



PERSONA

PLUS

Rested and Relaxed



Getting rested and relaxed

Michael King drove off the road on a sunny autumn afternoon and into a tree, killing himself and his wife. King had written 33 books and won a range of awards for his contribution to New Zealand history and biography. He was recovering from throat cancer, and his latest book was selling incredibly well. The coroner put his death down to inattention. Why would King have been inattentive that afternoon? He typically wrote from 7 am till midday, and then read in the afternoon. He and his wife were driving from their rural home to take a holiday. They had stopped for a (carbohydrate heavy) lunch of bread and soup before the accident. Perhaps King nodded off as he drove. If so his accident illustrates the importance of managing rest to maintain alertness and attention at critical times.

This module will introduce approaches to help you maintain your alertness and attention. This means getting enough sleep. And getting to sleep means ensuring you can relax. That might be hard for you during high pressure or catastrophe. Our aim is to help you achieve control over your thoughts and feelings; so you can use relaxation to unwind, and to sleep when you need to; to bring more positivity into your life, and to be alert and attentive when needed.

The final section of this module (before some background material) covers the approaches that might work better for different personalities, since we know that there is not necessarily a single approach that works for all people.

Rested and relaxed 1 Dealing with tension right now

Tension doesn't happen out of a clear blue sky. Tension arrives when you are feeling worried or low, you are having scary or at least unhelpful thoughts (such as 'I have a problem!'), and when you are busy trying to solve the problem.

But dealing with tension instead of getting sucked into the drama of the situation takes a radical change of priorities. Taking time out to check on tension can get lost in the rush. You need your personal 'stress signal application'.

Let's say you rigged up an application to tell you when tension was building. Your application could check on muscle tension (or heart rate, breathing rate, or even worried thoughts) and ring an alarm when you nudged into the red zone.

Let's build you your own tension application. It only takes a few moments:

What are the signs that signal you are tense?

Physiological – signs such as muscle tremor, breathlessness, pounding heart, tightness or pain...

Activity – flustered, losing things...

Thoughts – 'this is going bad'...

Feelings – anxious, fearful...

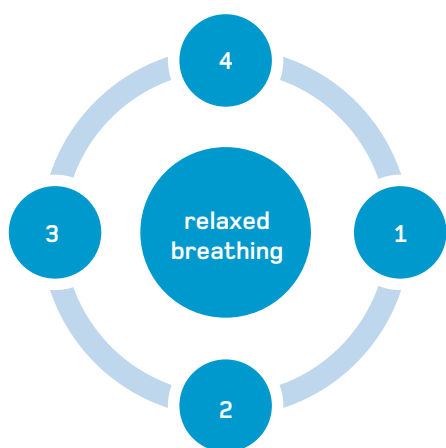
You've just built your tension app. Write these signals on a note to yourself (on the back of a business card maybe). Use a code if you don't want other's to work out your tension signals – maybe STCA stands for Shallow breathing, going to the Toilet, Catastrophising thoughts and feeling Anxious.

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Use your tension signals as a signal for relaxation rather than more tension. Here's our 3-step model:

1. Tension signals – time to relax
2. Focus on breathing – think about breathing, count your breaths in sets of four, let go any thoughts about your feelings and your physiology by attending to the in-breath, the out-breath, the pause in between, the feeling of air in and out your nostrils...over and over...deeper and deeper...and keep coming back from any distractions, including distracting thoughts, to the count of your breaths, starting at 'one' if you've lost track
3. After ten sets of four decide if you need to repeat or you can go and do some problem-solving.



Suggestions:

It might be useful to visualise the four breaths – to keep you 'on task'

It helps to sit down somewhere 'neutral' – not at your work station for example. Put both feet on the floor; push your bottom back in the seat, and keep your back and neck straight. You might want to close your eyes or concentrate on a space just in front of you. Rest your hands on your thighs or in your lap.

Objections	Answers
This is an emergency – I don't have time to think about breathing	<p>Possibly. If you have decided this is an emergency, then put your emergency management plan into effect. And take time to relax when things are under control.</p> <p>In making that decision (that this is an emergency), give a split second of thought to the idea that many trivial issues seem like emergencies. Possibly this really is no big deal, and you should relax now so that you will be better able to evaluate the situation clearly.</p>
I'm on show – I don't have the chance right now to turn off and do the breathing thing.	<p>All the more reason to be focusing on your breathing. If you are presenting or in a meeting you benefit greatly by keeping your breathing deep in the diaphragm. You might be thinking of sets of 1 – that is taking one deep breath at a time.</p> <p>By smoothing out your breathing you have the air to speak clearly and with authority (instead of sounding squeaky and wobbly). You have the presence of mind to think clearly.</p>
I'm a busy person – I don't have the time to sit down and take a mini-nap.	<p>We're talking about 3 minutes, but no matter, the point is that busy does not equal effective. After your relaxation break you are more likely to be able to reflect, to avoid impulsive action, to consider some options, to gain perspective. All of these, over the long term, are likely to increase your effectiveness, and reduce your need to be chronically busy.</p>
In 3 or so minutes I could have a coffee and chat with a friend	<p>Great idea. And it's also good to have another option to a coffee break in your bag of tricks. Coffee (or any caffeine product) can result in a slump after the lift. And, just like a drug, the more you use it, the more you need to use it. It may keep you alert later when you want to relax and sleep.</p> <p>Again, chatting with a friend is a great idea. Breathing relaxation is not an alternative to this, but provides another option on top of existing strategies.</p>



Another approach to bringing relaxation into your life is to relax while you walk. Walking mindfulness provides a positive alternative to getting distracted by negative thoughts as you walk to a meeting, or up the steps to your home—you let your unconscious mind take care of the practicalities of walking, while you focus your consciousness on settling your mind into a restful and relaxing set of thoughts, so that you are invigorated for the next challenge

Walking mindfulness exercise

As you walk, get your thoughts out of your head. Feel your feet with each foot-strike. Feel each breath in your nostrils with each breath out. Think of your favourite tree, how it drinks water from the ground, soaks up sunshine, absorbs carbon dioxide, giving oxygen to the atmosphere. Your feet are touching the same earth that it rests in. You breathe the oxygen it gives to the atmosphere.

Think of your favourite mountain reaching towards the sky, exposed to the sun, breezes and showers that you experience. Think of your favourite river. Water in it flowing down from mountains or hills, rushing at times, flowing into gentle pools at others. Flowing down valleys, across river flats, to the estuary and the sea.

Your tree is respiring, your mountain is enduring, your river is flowing. Think of the near-still water in a pool, pausing before it rushes on. Think of the earth your mountain lifts from as you feel your foot-fall. Think of the oxygen that your tree respire as you feel the air of your breath in your nostrils.

I have emphasized 'right here, right now' approaches to relaxation. But for those who like to experiment, or want more long-term benefits, we have a range of relaxation approaches in the first Appendix of this Module.

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Benefits of relaxation

The research suggests that while different people may use different formal relaxation techniques they tend to have the same impact on physiology and mental processes. The greatest positive impact of relaxation (of body and mind) appears to be when people are able to break the train of everyday thought.

The 'mystical' tradition in a range of world religions appears to converge on very similar approaches¹. Apparently different approaches such as muscular relaxation and yoga produce [similar benefits](#).²

You can enjoy these benefits – with more impact likely as you build relaxation into more of a regular routine in your life.

Impact:			
Approaches:	Chatting, distraction	Occasional use of formal relaxation techniques	Daily formal relaxation such as yoga, meditation, prayer, body scanning
Benefits of relaxation – tend to be greater with more regular practice:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Release of muscle tension • Lower blood pressure • Slowing of heart rate and breath rate • Reduced variability of heart rate • Improved immune response • Glucose regulation in Type-2 diabetes • Reduced insomnia • Mental space and distance from worries and hassles 		

Another way to look at the benefits of relaxation:

- Open-minded → The chance to experiment with some profound approaches to improving your well-being
- Conscientiousness → The chance to improve your efficiency and effectiveness
- Extrovert → Many of these approaches are fun
- Agreeable → You will gain the energy to really make a difference in your, and others, lives
- Nervous → These are effective ways to wind nervousness and tension back, so you are in charge, rather than these negative feelings adversely influencing your life

¹ Lawrence LeShan (1974). How To Meditate. Sphere Books, London.

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Are some personalities better at relaxation?

We all know people who seem to sail through pressure and bounce back from serious challenges in their lives. If we were describing them, we'd call them 'resilient'. These people seem to have inner resources that help. The resilient personality can be developed (of course regular relaxation is a part of this), and it also helps to inherit the right disposition. The major personality dimensions that make a difference to coping with pressure, hassles and catastrophes are extroversion and nervousness. I have outlined the extroversion / nervousness interaction in the table below. The other three aspects of the Big Five of personality also contribute (see section 8).¹

The N (nervousness) and E (extroversion) dimensions of personality are based on deep brain structures (deep below the wrinkly neo-cortex, down into the old limbic core of the brain). Nervousness is the 'stop' system. When we experience pain, fear or anxiety we are experiencing this system's emotional signals. We don't need to think; we can simply stop doing what we are doing and turn the bad signals off. We drop the hot potato. We don't go into the dark woods. By a process of conditioning we learn not to do things that have been connected (no matter how arbitrarily) to the feeling. We don't touch the hot plate after we've had the unpleasant experience with it. We stop what we are doing when we think 'I am crap at this'.

Extroversion is the 'go' system. As you can imagine, the emotions we are talking about include joy, satisfaction and happiness. Again, thinking is optional. When we smell fresh bread, see a beautiful person, see a cold drink on a hot day (or vice versa) we are naturally inclined to go for it (or them). How does the sociable aspect of extroversion fit this? We are social animals, and most of our rewards come from others and being with others. Extroverts gravitate to people because it is rewarding to do so (it's not a coincidence that extroverts tend to have more romantic partners).

Putting extroversion and nervousness together as I've done in the chart below explains a lot of our potential for wellbeing or misery. This chart also illustrates that extroverts are not the opposite of nervous folk. The opposite of extroversion is the lack of sensitivity to strong positive feelings, not the experience of negative ones.

The chart shows the potential interaction between these two 'emotional' aspects of personality (expressed as extremes – in terms of highs and lows, rather than the high proportion of people who are 'in the middle'). The chart also summarises likely attempts at coping, and suggestions for effective coping and resilience. This covers what would be typically available in terms of 'self-help' – it does not for example include prescription drugs.

High extroversion ('go')	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common emotions: Happy, optimistic, positive • Coping approaches: Talking (including seeking support), positive thinking, problem-solving, cognitive re-structuring ('let me think this through more logically'), goal-oriented action, yoga classes or other relaxation approaches with a social dimension • Likely effective coping: Talk therapy, including facilitative approach to problem-solving approaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highly emotional, both highs and lows • Talking, seeking support, stimulants and sedation, switching between trying to resolve issues and avoiding them. • Talk therapy, relaxation
Low extroversion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unemotional, flat • Few coping strategies • Relaxation, emotional support and advice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unhappy, anxious, depressed, angry, frustrated • Seeking support, escapist fantasies, withdrawal or avoidance, indecisiveness, sedation, self-blame, hostility. • Cognitive behaviour therapy – working on the actions, thoughts, feelings and physiology that drive avoidance behaviour and unpleasant emotions. This could include relaxation under supervision.
	Low nervousness	High nervousness ('stop')

¹ This section is based on Paul Costa and Robert McCrae (1992). NEO-PIR Professional Manual. Psychological Assessment Resources Inc, Florida.

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Only a small proportion of people are at the extremes of any personality dimension. Fewer again are at the extreme on two dimensions. Only a small percentage of folk fall into the boxes in the chart above. But I want to make some points, which you can evaluate in terms of your own personality results.

- Different people try to cope in different ways
- Not all coping approaches are effective in the long term, some are simply distractions
- A small proportion of low E / high N people may need professional help during high pressure, high stress times, and attempting to use self-help techniques such as relaxation during such times could be counter-productive.



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Sleeping well

Sleep is a strong drive. In a [fascinating experiment](#) three people had their eyes taped open so they couldn't avoid looking at bright flashing lights, and were then wired up to receive regular painful electric shocks, and then the experimenters turned on very loud blues music. All three subjects, only one of whom was sleep deprived, gave every appearance of going to sleep (they were also wired to an EEG measuring their brain's electrical activity). Presumably, the very regularity of the shocks meant they became boringly predictable, and sleep prevailed.

However, many of us have managed to stay awake worrying about unpleasant and scary things, even if not directly experiencing them as the shocked experimental subjects did. What seems to happen is that worrying thoughts trigger negative feelings. This leads to a nasty feedback loop of neurotic thoughts and bad feelings. These feed each other, resulting in a body ready to fight off imaginary enemies instead of relaxing into sleep.

The relaxation approaches already introduced (and which you may have practiced), short circuit this loop. By relaxing the body and quietening the rumination (repetitive worrying thoughts), the body can get on with going to sleep.

An important point is that we can often end up not only worrying about some issue in our lives, but also getting worried about not getting enough sleep. But how much, on any given night, is enough sleep? Do we really need 8 hours of sleep every night to get things done? The short answer is No. An example is provided by DJ Nikora Curtis.

In 2010 Nikora Curtis set a record for longest non-stop radio broadcasting (on Uawa FM radio station in Tolaga Bay) by making it to 176½ hours (nearly 7 ½ days). He had 15 minute naps every eight hours, and a serious (12 hour) sleep after¹. But he didn't need to catch up on 49 or so hours of sleep (7 hours for every one of those 7 sleepless days). Pulling an all-nighter, or even several all-nighters is not going to put you hopelessly behind sleep-wise.

Let's check out some general sleep hygiene approaches, then more specific suggestions. In the next section, we cover how these approaches can be flexed around your personality.

Try this sleep hygiene assessment on the following page, and then target some improvement areas. Use the rating scale to describe your sleep hygiene behaviours – (0=very unlikely, 1=somewhat likely, might be true some of the time, 2=very likely)²

¹ Personal communication

² Adapted from University of Maryland Medical Centre's [suggestions](#) for sleep hygiene

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What could be disturbing your sleep?

Rate 0-2

(from very unlikely to very likely)

1. Caffeinated drinks (coffee, tea, cola) in late afternoon or evening
2. More than three alcoholic drinks in the evening
3. Inconsistent bed-times
4. Using the bed for TV, work or other non-sleeping activities (the rule – bed is for sleep or sex)
5. Staying in bed thinking about how you are not sleeping. If you have been awake more than 15-30 minutes, get up and try some soothing alternative such as reading.

Potential sleep disturbance score

SD Total of 1-5 =

What could be enhancing your sleep?

6. Going to bed at similar times each evening (as a guide, no more than 90 minutes difference, e.g., between 10.30 and 12.00)
7. Unwinding early in the evening with gentle exercise, relaxation, hot bath, calming drink or similar
8. Dimming the lights, or turning on reading light before turning lights off
9. A least 20 minutes exercise (noticeably lifts heart rate) every day (but not just before bed-time)
10. Doing your worrying in a non-bed space before you go to bed. Late afternoon, or early evening – do some serious thinking about any issues; write these down, together with what you can do to make a difference. If necessary take paper and pen to put beside the bed – so that you can put your worries out of your head.

Total sleep enhancement score

SE Total of 6-10 =

Net sleep hygiene = sleep enhancement – sleep disturbance

A negative score (where sleep disturbing factors are greater than sleep enhancers) suggest your disturbed sleep could be causing tiredness and irritability.

NSH = (SE-SD) =

Things to do to improve sleep:

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How much sleep do I need?

It is conventional wisdom that the average person needs an average 8 hours of sleep a night – to be healthy and effective. However the science suggests seven hours is the happy medium, and that 6 hours is better for long-term well-being than eight.

The evidence suggests that ordinary people can not only get by, [but perform well](#), and not suffer mood or medical issues by sleeping less.

Because of the issue of weight gain (more later) I don't recommend going below 7 hours of sleep, but the only apparent short-term consequences of getting below an average of 6 hours sleep a night is day-time sleepiness, and lower auditory vigilance (though extroverts seem to have bigger [performance drop-off](#) with sleep deprivation). If you are driving, or could be taking serious risks because of fatigue, you should check your fatigue levels – see the short check below.

What matters is what is optimum for you. The best way to establish what works is to keep a sleep diary, wind back the hours you actually sleep over a few weeks (average 8 hours of sleep a night one week, then 7 the next, then 6...), and check on how effective you are on different amounts of sleep.

The Free PersonaPlus download has a sleep diary to help you monitor how much sleep you are getting.

- Pilot [check](#) on fatigue:
- Eyes going in and out of focus
- Head bobs involuntarily
- Persistent yawning
- Wandering or poorly organised thoughts
- Spotty near term memory
- Mistakes or missing steps of routine procedures

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Sleeping tips

Some simple ways to do this when you are in bed and want immediate distraction (you are just getting started on learning relaxation approaches, or you are more spontaneous and haven't got around to the practice required):

Take a radio to bed, and **listen to soothing voices** (not drama – you could get hooked into the emotions; similarly not talk-back – people often put their emotional issues out there to share with listeners; and music doesn't distract the talking, thinking, worrying part of your brain so well).

Try the **vegetable and fruit alphabet** routine (illustrated at the end of this module) – memorise the different fruit for the letters of the alphabet, and then mentally rehearse these.

Re-run an emotionally neutral event from your day, such as your morning bike-ride, walk or run, or perhaps the gardening. Repeat the activity in your imagination – trying to be as detailed as you can be in re-creating the experience – what you saw around every corner, the trees, the quality of the road or path, the details of the landscape or architecture. Try to remember what you saw, heard, thought and felt – down to remembering how your muscles felt as they got you up the steps.

If you're conscientiously planning how to balance your need to get things done and your sleep requirements, there is [evidence](#) that you can **bank sleep**. Plan on a week which includes extra sleep before you need to go into the sleep deprivation zone.

Not so well researched, but a logical approach for a more planful conscientious person is to **book your sleep**. This is just an extension of the sleep hygiene principle of going to bed around the same time each night. But are you going to bed at the right time? You keep a diary of your sleeping, and of your alertness (which you can do using the free PersonaPlus download). How many hours do you typically need to ensure you can still be operating well during the day (including the afternoon slump)? What time do you want to get up? For example, if you only need to sleep 6.5 hours, and you plan to get up at 6 so you can do some meditation before breakfast? Your bed-time is 11:30.

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Grab a nap

In other situations, your body may be telling you that sleep is the priority – maybe you're nodding off or having difficulty concentrating. But you really need to get things done, and you need to be alert to do them well. The nap is best way to get by.

Leonardo da Vinci took a 15 minute nap every four hours – and so got by on 1.5 hours of sleep a day. Naps seem to be healthy: working men who consistently had a siesta had [lower coronary mortality](#) than non-nappers.

Just a small aside on [sleep stages](#) – when you slip into sleep, you go through stages 1, 2 and 3 and then into REM or dream sleep. Then it's back to the start for another set. You are most likely to wake after a good night's sleep in stage 1 – which is why you often have intense recollection of your (just experienced) dreams on waking.

If you wake from stage 3 sleep – the deepest sleep – you will take a long time to get up to speed. This can be why being woken by an alarm can be so unpleasant.

If you are going to wake refreshed from your nap – you need to be surfacing from stage 1 or 2 of sleep – so you are not coming up from so far down. Keeping your nap to less than 30 minutes is the best way to go. Naps work best when you are experiencing a slump (typically mid-afternoon). They could interfere with later sleep if you take one too close to your going to regular sleep time. Use an alarm to wake until your body has learned to wake after its 15, 20 or 25 minutes. Use ear plugs and a face mask to screen out distractions.

In an interesting variation on this researchers experimented with the Caffeine Nap. They fed their experimental subjects the equivalent of a strong espresso, and then had them take a 20 minute nap, so when they were woken, the caffeine was kicking in. The lucky subjects reported feeling more [refreshed and performed better](#) than simply having a nap (and doing slightly better than having a nap and washing their face, or being exposed to bright light for good measure).

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Sleep, eating and drinking (including coffee)

Recent [research](#) indicates that people who sleep less than 6 hours a night are heavier. What you gain in extra hours of wakefulness you may lose in packing on extra pounds. There could be a cause and effect confusion here – maybe fat people have difficulty sleeping, but [follow-up studies](#) suggest that losing sleep leads to weight gain.

Fatigue seems a likely factor in weight gain for those sleeping less. Not just that it feels better to have a snack when you're tired, but also the [finite resources of self-control](#) are limited by fatigue. No matter how high you rate on Conscientiousness, it's harder work to stare down those sweet simple carbs when you're tired. For example people who had to resist eating cookies (they could choose carrots) showed a [higher level](#) of heart rate variability (resulting from that hard work of self-control) than in the reverse condition – eat cookies, resist carrots.

Stress may also play a role. Simple carbs do seem to be used by many for stress relief. The [digestion of carbohydrates](#) lifts insulin, which in turn pushes up the brain chemical serotonin – which makes the brain's reward centres happy. Simple carbs (read candy and cookies, as well as white bread) make it all happen much faster. 'Comfort foods' may be aptly named.

Of course, managing relaxation to nap and to get better sleep is the way out of this particular bind.

As yet there is no evidence of whether naps can help you keep sleeping hours down and resist over-eating and weight gain.

In the early afternoon our body slows as a function of our circadian or body clock cycle (our body slows down at 2 am and 2 pm). What to eat for lunch to smooth out the post-lunch slump? Eating less for lunch is good (since a big meal can result in big sleep) – so protein is a good call, since you don't need to eat so much to feel full.

Coffee is a popular pick-me-up, obviously in coffee and tea, less obviously in many energy and soft drinks as well as chocolate and other snacks. Caffeine helps – if you are sleep-deprived, or trying to get into a new sleep/wake routine (for example you have shifted time-zones). Otherwise, unfortunately, [it doesn't help](#). The lift you get from your morning coffee is only returning you to where you would have been, if you hadn't had the caffeine jolt the day before that disturbed last night's sleep.

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Flexing around your personality to relax and to sleep better

You can objectively assess your personality at the PersonaPlus site. In working out how to make relaxation work for you, think about those of your personality dimensions that are relatively high or low. Focus on just one, or a few dimensions in terms of developing your personal approach to strengthening your ability to relax.

Personality dimension	Low	High
<p>Openness</p> <p>LOW: Favour the familiar and proven</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Conventional</i> + <i>Consistent</i> <p>HIGH: Explore new ideas and experiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Strange</i> + <i>Creative</i> 	<p>Low – Biofeedback – immediate information about your heart or breathing rate could be useful. If you don't want the hassle of the technology – when you lie down to relax, put your hand on your stomach, feel your breathing and your heart, notice them as you deepen your breathing. To get to sleep try listening to relaxation instructions – there are excellent resources available as pod-casts – see the first Appendix</p>	<p>High – mix up the approaches, ensure it doesn't get routine. Include visual imagery among your experiments; including imagery based meditation (see Appendix 1). Try new courses. Bring new techniques into your daily relaxation. You might want to try experimenting with hypnagogic¹ approaches as an aid to creativity. Use goal-setting and self-management (end of this section) to reduce the risk of getting distracted.</p>
<p>Conscientiousness</p> <p>LOW: Lets things happen</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Drifter</i> + <i>Flexible</i> <p>HIGH: Get things done</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Compulsive</i> + <i>Hard worker</i> 	<p>Low – To keep up the relaxation habit – set up cues to remind you to keep a note of the relaxation you are aiming to do. Maybe a dairy reminder on your phone. Give yourself encouragement (and occasional treats) for being able to say 'No' to the temptation of lying in bed or having a coffee and instead getting on with your relaxation practice. Acknowledge that you are more of a deadline-rider than some high C folk, and that means you are more likely to put in some late nights or early mornings. Some suggestions: bank sleep, learn to nap, ration caffeine so it is there to help when you need a lift. Train yourself so that your sleep world triggers sleep. Don't use your bed for anything but sleep or sex. Anything else, including thoughts about why you are not sleeping; get up and sit on the sofa with a snack or warm drink and do some light reading (avoid TV or video). Give a minder or yourself the right to nag if you are at risk, for example of driving while tired. Look at your daily routine to spot potential issues.</p>	<p>High – Keep records of relaxation periods and of sleep and waking. Include ratings of how alert or sleepy you feel during the day. You might want to use a heart rate meter (as used to track effort during exercise) – and include your heart rate records for relaxation in your daily upload. Work out the optimum sleep program for you based on the hours you need each day and each week, then head to bed to achieve the required hours for your morning wake-up time. If you anticipate needing to work late (or early), plan to bank some sleep in the week ahead. Keep exercise 3-4 hours from bed time.</p>

¹ Hypnagogic? The transition between wake and sleep, often characterized by lucid dreaming, hallucinations and out-of-body experiences. Used by many creatives as a path to potential insights. Thomas Edison would sit down in a comfy chair with a pad and pencil nearby. In each hand he held a ball bearing, which would fall onto a tin plate below when he dozed off – waking him up so he could record the insights produced.

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Personality dimension	Low	High
<p>Extroversion</p> <p>LOW: Independent - Aloof + Steady</p> <p>HIGH: Positive and persuasive - Flighty + Lively</p>	<p>Low – Relaxation approaches may not leave you buzzing, but think of them as a way to reduce, or avoid some bad experiences. The evidence of how relaxation reduces the nasty effects of stress is quite compelling.</p> <p>You have the advantage of being able to choose which of individual or social relaxation approaches are best for you.</p>	<p>High – It seems a very human thing to enjoy shared activities – such as aerobics, dancing, even marching. Try some shared relaxation classes – such as yoga. Introduce yourself to others in the class and set up a regular after-class coffee or breakfast session.</p> <p>Enjoyable activities may push out your bed-time. You might even suffer caffeine or alcohol-induced sleep disturbance at times. Try some of the sleep hygiene approaches for the next evening. Or fit a nap into the next day. Remember that what you lose tonight you can pick up later.</p> <p>Also – try to keep a gap between exercise or social activities and going to bed, use a quietening wind-down.</p>
<p>Agreeableness</p> <p>LOW: Self-centred, skeptical - Selfish + Assertive</p> <p>HIGH: Sympathetic - Gullible + Nice</p>	<p>Low – try asking other people how they are feeling, and not being judgemental or directive. Notice how it seems to help some people just to talk.</p> <p>Join some community or service groups. You could think of this as ‘networking’ rather than as building up a support group.</p> <p>Invest in helping your partner in the chores, including child-care that might be keeping him or her from getting adequate rest. Work out an equitable roster.</p>	<p>High – nurture yourself. Try some pampering. Perhaps that’s hot baths and chocolate. Or hot whiskey and a DVD. Ensure you build some me-time into your life. While it is great to help other people out, you need to help yourself out too.</p> <p>When dealing with other people, including some who are more demanding, rehearse assertion skills. That means practicing and then saying ‘No’ to the demands of some of your friends (mental practice makes that easier).</p> <p>Stroking cats has been demonstrated to reduce tension.</p> <p>Be assertive about your need for sleep. This might include telling your partner how she or he needs to help with children or other demands.</p>
<p>Nervousness</p> <p>LOW: Emotionally stable - Easy-going + Calm</p> <p>HIGH: Emotional - Worrier + Sensitive</p>	<p>Low – Practice relaxation techniques – perhaps on an occasional basis. Just because you don’t feel unpleasant emotions that often doesn’t mean that life won’t at some point test you to the limit. It’s good to know you are up for it when it happens.</p>	<p>Gain control over tension using a technique such as muscle relaxation. Notice the control you can exert over thinking using meditation techniques.</p> <p>By alternating between these approaches you will wind down the rumination-anxiety feed-back loop (where negative feelings get attached to worrying thoughts). See the suggestions above for getting to sleep.</p> <p>Try loving kindness meditation to build up positive thoughts and feelings to provide resilience and build your positive emotions (see Appendix 1).</p> <p>Keep in mind that even if you feel tired or worried while you are working through the current issue that you will be able to relax when you are done.</p> <p>Get professional advice if you are truly stressed and feel you can’t control that.</p>

Most people, not just the highly conscientious, find that goal-setting and self-monitoring can be valuable in getting a habit such as regular relaxation practice established. Here is a simple approach you could use (based on the PersonaPlus Personal Planning approach – available as a free download at the PersonaPlus site – <http://www.persona-plus.com/coach/>).

Your action points:

For example – wake at 6.00, between 6.30 and 7.00 do morning relaxation. Then do breakfast.

Potential obstacles:

Ignoring alarm – put it out of reach of bed.

Getting distracted when I get up – leave breakfast things in cupboards, put cover over computer or put TV remote away the night before.

Getting distracted when I sit or lie to relax – focus on counting your breaths, a word, a phrase; and don't beat yourself up if you drift away from that...just let go distracting thoughts, and come back to the breathing pattern.

Write the consequences you will apply for success and failure.

Success: Daily breakfast! Weekly treat, such as movie with a friend.

Missing a day in the week: Missing a treat, such as going out for coffee.

Keep a daily record – useful things to include are your sleeping hours, your relaxation minutes, your exercise minutes, and what went well, and what a hassle was. There is a free personal record available for downloading from persona-plus.com

Remind yourself to check in with your progress by booking personal follow-ups in your calendar.

Use the goal-setting and self-management approach outlined in section 2 (or the free personal planning download – <http://www.persona-plus.com/coach/>).



Your author

This module is written by Stewart Forsyth. He trained as a clinical psychologist and practiced in New Zealand and Papua New Guinea before further training in Industrial-Organisational psychology. He has completed training in meditation and mindfulness and follows an early morning routine of meditation and exercise. These suggestions are designed to help you flex with your capabilities and learn effective approaches to bringing relaxation and rest into your life. Learn more about Stewart at <http://www.persona-plus.com/about>.

Appendix 1: Different ways to make relaxation a part of your life

How often should you practice relaxation or meditation? The Dalai Lama suggests that you should 'practice in daily life'¹. The consensus is that it is better to practice for 10 minutes daily than two hours once a week – in other words try to make your relaxation a habit or ritual.

That could mean between 20-40 minutes at the same time each day (or twice a day).

Or it could mean 20-40 minutes a day before a regular event (breakfast say, or before breakfast and again before your mid-afternoon stretch break).

What do you do for 20-40 minutes?

Breathing	You could try using the same (1, 2, 3, 4) breathing approach outlined above (in the first section), just extended out to many 'sets'.
Meditation; includes mindfulness meditation and loving kindness meditation	<p>Mindfulness</p> <p>You could try the meditation approach suggested by Dr Herbert Benson (the author of Relaxation Response) – there is a written script here – http://relaxationresponse.org/steps/.</p> <p>And downloadable audio guides from: http://www.calm.auckland.ac.nz/18.html - this site has a lot of useful relaxation and well-being resources, including imagery-based relaxation.</p> <p>Loving kindness meditation</p> <p>Here is a clear guide to loving kindness meditation.</p>
Yoga	Some examples of yoga exercises, for stretching your body and quieting your mind – http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ZxYlHdBS4 .
Muscle relaxation	Examples of muscle relaxation or body scan approach can be found: http://www.calm.auckland.ac.nz/18.html
Body scan	<p>Simple alternation of stretching with relaxation can keep you in touch with your body.</p> <p>You might be walking, or taking a shower...stretch your arms above your head...reach as high as you can stretch...feel the work your muscles are doing...let your arms drop down...shake them gently by your side...feel the relaxation (in your upper body – your legs are still obviously keeping you standing!).</p> <p>In this body awareness approach it is good to keep your breathing in synch with the tension/relaxation cycle:</p> <p>Breathe through your nose. If you are working hard, try in through the nose, out through your mouth</p> <p>Try breathing in as you wind up the tension, hold your breath as you hold the tension, then breathe out as you relax.</p>
Walking meditation	I provided an example above already, and/or this link http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QdO1vZJgUu0






Is relaxation working for you? A useful guide to how relaxed you are feeling is your breathing rate. How many breaths do you take in a minute? Most people would have no idea. Fast breathers may be shallow breathers – getting less oxygen into their system. Count your breaths over one minute ([here's an on-line stop watch](#)). Try one of the relaxation approaches, and then count your breaths again. Any difference?






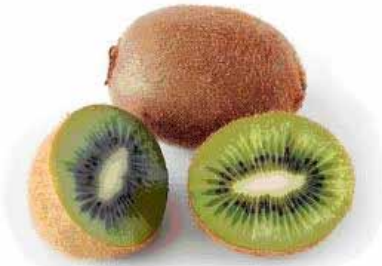
¹ Piburn, S (1990). A Policy of Kindness. Snow Lion Press, Ithaca, NY

Appendix 2: The fruit and vegetable ABC: Distracting your thoughts







It takes about 40-60 seconds to go thoughtfully through this list; try to see the fruit or vegetable as well as hearing its name. If you can't remember the fruit or veg for a particular letter, just skip it (and feel free to customise your own list, you might not like some of these fruit or veggies).








After around 5-15 repeats you should be nodding off. If you have got to a high number, such as 15, and you're not sliding into sleep, you should do something different. Maybe read in bed, or listen to the radio. Or get up and do something different, but settling; such as a warm drink, a warm bath, or reading, or all three.



A	Apple	
B	Banana	
C	Carrot	
D	Dates	
E	Eggplant	

F	Figs	
G	Grapes	
H	Haricot beans	
I	Iceberg lettuce	
J	Jerusalem artichoke	
K	Kiwi	



<p>L</p>	<p>Lemon</p>	
<p>M</p>	<p>Melon</p>	
<p>N</p>	<p>Nuts</p>	
<p>O</p>	<p>Orange</p>	
<p>P</p>	<p>Pineapple</p>	
<p>Q</p>	<p>Quince</p>	

R	Radish	
S	Strawberry	
T	Tomatoes	
U	Ugli	
V	Vanilla	
W	Watermelon	
X	Xigua	

Y	Yam	
Z	Zucchini	

Here's an example of different fruit or vegetables you could use for your own version of this alphabet...<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MTxN6TSG4Yk>

Read more: http://wiki.answers.com/Q/What_are_some_fruits_and_vegetables_from_A_to_Z#ixzz1LBNTUhHe