

Relaxation & Stress Management

Basic Elements

by

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Thanks to

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Effective Relaxation & Stress Management

- Effective programs recommend some or all of the following:
 - Time management (prioritizing)
 - Exercise
 - Mind-body approaches
 - Self-actualization methods

Some Simple Techniques

- Muscle relaxation (including yoga postures, stretching)
- Deep breathing (diaphragmatic breathing, involves rhythm)
- Visualizations or imagery (in a subtle form it can also be called ideation)
- Delicate vibrating sounds (most subtle are mantras, can be with music)
- Meditation

Relaxation Response

- Simple techniques can induce the *relaxation response*
- This results in a decrease in physiological effects of:
 - Muscle tension
 - Metabolism
 - Blood pressure
 - Heart rate
 - Breathing rate

The *Relaxation Response*

- Due to:
 - use of mental focusing devices
 - passive attitude to distracting thoughts
- While being fully aware (mindfulness)
- Brings:
 - deep, relaxed, abdominal breathing
 - inner contemplation and concentration
 - a subtle inner rhythmic flow

Basic Steps to Elicit the *Relaxation Response*

1. Focus word
2. Sit quietly in a comfortable position
3. Close your eyes
4. Relax muscles
5. Breathe slowly, naturally, and repeat focus word (e.g. an uplifting mantra)
6. Assume passive attitude
7. Continue 10-20 minutes
8. Daily practice
9. When distracting thoughts occur:
 - return to focus word
 - concentrate on visualization
 - ensure rhythmic breathing

Simple Practice for the *Relaxation Response*

- Lie down
- Hands on lower belly
- Hypnotic, low, “FM radio” voice
- Focus word in: OCEAN & focus word out: PEACEFUL
 - IN and then OUT
 - OR
- Focus word in: BABA NAM & focus word out: KEVALAM
 - IN and then OUT
- On inhale, diaphragm expands fully (feel belly rise)
- On exhale, diaphragm contracts (suck belly button to spine)

The ‘Mini’ Relaxation

- Stuck in traffic? Worried about something?
- Minis may be the key to help you!
 - Take a deep breath and hold several seconds, letting it out slowly
 - Do while repeating focus words (uplifting mantras)
 - Check with hand on navel and breath slowly:
 - expand abdomen when breathing in; and
 - contract abdomen when breathing out

Mindfulness as 'Minis'

- Pay attention to your breathing as you awake, and from time to time through the day, ensure relaxed breathing before sleep
- Notice physical signs of tension and take some mindful breaths to release tension
- Pay intense attention to the present moment
 - the Cosmic flow of flowers, birds, beauty in the environment

Indications of when the *Relaxation Response* is Required

- **Stress related diseases:**
 - Anxiety
 - Headache
 - Sleep problems
 - Muscle tension
 - Irritable bowel

More Indications for the *Relaxation Response*

- **Symptom reduction for:**
 - Pain control
 - Grief
 - Relationship issues
 - Improving communication
 - Job related difficulties
 - Enhancing self-efficacy

Specific Conditions Requiring the *Relaxation Response*

- **Reduction of negative stress effects help:**
 - Hypertension
 - Asthma
 - Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease
 - Heart disease
 - Diabetes
 - Immune problems / HIV
 - Cancer
 - Infertility

The Stress Reaction - *Flight or Fight*

- Researched by Selye, Cannon, Benson in Canada and USA
- Looked at:
 - Physiological effects of stress on the body
 - Its acute and chronic effects
- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fight-or-flight_response

Stress hormone axis activation causes release and response of:

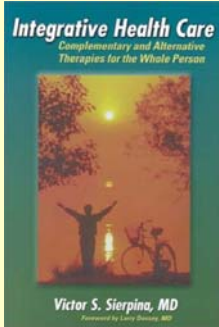
- Hypothalamic-pituitary hormones – adrenocorticotrophic hormone (ACTH)
- Adrenal cortex hormones – corticosteroids
- Adrenal medulla hormones – epinephrine & norepinephrine
- Alteration in post-synaptic sympathetic tone

Readings: *Relaxation Response*

- ***The Wellness Book***, H. Benson, E. Stuart; Simon and Schuster, 1992
- ***The Relaxation Response***, H. Benson; William Morrow, 1975
- ***Beyond the Relaxation Response***, H. Benson; Times Books, 1984

More Possibilities

- ***Mind-Body Medicine — A Clinician's Guide to Psychoneuroimmunology***, A Watkins; Churchill Livingstone, 1997
- ***Mind/Body Medicine: How to Use Your Mind for Better Health***, D Goleman, J Gurin; Consumer Reports Books, 1993



**Integrative Healthcare:
Complementary and
Alternative Therapies
for the Whole Person**

By: *Victor S. Sierpina, MD*
FA Davis, Philadelphia, 2001