that are characteristic of stress. Thus, when your body is relaxed, it is much less likely to feel the effects of stressful situations. Muscular relaxation is the first intervention we can make in the stress spiral.

Learning to relax is the same as learning any other skill, it needs disciplined and regular practice. The relaxation exercises presented in the course should be practised for at least half an hour every day for the duration of the course, and probably for several months after the training has been completed. At first, you may find it difficult to relax. Some people worry about succeeding with relaxation and may find themselves trying too hard. For others, concentration can be an initial problem. You may find that you fall asleep during the exercises.



There may be odd physical sensations such as tingling or shaking, and often the first sign that you are beginning to relax is that of your stomach rumbling. Also, if you have been holding high levels of tension, this can lead to a habit of rigid control, which may make you feel the loss of this control when you begin to relax. Relaxation can also cause old hurts, which may have contributed to high levels of stress, to rise to the surface again. However, the more you practice the stress management relaxation exercises, the better you will feel. Remember, it is up to you to decide how much, or how little tension, you are ready to let go of, each time you practice a relaxation exercise.

When you practice the exercises at home, make sure you have half an hour free where you won't be disturbed. With regular practice, you will find the exercise has become easier to do and you will find that you are able to concentrate better. After several days of regular practice of both the passive progressive relaxation and active progressive relaxation exercises, you will find that you are beginning to learn these exercises off by heart. Once this occurs, you will be able to use these exercises as skills to enable you to cope with the stresses of your daily life.

In stress management training, just doing the exercise, either in the class or at home, is not enough. You must also train yourself to use the relaxation skills which you have learned, before, during, and after, any situation in which normally causes you stress. This course will provide you with a range of such skills. The object of the course is to train you to use the skills to reduce harmful stress in your daily life. You cannot just use these exercises passively, as though they were a tranquilliser. Research shows that a substantial reduction in stress levels will only occur if the individual understands that Muscular relaxation, together with the other skills taught in this course, are active coping skills to be practised and applied to daily life. A greatly increased control of your stress reaction is an important result for people who successfully apply and complete stress management training. This result can only occur if the trainee is an active participant in the training. You will find, with practice, that you are able to use the exercises to modify your response to stressful events and situation in your daily life.

When stress management training is used as a coping skill in stressful situations, it not only induces relaxation, it also develops within the individual, a feeling of being in control. You will find that you develop a feeling of having begun to take responsibility for the management of your



own life and health. This will not only lead to greater relaxation and a reduction in stress. You will also find that you have improved self-esteem, you will feel stronger and much more able to tackle both stressful events, and your own stress response.