

The Relaxation Response

The relaxation response is an exercise that was coined by Herbert Benson, MD. He did extensive research on this topic and found it to offer the following benefits to those who practice it on a regular basis.

Benefits:

Blood pressure decreases

Heart rate decreases

Breathing rate decreases

Muscle tension decrease

Why is this important? When you are stressed, these four areas have a tendency to increase, again, causing some wear and tear on your body. When they decrease, you are in a more relaxed state.

One of the reasons I love the relaxation response is that it, like deep breathing, is a simple but very effective tool to manage your stress effectively. It does not require any special training or expensive equipment. All it takes is the desire to learn the steps and allowing yourself to take the time to do it!!

It is also important to remember that although you may “relax” when you lie in the hammock, watch the television or read our favorite book, it is not to the extent of deep relaxation that you experience when practicing the relaxation response. When you practice this exercise on a regular basis it has wonderful benefits to your body. It can help repair the negative effects of stress that we experience. It also has a cumulative effect, similar to exercise, where you become in better “stress shape”, as I like to call it. In other words, your body is better able to deal with the daily stressors we are under and the negative impact is not as much. We stop over-responding to daily stressors. For example, when that person pulls out in front of you on Loop 410, rather than having that heart rate increase, blood pressure increase and so on, we may be a little annoyed, but the negative physical impact is much less.

This is also an exercise where you are best served by letting go of the results. Don’t worry about “if it is working”. Just allow it to happen and trust that it is helping. You are benefiting just by sitting down and doing it, even if for just five minutes.

Some of the other areas helped by doing the relaxation response:

- can help decrease high blood pressure
- helps decrease pain
- improves sleep
- helps decrease anxiety
- helps decrease depression
- decreases headaches and migraines
- may improve self-esteem
- decreases anger and hostility
- pleasant disposition
- increased clarity of thought
- enjoy the moment



Here are the steps:

Step 1: Find a **comfortable and quiet place**. It is best to do this exercise in a sitting position rather than laying down (where you may fall asleep!). Turn off the phone or turn down the ringer if possible and appropriate. I like to do this exercise in my recliner. Make sure to tell others that you will be busy for the next ten to twenty minutes and asked that they not bother you.

Step 2: You will want to **choose a focus word or short phrase**. This can be a relaxing word, or perhaps a short spiritual phrase that has meaning to you. Examples include: ocean, love, peace, a spiritual phrase of your choice.

Step 3: **Sit quietly in your chair** and take several deep breaths.

Step 4: Gently **close your eyes**.

Step 5: Scan down through your body and **let go of any muscle tension** you feel.

Step 6: Now breathe slowly and naturally. As you exhale, **repeat your focus word or phrase** silently to yourself.

Step 7 :Assume a pleasant, passive, **non-judgmental attitude** as you do this. If you start thinking about something else (which is very common, especially when you first start this exercise!) just gently bring yourself back to repeating your focus word or phrase.

Step 8: **Continue the exercise for 10 to 20 minutes**. Sometimes it is easiest to start this exercise for shorter time periods, perhaps 3 to 5 minutes, and then gradually increase your time.

Step 9: **Practice this technique once or twice per day**.