The Art of Relaxation

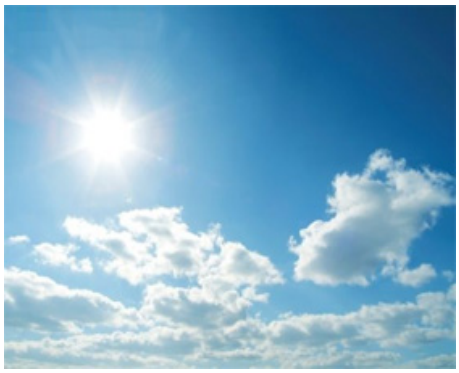
by Nadia Rodman

Let's face it — we all need help dealing with the challenges life brings us each day. Everyone's minds and bodies experience some degree of stress whether the source is physical, psychological, mental, or emotional stress. Relaxation can be easily misunderstood and is often associated with pleasure. Is laying on the couch watching T.V. after a long day at work really considered relaxation? Do we tend to think relaxation can only happen on a beautiful white-sand beach? Most people do not take time each day to relax because they do not know how to properly relax or the important health benefits of relaxation. It is an art, but it can be learned quickly. The great news is that you can relax — truly relax — each day no matter where you are or what you are doing. Take a look at the many ways relaxation can improve your health.

Health Benefits of Relaxation

Relaxation is key in managing stress. The body's physiological response to stress includes increasing heart rate, increasing blood pressure, and increasing breathing rate. People who experience stress multiple times a day will likely suffer from headaches, heart disease, high blood pressure, and chest pain. Incorporating relaxation techniques into your lifestyle will result in fewer physical responses to stress such as headaches and back pain as well as emotional responses such as irritability, impatience, and an ill-temper. A person who practices relaxation regularly is likely to have more energy to perform life's daily activities with greater precision and handle challenges better than a person who does not take time to relax each day.

Ways to Relax



The easiest and most basic way to counteract stress when you first feel your muscles tensing and a headache coming on is to close your eyes and take fifteen deep breaths with your stomach. This will take less than five minutes but can go on as long as twenty if you need it! Breathe in through your nose until your lungs are completely expanded, hold your breath for a few seconds, and then exhale through your mouth. Repeat calming phrases or picture peaceful surroundings in your mind to take your mind off of whatever is causing you stress and restore your peace of mind!

The diaphragm expanding elicits the relaxation response which slows the heart rate, lowers blood pressure, and decreases muscle tension. This is great to do at work or at home periodically throughout the day— when you complete one task, close your eyes for a minute or two and focus on breathing slowly before you move on to another job, and you will find that you experience less tension as a result! Go ahead and try it — it works!

Exercise is another fantastic way to relax. Not only are the health benefits of exercise wonderful, exercise can help you effectively manage your stress. Yoga classes often end in meditation which leaves you feeling energized and relaxed after you finish working out. Going for a walk can be very calming when you leave distractions behind and can let your mind wander or focus on whatever requires your attention. Take some music with you! Listening to peaceful music is a great way to calm your nerves and relax your mind.

Every once in a while you deserve to treat yourself to a massage! These are amazing and actually have therapeutic health benefits. Massaging the body will release stored pain, stress, toxins, and tension as well as stimulate circulation throughout the body. There are many different types of massages — one is sure to satisfy you. You will walk out of a massage at ease with hardly any tension left in your muscles. Splurge this month - or maybe once every month! You won't regret it!

Lastly, laughter also gives you the psychological and physiological benefits of relaxation. Laughing heartily uses the diaphragm when you take a big breath in and exhale rhythmically which helps you relax. Everybody can use a good laugh!

Be good to yourself. The benefits of relaxation are too great to not incorporate relaxation into your daily lifestyle. It doesn't take much — as little as two minutes — for you to reduce muscle tension and prevent headaches as well as heart disease and other serious health conditions. So why not sit back, R-E-L-A-X, and enjoy life to the fullest!