

The Relaxation Response

An effective approach to reduce stress

The Relaxation Response is a simple and effective approach to reducing stress using mindfulness meditation. Discovered by Dr. Benson at Harvard Medical School, it is routinely recommended to treat patients suffering from heart conditions, high blood pressure, chronic pain, insomnia, and many other physical ailments. The breadth and variety of health conditions that can benefit from the Relaxation Response suggests that deliberately encouraging calm and relaxation in the mind and body is critical for optimal health.

Using the relaxation response can result in:

- Lowered heart rate
- Reduced blood pressure
- Lower respiratory rate
- Stable oxygen consumption
- Reduced muscle tension throughout the body
- Reduction of circulating stress hormones such as cortisol

How to use the relaxation response:

1. Sit quietly in a comfortable position.
2. Close your eyes.
3. Progressively relax all your muscles; beginning at your feet and moving up the body all the way to your face. Keep them relaxed.
4. Become aware of your breathing, preferably in and out through your nose. As you breathe out, say the word, "one*", silently to yourself.

For example, breathe in ... out, "one", breathe in ... out, "one", etc. Breathe easily and naturally.

**You may also use any soothing sound (instead of repeating "one"), however try to ensure it holds no meaning or association, in order to avoid stimulation of unnecessary thoughts.*

5. Continue for 10 to 20 minutes. You may open your eyes to check the time, but it is best not use an alarm.



6. Try to sit quietly for a few minutes once you've finished; at first with your eyes closed, and later with your eyes opened.

Try not to become preoccupied with whether you achieve a deep level of relaxation. Instead, maintain a positive mindset and allow relaxation to occur at its own pace. If any thoughts pop up, try your best to just accept them and let them pass, without dwelling on them. Return to repeating "one" (or whatever you have chosen as your mantra). Tuning out distracting thoughts will become easier with time and practice.

Practice the Relaxation Response technique once or twice daily, aiming to steer clear of meal times by two hours. This is due to the finding that the digestive process (at its peak within 1-2 hours of eating), seems to interfere with the elicitation of the Relaxation Response.

