Relaxation for Mind-body Connection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Fight-or-Flight</strong></th>
<th><strong>Relaxation Response</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brain interprets something to be a stressor</td>
<td>Brain tells body it is safe now and can relax</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brain releases chemicals that stimulate the body</td>
<td>Brain releases chemicals that relax body</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chemicals increase blood pressure and heart rate, dilate pupils, etc.</td>
<td>Chemicals lower blood pressure and heart rate, restrict pupils, etc.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Signs of Chronic Stress**

- Anxiety
- Back pain
- Change in appetite
- Chest pain
- Constipation
- Depression
- Diarrhea
- Dry mouth
- Extreme tiredness
- Frequent illnesses
- General aches and pains
- Headaches
- Heartburn
- Increased blood pressure
- Irritability

- Feeling disconnected from your body/dreamy
- Fuzzy thinking
- High blood pressure
- Trouble sleeping
- Lightheadedness
- Feeling your heart pounding
- Sexual problems
- Shortness of breath
- Stiff neck
- Sweating
- Upset stomach
- Weight gain/loss

What symptoms do you have when you are stressed?

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**Ways to Achieve the Relaxation Response**

- Imagery
- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Repetitive prayer
- Repetitive physical exercises
- Breath focus
- Mindfulness meditation

**Focused Breathing**

Before you begin: Test yourself to see if you are breathing deeply enough by putting one hand on your chest and the other on your belly. Take a deep breath. If your hand on your belly does not rise, you are not breathing deeply enough. Take some deep breaths and focus on expanding your lungs downward so that your belly rises and falls with each breath. Determine a word, prayer or a mantra that you can focus on while breathing. It doesn’t matter what it is as long as it is something deeply rooted in your beliefs.

- Sit in a relaxed position.
- Take a slow, deep breath in through your nose while counting to five (your belly should raise). Now, fully let your breath out while slowly counting to five again (your belly should deflate).
- With each breath focus on a word, prayer or a mantra.
- Do this for 10-20 minutes per day.

**Steps for muscle tension and relaxation**

- Sit in a relaxed position.
- Begin with your facial muscles. Frown hard for 5-10 seconds and then relax your muscles.
- Work other facial muscles by scrunching your face up or knitting your eyebrows for 5-10 seconds. Release. You should feel a noticeable difference between the tense and relaxed muscles.
- Move on to your jaw. Then, move on to other muscle groups—shoulders, arms, chest, legs, etc.—until you've tensed and relaxed individual muscle groups throughout your whole body.

**Mindfulness Meditation**

- Body – Notice how your body is positioned. Is there's any tension anywhere?
- Emotions – Focus on your feelings. Are you angry, frustrated, calm, happy, sad, stressed?
- Thoughts – What are you thinking about? Are you worrying, stewing, or rehashing? Are you stuck in the past or future?
- Location – Where are you? What is your environment like; is it hot or cold? Look for something new in your environment, something you never noticed before.

Experiment with yourself: try doing this once an hour for a day and see if it makes a difference in your relaxation level.

What did you learn about yourself after completing these activities?
Resources

- Mindfulness: [www.mindful.org](http://www.mindful.org)
- Mindfulness Stress Reduction and Healing - John Kabat-Zinn: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rSU8ftmmhmv](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rSU8ftmmhmv)
- Relaxation.com: [www.relaxation.com](http://www.relaxation.com)
- UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center: [http://marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=22](http://marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=22)

References


