



Session 6

Theories of Motivation

A Closer Look at Some Important Theories of Motivation

Motivation is the force that initiates, guides and maintains goal-oriented behaviors. It is what causes us to take action, whether to grab a snack to reduce hunger or enroll in college to earn a degree. The forces that lie beneath motivation can be biological, social, emotional or cognitive in nature.

Researchers have developed a number of different theories to explain motivation. Each individual theory tends to be rather limited in scope. However, by looking at the key ideas behind each theory, you can gain a better understanding of motivation as a whole.

Instinct Theory of Motivation



According to instinct theories, people are motivated to behave in certain ways because they are evolutionarily programmed to do so. An example of this in the animal world is seasonal migration. These animals do not learn to do this, it is instead an inborn pattern of behavior.

[William James](#) created a list of human instincts that included such things as attachment, play, shame, anger, fear, shyness, modesty and love. The main problem with this theory is that it did not really explain behavior, it just described it. By the 1920s, instinct theories were pushed aside in favor of other motivational theories, but contemporary evolutionary psychologists still study the influence of genetics and heredity on human behavior.

Incentive Theory of Motivation

The incentive theory suggests that people are motivated to do things because of external rewards. For example, you might be motivated to go to work each day for the monetary reward of being paid. Behavioral learning concepts such as association and reinforcement play an important role in this theory of motivation.

Drive Theory of Motivation

According to the [drive theory](#) of motivation, people are motivated to take certain actions in order to reduce the internal tension that is caused by unmet needs. For example, you might be motivated to drink a glass of water in order to reduce the internal state of thirst. This theory is useful in explaining behaviors that have a strong biological component, such as hunger or thirst. The problem with the drive theory of motivation is that these behaviors are not always motivated purely by physiological needs. For example, people often eat even when they are not really hungry.

Arousal Theory of Motivation

The arousal theory of motivation suggests that people take certain actions to either decrease or increase levels of arousal. When arousal levels get too low, for example, a person might watch an exciting movie or go for a jog. When arousal levels get too high, on the other hand, a person would probably look for ways to relax such as meditating or reading a book. According to this theory, we are motivated to maintain an optimal level of arousal, although this level can vary based on the individual or the situation.

Humanistic Theory of Motivation

Humanistic theories of motivation are based on the idea that people also have strong cognitive reasons to perform various actions. This is famously illustrated in Abraham Maslow's [hierarchy of needs](#), which presents different motivations at different levels. First, people are motivated to fulfill basic biological needs for food and shelter, as well as those of safety, love and esteem. Once the lower level needs have been met, the primary motivator becomes the need for [self-actualization](#), or the desire to fulfill one's individual potential.

Field theory is a [psychological](#) theory which examines patterns of interaction between the individual and the total field, or environment. The concept was developed by [Kurt Lewin](#), a [Gestalt psychologist](#), in the 1940s.

Field theory holds that behavior must be derived from a totality of coexisting facts. These coexisting facts make up a "dynamic field", which means that the state of any part of the field depends on every other part of it. Behavior depends on the present field rather than on the past or the future.

In the view of field theory, the understanding of intentional action lends itself to a more idealized view on the person, than say [behaviorism](#). It also lends itself to aspects of [systems theory](#). It is more idealized because the individual is not only conditioned by preconditioning, but also from motives, goals and aspirations stemming from inside, and thirdly, from the subjective perception of the situation. Although [systems theory](#) might belong to a later time, the image of psychological-personal fields reminds us of systems, in terms of parts integrated in a bigger whole defined by a higher purpose or goal. The following quote states this eloquently:

Lewin viewed the person as system containing subsystems that are more or less separate and more or less able to interact and combine with each other.

—Victor Daniel

In the same source as above, one can also read the basic tenets of the field theory:

FIELD THEORY. Its basic statements are that:

- Behavior must be derived from a totality of coexisting facts
- These coexisting facts make up a "dynamic field," which means that the state of any part of the field depends on every other part of it
- Behavior depends on the present field rather than on the past or the future. "This is in contrast both to the belief of teleology that the future is the cause of behavior, and that of associationism that the past is the cause of behavior."

The word *cybernetics* was first used in the context of "the study of self-governance" by [Plato](#) in [The Alcibiades](#) to signify the [governance](#) of people.^[14] The word 'cybernétique' was also used in 1834 by the physicist [André-Marie Ampère](#) (1775–1836) to denote the sciences of government in his classification system of human knowledge.



James Watt

The first artificial automatic regulatory system, a [water clock](#), was invented by the mechanician [Ktesibios](#). In his water clocks, water flowed from a source such as a holding tank into a reservoir, then from the reservoir to the mechanisms of the clock. Ktesibios's device used a cone-shaped float to monitor the level of the water in its reservoir and adjust the rate of flow of the water accordingly to maintain a constant level of water in the reservoir, so that it neither overflowed nor was allowed to run dry. This was the first artificial truly automatic self-regulatory device that required no outside intervention between the feedback and the controls of the mechanism. Although they did not refer to this concept by the name of Cybernetics (they considered it a field of engineering), [Ktesibios](#) and others such as [Heron](#) and [Su Song](#) are considered to be some of the first to study cybernetic principles.

The study of [teleological mechanisms](#) (from the [Greek](#) τέλος or *telos* for *end, goal, or purpose*) in machines with *corrective feedback* dates from as far back as the late 18th century when [James Watt](#)'s steam engine was equipped with a [governor](#), a centrifugal feedback valve for controlling the speed of the engine. [Alfred Russel Wallace](#) identified this as the principle of [evolution](#) in his famous 1858 paper. In 1868 [James Clerk Maxwell](#) published a theoretical article on governors, one of the first to discuss and refine the principles of self-regulating devices. [Jakob von Uexküll](#) applied the feedback mechanism via his model of functional cycle (*Funktionskreis*) in order to explain animal behavior and the origins of meaning in general.

Relaxation Techniques for Stress Relief

Finding the Relaxation Exercises That Work for You

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For many of us, relaxation means zoning out in front of the TV at the end of a stressful day. But this does little to reduce the damaging effects of stress. To effectively combat stress, we need to activate the body's natural relaxation response. You can do this by practicing relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, meditation, rhythmic exercise, and yoga. Fitting these activities into your life can help reduce everyday stress and boost your energy and mood.

The relaxation response: Bringing your nervous system back into balance

Stress is necessary for life. You need stress for creativity, learning, and your very survival. Stress is only harmful when it becomes overwhelming and interrupts the healthy state of equilibrium that your nervous system needs to remain in balance. Unfortunately, overwhelming stress has become an increasingly common characteristic of contemporary life. When stressors throw your nervous system out of balance, relaxation techniques can bring it back into a balanced state by producing the *relaxation response*, a state of deep calmness that is the polar opposite of the stress response.

When stress overwhelms your nervous system your body is flooded with chemicals that prepare you for "fight or flight." While the stress response can be lifesaving in emergency situations where you need to act quickly, it wears your body down when constantly activated by the stresses of everyday life. The relaxation response puts the brakes on this heightened state of readiness and brings your body and mind back into a state of equilibrium.

Producing the relaxation response

A variety of different relaxation techniques can help you bring your nervous system back into balance by producing the relaxation response. The relaxation response is not lying on the couch or sleeping but a mentally active process that leaves the body relaxed, calm, and focused.

Learning the basics of these relaxation techniques isn't difficult, but it does take practice. Most stress experts recommend setting aside at least 10 to 20 minutes a day for your relaxation practice. If you'd like to get even more stress relief, aim for 30 minutes to an hour. If that sounds like a daunting commitment, remember that many of these techniques can be incorporated into your existing daily schedule—practiced at your desk over lunch or on the bus during your morning commute.

Finding the relaxation technique that's best for you

There is no single relaxation technique that is best for everyone. When choosing a relaxation technique, consider your specific needs, preferences, fitness level, and the way you tend to react to stress. The right relaxation technique is the one that resonates with you, fits your lifestyle, and is able to focus your mind and interrupt your everyday thoughts in order to elicit the relaxation response. In many cases, you may find that alternating or combining different techniques will keep you motivated and provide you with the best results.

How you react to stress may influence the relaxation technique that works best for you:

How do you react to stress?

Do you tend to become angry, agitated, or keyed up?

You may respond best to relaxation techniques that quiet you down, such as meditation, deep breathing, or guided imagery

Do you tend to become depressed, withdrawn, or spaced out?

You may respond best to relaxation techniques that are stimulating and that energize your nervous system, such as rhythmic exercise

Do you tend to freeze-speeding up internally, while slowing down externally?

Your challenge is to identify relaxation techniques that provide both safety and stimulation to help you “reboot” your system. Techniques such as mindfulness walking or power yoga might work well for you

Do you need alone time or social stimulation?

If you crave solitude, solo relaxation techniques such as meditation or progressive muscle relaxation will give you the space to quiet your mind and recharge your batteries. If you crave social interaction, a class setting will give you the stimulation and support you're looking for. Practicing with others may also help you stay motivated.

Relaxation technique 1: Breathing meditation for stress relief

With its focus on full, cleansing breaths, deep breathing is a simple, yet powerful, relaxation technique. It's easy to learn, can be practiced almost anywhere, and provides a quick way to get your stress levels in check. Deep breathing is the cornerstone of many other relaxation practices, too, and can be combined with other relaxing elements such as aromatherapy and music. All you really need is a few minutes and a place to stretch out.

Practicing deep breathing meditation

The key to deep breathing is to breathe deeply from the abdomen, getting as much fresh air as possible in your lungs. When you take deep breaths from the abdomen, rather than shallow breaths from your upper chest, you inhale more oxygen. The more oxygen you get, the less tense, short of breath, and anxious you feel.

- Sit comfortably with your back straight. Put one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach.
- Breathe in through your nose. The hand on your stomach should rise. The hand on your chest should move very little.
- Exhale through your mouth, pushing out as much air as you can while contracting your abdominal muscles. The hand on your stomach should move in as you exhale, but your other hand should move very little.
- Continue to breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Try to inhale enough so that your lower abdomen rises and falls. Count slowly as you exhale.

If you find it difficult breathing from your abdomen while sitting up, try lying on the floor. Put a small book on your stomach, and try to breathe so that the book rises as you inhale and falls as you exhale.

Relaxation technique 2: Progressive muscle relaxation for stress relief

Progressive muscle relaxation involves a two-step process in which you systematically tense and relax different muscle groups in the body.

With regular practice, progressive muscle relaxation gives you an intimate familiarity with what tension—as well as complete relaxation—feels like in different parts of the body. This awareness helps you spot and counteract the first signs of the muscular tension that accompanies stress. And as your body relaxes, so will your mind. You can combine deep breathing with progressive muscle relaxation for an additional level of stress relief.

Practicing progressive muscle relaxation

Before practicing Progressive Muscle Relaxation, consult with your doctor if you have a history of muscle spasms, back problems, or other serious injuries that may be aggravated by tensing muscles.

Most progressive muscle relaxation practitioners start at the feet and work their way up to the face. For a sequence of muscle groups to follow, see the box below.

- Loosen your clothing, take off your shoes, and get comfortable.
- Take a few minutes to relax, breathing in and out in slow, deep breaths.
- When you're relaxed and ready to start, shift your attention to your right foot. Take a moment to focus on the way it feels.
- Slowly tense the muscles in your right foot, squeezing as tightly as you can. Hold for a count of 10.
- Relax your right foot. Focus on the tension flowing away and the way your foot feels as it becomes limp and loose.
- Stay in this relaxed state for a moment, breathing deeply and slowly.
- When you're ready, shift your attention to your left foot. Follow the same sequence of muscle tension and release.
- Move slowly up through your body, contracting and relaxing the muscle groups as you go.
- It may take some practice at first, but try not to tense muscles other than those intended.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation Sequence

The most popular sequence runs as follows:

- | | | |
|----------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Right foot* | 6. Left thigh | 11. Right arm and hand |
| 2. Left foot | 7. Hips and buttocks | 12. Left arm and hand |
| 3. Right calf | 8. Stomach | 13. Neck and shoulders |
| 4. Left calf | 9. Chest | 14. Face |
| 5. Right thigh | 10. Back | |

* If you are left-handed you may want to begin with your left foot instead.

Relaxation technique 3: Body scan meditation for stress relief

A body scan is similar to progressive muscle relaxation except, instead of tensing and relaxing muscles, you simply focus on the sensations in each part of your body.

Practicing body scan meditation

- Lie on your back, legs uncrossed, arms relaxed at your sides, eyes open or closed. Focus on your breathing , allowing your stomach to rise as you inhale and fall as you exhale. Breathe deeply for about two minutes, until you start to feel comfortable and relaxed.
- Turn your focus to the toes of your right foot. Notice any sensations you feel while continuing to also focus on your breathing. Imagine each deep breath flowing to your toes. Remain focused on this area for one to two minutes.
- Move your focus to the sole of your right foot. Tune in to any sensations you feel in that part of your body and imagine each breath flowing from the sole of your foot. After one or two minutes, move your focus to your right ankle and repeat. Move to your calf, knee, thigh, hip, and then repeat the sequence for your left leg. From there, move up the torso, through the lower back and abdomen, the upper back and chest, and the shoulders. Pay close attention to any area of the body that causes you pain or discomfort.
- Move your focus to the fingers on your right hand and then move up to the wrist, forearm, elbow, upper arm, and shoulder. Repeat for your left arm. Then move through the neck and throat, and finally all the regions of your face, the back of the head, and the top of the head. Pay close attention to your jaw, chin, lips, tongue, nose, cheeks, eyes, forehead, temples and scalp. When you reach the very top of your head, let your breath reach out beyond your body and imagine yourself hovering above yourself.
- After completing the body scan, relax for a while in silence and stillness, noting how your body feels. Then open your eyes slowly. Take a moment to stretch, if necessary.

For a guided body scan meditation, see the Resources section below.

Relaxation technique 4: Mindfulness for stress relief

[Mindfulness](#) is the ability to remain aware of how you're feeling right now, your "moment-to-moment" experience—both internal and external. Thinking about the past—blaming and judging yourself—or worrying about the future can often lead to a degree of stress that is overwhelming. But by staying calm and focused in the present moment, you can bring your nervous system back into balance. Mindfulness can be applied to activities such as walking, exercising, eating, or meditation.

Meditations that cultivate mindfulness have long been used to reduce overwhelming stress. Some of these meditations bring you into the present by

focusing your attention on a single repetitive action, such as your breathing, a few repeated words, or flickering light from a candle. Other forms of mindfulness meditation encourage you to follow and then release internal thoughts or sensations.

Practicing mindfulness meditation

Key points in mindfulness meditation are:

- **A quiet environment.** Choose a secluded place in your home, office, garden, place of worship, or in the great outdoors where you can relax without distractions or interruptions.
- **A comfortable position.** Get comfortable, but avoid lying down as this may lead to you falling asleep. Sit up with your spine straight, either in a chair or on the floor. You can also try a cross-legged or lotus position.
- **A point of focus.** This point can be internal – a feeling or imaginary scene – or something external - a flame or meaningful word or phrase that you repeat it throughout your session. You may meditate with eyes open or closed. Also choose to focus on an object in your surroundings to enhance your concentration, or alternately, you can close your eyes.
- **An observant, noncritical attitude.** Don't worry about distracting thoughts that go through your mind or about how well you're doing. If thoughts intrude during your relaxation session, don't fight them. Instead, gently turn your attention back to your point of focus.

Relaxation technique 5: Visualization meditation for stress relief

Visualization, or guided imagery, is a variation on traditional meditation that requires you to employ not only your visual sense, but also your sense of taste, touch, smell, and sound. When used as a relaxation technique, visualization involves imagining a scene in which you feel at peace, free to let go of all tension and anxiety.

Choose whatever setting is most calming to you, whether it's a tropical beach, a favorite childhood spot, or a quiet wooded glen. You can do this visualization exercise on your own in silence, while listening to soothing music, or with a therapist (or an audio recording of a therapist) guiding you through the imagery. To help you employ your sense of hearing you can use a sound machine or download sounds that match your chosen setting—the sound of ocean waves if you've chosen a beach, for example.

Practicing visualization

Find a quiet, relaxed place. Beginners sometimes fall asleep during a visualization meditation, so you might try sitting up or standing.

Close your eyes and let your worries drift away. Imagine your restful place. Picture it as vividly as you can—everything you can see, hear, smell, and feel. Visualization works best if you incorporate as many sensory details as possible, using at least three of your senses. When visualizing, choose imagery that appeals to you; don't select images because someone else suggests them, or because you think they should be appealing. Let your own images come up and work for you.

If you are thinking about a dock on a quiet lake, for example:

- Walk slowly around the dock and notice the colors and textures around you.
- Spend some time exploring each of your senses.
- See the sun setting over the water.
- Hear the birds singing.
- Smell the pine trees.
- Feel the cool water on your bare feet.
- Taste the fresh, clean air.

Enjoy the feeling of deep relaxation that envelopes you as you slowly explore your restful place. When you are ready, gently open your eyes and come back to the present.

Don't worry if you sometimes zone out or lose track of where you are during a guided imagery session. This is normal. You may also experience feelings of stiffness or heaviness in your limbs, minor, involuntary muscle-movements, or even cough or yawn. Again, these are normal responses.

Relaxation technique 6: Yoga and tai chi for stress relief

[Yoga](#) involves a series of both moving and stationary poses, combined with deep breathing. As well as reducing anxiety and stress, yoga can also improve flexibility, strength, balance, and stamina. Practiced regularly, it can also strengthen the relaxation response in your daily life. Since injuries can happen when yoga is practiced incorrectly, it's best to learn by attending group classes, hiring a private teacher, or at least following video instructions.

What type of yoga is best for stress?

Although almost all yoga classes end in a relaxation pose, classes that emphasize slow, steady movement, deep breathing, and gentle stretching are best for stress relief.

- **Satyananda** is a traditional form of yoga. It features gentle poses, deep relaxation, and meditation, making it suitable for beginners as well as anyone primarily looking for stress reduction.
- **Hatha yoga** is also a reasonably gentle way to relieve stress and is suitable for beginners. Alternately, look for labels like *gentle*, *for stress relief*, or *for beginners* when selecting a yoga class.
- **Power yoga**, with its intense poses and focus on fitness, is better suited to those looking for stimulation as well as relaxation.

If you're unsure whether a specific yoga class is appropriate for stress relief, call the studio or ask the teacher.

Tai chi

If you've ever seen a group of people in the park slowly moving in synch, you've probably witnessed tai chi. [Tai chi](#) is a self-paced, non-competitive series of slow, flowing body movements. These movements emphasize concentration, relaxation, and the conscious circulation of vital energy throughout the body. Though tai chi has its roots in martial arts, today it is primarily practiced as a way of calming the mind, conditioning the body, and reducing stress. As in meditation, tai chi practitioners focus on their breathing and keeping their attention in the present moment.

Tai chi is a safe, low-impact option for people of all ages and levels of fitness, including older adults and those recovering from injuries. Like yoga, once you've learned the basics of tai chi or qi gong, you can practice alone or with others, tailoring your sessions as you see fit.

Making relaxation techniques a part of your life

The best way to start and maintain a relaxation practice is to incorporate it into your daily routine. Between work, family, school, and other commitments, though, it can be tough for many people to find the time. Fortunately, many of the techniques can be practiced while you're doing other things.

Rhythmic exercise as a mindfulness relaxation technique

Rhythmic exercise—such as running, walking, rowing, or cycling—is most effective at relieving stress when performed with relaxation in mind. As with meditation, mindfulness requires being fully engaged in the present moment,

focusing your mind on how your body feels right now. As you exercise, focus on the physicality of your body's movement and how your breathing complements that movement. If your mind wanders to other thoughts, gently return to focusing on your breathing and movement.

If walking or running, for example, focus on each step—the sensation of your feet touching the ground, the rhythm of your breath while moving, and the feeling of the wind against your face.

Tips for fitting relaxation techniques into your life

- **If possible, schedule a set time to practice each day.** Set aside one or two periods each day. You may find that it's easier to stick with your practice if you do it first thing in the morning, before other tasks and responsibilities get in the way.
- **Practice relaxation techniques while you're doing other things.** Meditate while commuting to work on a bus or train, or waiting for a dentist appointment. Try deep breathing while you're doing housework or mowing the lawn. Mindfulness walking can be done while exercising your dog, walking to your car, or climbing the stairs at work instead of using the elevator. Once you've learned techniques such as tai chi, you can practice them in your office or in the park at lunchtime.
- **If you exercise, improve the relaxation benefits by adopting mindfulness.** Instead of zoning out or staring at a TV as you exercise, try focusing your attention on your body. If you're resistance training, for example, focus on coordinating your breathing with your movements and pay attention to how your body feels as you raise and lower the weights.
- **Avoid practicing when you're sleepy.** These techniques can relax you so much that they can make you very sleepy, especially if it's close to bedtime. You will get the most benefit if you practice when you're fully awake and alert. Do not practice after eating a heavy meal or while using drugs, tobacco, or alcohol.
- **Expect ups and downs.** Don't be discouraged if you skip a few days or even a few weeks. It happens. Just get started again and slowly build up to your old momentum.

The four models of motivation

Attention relevance confidence and satisfaction