

The Relaxation Response

This exercise is derived from Dr. Herbert Benson's book, *The Relaxation Response*. It is a simple form of meditation. The relaxation response is a natural process that everyone can do. This technique needs to be practiced daily. It allows you to focus away from thoughts which may cause tension in the body.

1. Choose a quiet environment that is free of distraction and limits outside noises. Unplug the telephone and ask for privacy.
2. Sit in a comfortable position so that there is no undue muscular tension. Your chin may naturally drop a bit as you choose to relax. Your feet should touch the floor. Do not lie down as there is a tendency to fall asleep.
3. Close your eyes gently. Don't squeeze them closed, but rather close them expecting a very relaxing experience.
4. Begin to repeat a word like "one" or any other one-syllable word. Say this word silently over and over for 15 minutes. There is no right or wrong way to do this. The word may be repeated quickly or slowly. Whatever occurs naturally is correct.
5. Let it just happen. When distracting thoughts occur, disregard them and return to the word "one." Don't worry about how well you are performing the technique. Distracting thoughts will occur. Do not analyze them. When they occur, simply return to the repetition of the word "one." These other thoughts are supposed to occur. Let them go. They show the release of stress.
6. Gradually come out of the Relaxation Response. Glance at a clock to see when 15 minutes are over. This will not spoil the technique. (You may develop a "built-in" clock that will tell you when 15 minutes are up.) When you are finished, sit quietly for two minutes before opening your eyes. Slowly open your eyes, enjoy your surroundings, and stand up when you feel like it. You are now ready to go about your normal activity, relaxed, refreshed, and alert.

Information About the Relaxation Response

- Most people feel a sense of calm, relaxation, pleasure, refreshment, and well-being after completing this exercise.
- It is a natural process within us. You can do the response at home, at work, or while on vacation.
- Practice the Relaxation Response two times a day for 15 minutes each time. This 30 minutes per day will produce maximum relaxation benefits. Using the technique for too long a time period or too many times can reduce its stress management benefit.
- Many people practice first thing in the morning before breakfast and shortly before dinner. In the morning, plan on getting up 15 minutes earlier than usual. You will not be losing sleep because the Relaxation Response produces the same refreshment that sleep does.
- Do not practice within two hours of having eaten. The digestive process tends to interfere with the benefits. Alcohol or drugs will also interfere.