

INTRODUCTION TO MIND/BODY TECHNIQUES:

THE RELAXATION RESPONSE (RR)

WHAT IS THE RELAXATION RESPONSE?

The Relaxation Response (RR) is a scientifically proven physical state of deep rest that changes the physical and emotional responses to stress. It was first discovered and researched at Harvard Medical School by Dr Herbert Benson.

WHAT HAPPENS DURING THE RELAXATION RESPONSE?

When you elicit the Relaxation Response evidence has found that the following physiological changes occur:-

- Your metabolism decreases
- Your heart beats slower
- Your muscles relax
- Your breathing becomes slower
- Your blood pressure decreases
- Your levels of nitric oxide are increased

WHAT IS NITRIC OXIDE AND WHY IS IT BENEFICIAL?

The chemical nitric oxide (NO), is primarily produced in the blood vessels' endothelium, or lining. There it increases blood flow, prevents fatty deposits from sticking to blood vessel walls, keeps walls from getting too thick and stiff, and prevents the arteries from narrowing.

“Regular elicitation of the Relaxation Response has been scientifically proven to be an effective treatment for a wide range of stress-related disorders. In fact, to the extent that any disease is caused or made worse by stress, the relaxation response can help.” **Dr Herbert Benson, MD. Professor of Medicine, Harvard Medical School, Director Emeritus of the Benson-Henry Institute and Mind/Body Medical Institute.**

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HOW DO I ELICIT THE RELAXATION RESPONSE?

There are just 3 essential steps to remember:-

1. Abdominal breathing.
2. Repetition of a word, sound or phrase on exhale.
3. Passive disregard of everyday thoughts that inevitably come to mind and the return to your repetition.

There are various ways to elicit the Relaxation Response, in this leaflet we describe the following techniques:-

- (1) The Relaxation Response technique.
- (2) Relaxation Response technique with Progressive Relaxation for sleep.
- (3) "Mini's" – focused breathing techniques.

1) The Relaxation Response technique:

1. ***Pick a focus word or short phrase that is firmly rooted in your belief system, such as: "one," "peace," "relax," "Hail Mary Full of Grace," "Shalom," "om" etc.***
2. lie down, (or sit) quietly in a comfortable position.
3. close your eyes.
4. place palms of your hands over your navel.
5. **breath slowly and naturally to your abdomen**, aware of the natural rise and fall of your abdomen (this is called "abdominal breathing.")
6. **as you exhale silently say to yourself your focus word or phrase.**
7. **assume a passive attitude.** Don't worry about how well you're doing. When other thoughts come to mind, simply say to yourself, "Oh well," *and gently return to your repetition.*
8. continue for ten to 20 minutes.
9. do not stand immediately. Continue lying quietly for a minute or so, allowing other thoughts to return. Then open your eyes and sit for another minute before rising.
10. practice the technique once or twice daily. Good times to do so are before breakfast or before dinner.

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2) Relaxation Response technique with Progressive Relaxation to help prepare for sleep:

This exercise includes the Relaxation Response technique with the additional relaxing technique known as **Progressive Relaxation**. **Progressive Relaxation** can help you prepare for sleep by using your **focus** to **relax your body**. The word “relax” is often found to be the most beneficial for sleep.

1. Preparing for sleep with the Relaxation Response:

- a. lie down quietly in a comfortable position.
- b. close your eyes.
- c. place palms of your hands over your navel.
- d. **breathe slowly and naturally to your abdomen**, aware of the natural rise and fall of your abdomen.
- e. Become aware of your exhale and **silently repeat: “Relax”**
- f. continue for about 12 exhales and then place your hands by your sides.

2. Progressive Relaxation:-

- a. start by becoming aware of your feet and toes, become fully aware of them (wiggling your toes and feet if you need) and then as you exhale gently say the word: “relax” to your feet and toes.
- b. **Notice** how they feel. Do they feel relaxed?
- c. Then continue working your way up through each area of your body starting at your feet and then finishing the exercise when you reach the top of your head. Remember to take your time with this and **notice** the feelings of relaxation in each area that you've just focused on, does it feel heavier, more relaxed? This is a good sign to look out for because when tension releases it gives us the feeling of '**relaxed heaviness**.' This is also a sign that your body listens and responds to you!
- d. **assume a passive attitude**. Don't worry about how well you're doing. When other thoughts come to mind, simply say to yourself, “Oh well,” *and gently return to your repetition*.
- e. continue for ten to 20 minutes or longer if required.
- f. If your mind starts to become active again simply repeat the steps.

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3) “Mini’s” – focused breathing techniques

“Mini” relaxation exercises are in fact focused breathing techniques that are quick and easy to use yet are proven to help reduce anxiety and tension immediately. Your breath is with you at every moment in time. You can do a Mini with your eyes open or closed (unless you are driving obviously!) You can do a Mini at any place, at any time. Remember to do Abdominal breathing with the Mini’s.

- a. **Mini #1:** Count very slowly to yourself from 10 down to 0, one number on each outbreath. Thus, breathe in, and on your first outbreath, say “10” to yourself. With the next outbreath, say “9” working your way down to “0.” When you get to “0” notice how you feel. You can also count slowly from 5 down to 0. Do this several times.
- b. **Mini #2:** As you breathe in, count slowly up to “4” as you breathe out, count slowly back down to “1.” Thus, as you breathe in, you say quietly to yourself: “1..2..3..4” and as you breathe out, you say quietly to yourself: “4..3..2..1.” Do this several times.
- c. **Mini #3:** This is counting the space between the inbreath and the outbreath. Thus, after each inbreath, pause and count: “1..2..3” after each outbreath pause again and count, “1..2..3” Do this several times.
- d. **Mini #4:** On the inbreath you think, “I am” and on the outbreath you think, “at peace.” Repeat this several times. This is an excellent Mini to use also while walking.
- e. **Mini #5:** Square breathing. Visualise a square. On the inbreath, visualise a vertical line and then a horizontal line. On the outbreath you visualise another vertical and horizontal line, to complete the square.

Good Times To Do a Mini:

When someone says something that bothers you... when you feel overwhelmed by all you need to do... whilst in a waiting room.. when in pain... in the night when you can't sleep.. etc.

The only time Mini’s do not work is when you don’t do them!

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