

Session 6. How to Release Tension

Every day, we have so many experiences, with all the feelings and thoughts that go along with them. These experiences tend to build up inside. People often carry a lot of accumulated tensions, anxieties, or fears. The Tension Release is an exercise designed to help let go of all those built-up tensions and feelings. It's a bit like filling up a board with lots of notes. It would be great to have a way to "erase the board" at the end of the day.

Here's how to do the Tension Release. Sit in a comfortable position. First, take a moment to notice your breathing. You can hold your hands out to your sides, with your palms facing the floor. As you inhale, you can swallow in the throat. Inhale directly into your heart area and expand with the breath. Hold your breath a moment and silently say, "I consciously wish to release all negative tensions." As you exhale, imagine all the tensions draining down your arms and out through the palms of your hands. On your next inhalation, just feel that the breath is breaking up any tension that might be in your heart area. You can repeat, "I consciously wish to release all negative tensions." As you exhale, visualize the heart pumping all the negative tension out of your arms and through the palms of your hands.

The wish to release tension is the most important part of the exercise. Really make an effort to break up all the inner tension and release it with the breath, until you can feel some relief from inner tension and holding. Take a moment to enjoy the feeling of quietness inside. Then you can move your head from side to side, raise your shoulders, and shake out your hands.

If you wish, you can hold up your arms overhead in a "V" shape, with the palms facing each other. As you inhale, swallow in the throat. Inhale directly into your heart area and expand with the breath. Hold your breath a moment and silently say, "I consciously wish to release all negative tensions." As you exhale, slowly lower your arms to your sides. Imagine all the tensions draining down your arms and out through the palms of your hands.

There are many times of day when it might be useful to do this exercise, such as in the morning when you wake up or right before bedtime. Some people like to do Tension Release for 10 minutes before their sitting practice, so that their mind is clear and quiet for the practice time. It is also helpful to practice Tension Release right after a period of sitting practice, to let go of anything that happened or didn't happen during the meditation practice. You can also do Tension Release at any time during the day when you need a quick break from the tensions of everyday life. Some people like to practice Tension Release before a stressful moment, such as a job interview, or when they have become angry or agitated about a situation. Tension Release is a powerful way to flush old tension from our systems.

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Session 6 (continued)

FAQs for Session 6

Is it useful to do Tension Release even if I'm not feeling tense?

Yes. We can hold tensions without even being aware of it. It is useful to let go of any thoughts, feelings, or tensions that have accumulated during the day. Keep trying the practice and see if you begin to feel better by doing so.

How can I use Tension Release in my everyday life?

It can be useful to do Tension Release at different times during your day. If you are sitting in a meeting, waiting in a line at the drugstore, or even waiting for a child's temper tantrum to pass, Tension Release is a valuable method for staying calm and releasing stress before it accumulates.

I've noticed that my neck muscles become more relaxed when I do Tension Release. Is that typical?

As you work to release tensions, physical tensions can be released also.

I have problems sleeping. Can I use Tension Release or the practice audio track to help me sleep?

“Yes,” many people find that the practice audio track and other practices can help them sleep better. Just be sure that you do practice at some time during the day when you are NOT sleeping; otherwise, you will always associate practicing with sleeping.

Help! I started the IR Participant Guide, then got busy and set it aside for a bit. What should I do?

Pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and start all over again! Growth doesn't always occur in a straight line and progress as we think it will.

Session 6 Practice

Tasks for the Next Week

You may wish to consider how you will support your ongoing practice after the group is over. This week, you can begin to explore other supports for practice, including other classes, mobile applications, or maintaining your practice on your own. You may wish to be prepared to discuss it next week.

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Session 6 (continued)

Practice in Daily Life

Use the Tension Release exercise anytime you need it throughout the day. You can also practice it at night before going to sleep. In daily life, outside of a regular sitting practice period, it is possible to do a quick version of Tension Release by taking in a breath into the heart area and holding it for a moment, while silently repeating, “I wish to release all negative tension.” With the exhalation, visualize the negative tension draining out of the arms and out through the hands.

Sitting Practice

Use Track 4, “Tension Release,” at least 3 days this week.

On the other 3 days, begin practicing without using a practice track. You can use any of the techniques we’ve learned. Some people like to begin their period of practice with the Tension Release exercise, next practice the Complete Breath, and then spend some time doing Hum Sah, letting go of any tension that arises. Try different techniques and see what works for you.

Daily Practice Log

Write down the number of minutes you have spent each day on each practice. You may not do all the listed practices every week. It will be helpful to record the types of practices you did in your self-guided practice, when you did not use an audio recording. You should progress at your own pace in transitioning from audio-guided practice. It is typical to have shorter practices during the early weeks of self-guided practice.

● Session 6 Journal ●

What situations in your life could be improved if you used your practice more often when in that situation?

Which practices did you use when you practiced without a practice audio track?

What was it like to practice without the practice audio tracks? Was it easy or hard?

Debriefing the Practice: How did the Tension Release go? When did you practice it? What happened when you used it?

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