

Wellness At Work - Simple Habits For A Happy Workplace

February 2016 - The Relaxation Response

"The relaxation response is a physical state of deep rest that changes the physical and emotional responses to stress... and the opposite of the fight or flight response."

The reality is, that modern, urban living pretty much has most human beings set at a default level of stress and anxiety which has become a constant and something that we've just gotten used to. This often leads to our bodies being set in a permanent state of fight or flight. Not only is prolonged stasis at the fight or flight set point bad for your health, it also spells disaster for your productivity and happiness levels. The following is an outline of how to bring forth a state of relaxation, as recommended by Dr. Herbert Benson's in his pioneering book *The Relaxation Response* (pages 159-161).



A Quiet Environment: Ideally, you should chose a quiet, calm environment with as few distractions as possible. A quiet room is suitable. The quiet environment contributes to the effectiveness of the repeated word or phrase (more about that below) by making it easier to eliminate distracting thoughts.



A Mental Device: To shift the mind from logical, externally oriented thought, there should be a constant stimulus such as a sound, word, or phrase, that is repeated silently or aloud. Alternatively you could fix your gaze on an object. Since one of the major difficulties in the elicitation of the Relaxation Response is "mind wandering," the repetition of the word or phrase is a way to help break the train of distracting thoughts. Your eyes are usually closed if you are using a repeated sound or word; of course your eyes are open if you are gazing. Attention to the normal rhythm of breathing is also useful and enhances the repetition of the sound or the word.



A Passive Attitude: When distracting thoughts occur, they are to be disregarded and attention redirected to the repetition or gazing; you should not worry about how well you are performing the technique, because this may well prevent the Relaxation Response from occurring. Adopt a "let it happen" attitude. The passive attitude is perhaps the most important element in eliciting the Relaxation Response. Distracting thoughts will occur. Do not worry about them. When these thoughts do present themselves and you become aware of them, simply return to the repetition of the mental device. These other thoughts do not mean you are performing the technique incorrectly. They are to be expected.



A Comfortable Position: A comfortable posture is important so that there is no undue muscular tension. Some methods call for a sitting position. A few practitioners use the cross-legged "lotus" position of the Yogi. If you are lying down, there is a tendency to fall asleep. It is relevant to note that the various postures of kneeling, swaying, or sitting in a cross-legged position are believed to have evolved to prevent falling asleep. You should always make sure that you are comfortable and relaxed.



Recommended resource: If you want to learn an easy technique to trigger the relaxation response, get yourself a copy of Dr. Benson's book [The Relaxation Response](#).

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