

Managing Stress: The Relaxation Response for Everyday living”

Mariann Fox Wolskee, LCSW, (certified yoga instructor) and Expressive Movement Therapist

Connections to the Fight-or-Flight Response:

What is the stress response?

Walter B. Cannon, the famous Harvard physiologist, had discovered this concept of Fight or flight response; and it was revolutionary. It was described as an “evolutionary momentum that equipped modern human beings with keen physiologic survival instincts.” Cannon theorized that mammals have a physical ability to react to stress that evolved as a survival mechanism.”. When faced with a stressful situations, our bodies release hormones; adrenaline and noradrenaline, or epinephrine and norepinephrine – to increase heart rate, breathing rate, blood pressure, metabolic rate and blood flow to the muscles, gearing our bodies either to do battle with an opponent or to flee”. (Benson, Herbert “the relaxation response”, 1976, 2000 reprinting. Pg. 9).

What is the Relaxation Response?

Studies also revealed that the opposite was also true. The body is also imbued with what Robert Benson termed the Relaxation Response – an inducible, physiologic state of quietude.” P.9

Our ancestors also handed down to us a second, equally essential survival mechanism – the ability to heal and rejuvenate our bodies. In modern times, the latter “relaxation response” may be more important to our survival, since anxiety and tension often inappropriately trigger the fight-or-flight response in us.

A regular practice of eliciting the relaxation response can prevent, and compensate for, the damage incurred by frequent nervous reactions that pulse through our hearts and bodies.

How to trigger the relaxation response?

When the mind is focused, whether through meditation or other repetitive mental activities, the body responds with a dramatic decrease in heart rate, breathing rate, blood pressure and metabolic rate – the exact opposite effects of the fight or flight response.

Learning basic breathing techniques (the ones we will learn today are from yoga) is a terrific place to start. **There are four essential components that would elicit the Relaxation Response:**

- 1. A quiet environment**
- 2. A mental device – a sound, word, phrase, or prayer repeated silently or aloud, or a fixed gaze on an object (such as a candle, a favorite picture or scene).**
- 3. A passive attitude – not worrying about how well you are performing this technique and simply putting aside distracting thoughts to return to one’s focus**
- 4. A comfortable position.**

Ten tips for Stress Relief “Blissing Out”

(www.webmd.com/balance/stressmanagement/features/blissing-out-10-relaxation-techniques)

1. Meditate (walking, knitting, painting, swimming).
2. Picture yourself relaxed (guided imagery exercise)
3. Breathe deeply (change the way you breathe; try 3 part breathe, learn breathe of joy and alternate nostril breathing)
4. Mindfulness (exercise, stay present, focused)
5. Drink Hot Tea
6. Show some love (pet, hugs for family friends, social interaction helps the brain)
7. Self Massage (muscle tension relief exercise from session II) feet, back of neck, hands
8. Take a time out
9. Music (take a musical stress detour; align your heart with song, 30 minutes of classical music may produce calming effects are similar to 10 mg of valium!
10. Take an attitude break (in 30 seconds you can shift heart rhythms – engage the heart mind in positive thinking, “helps to slow breathing, relax tense muscles and put a smile on your face”).

GUIDED IMAGERY: A peaceful place to be

- Get comfortable, and close your eyes
- Take a few deep breaths
- Picture a setting that is calm and peaceful
- Imagine your scene; add detail (is there a breeze, what does the sky look like, is it clear, warm etc.
- Add a path – as you enter (e.g. the meadow, woods, beach), imagine a path leading you to feel more relaxed.
- When you are deep in your scene, feeling relaxed, take a few breaths and feel the calm.
- When you are ready slowly take yourself out of the scene back to the present.
- Tell yourself you will feel relaxed and refreshed and will bring that sense of calm with you
- Count to 3 and open your eyes.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

(302) 290-2774 cell

MARIANN WOLSKEE, LCSW,

Clinical Services – Outpatient Behavioral Health Dept.

Certified Yoga Teacher (500 HR). 2006

Certified Expressive Movement Instructor (500) 2004

Tai Chi Instructor: 2017

For more info: mwolskee@gmail.com