

Meditation– The Relaxation Response Exercise

Spend some time completing this exercise and discuss with your Licensed Brain Trainer.

Meditate or pray on a regular basis. The benefits of prayer and meditation go far beyond stress relief. Studies have shown that it also improves attention and planning, reduces depression and anxiety, decreases sleepiness, and protects the brain from cognitive decline associated with normal aging. In a study from researchers at UCLA, the hippocampus and frontal cortex were found to be significantly larger in people who meditate regularly. Meditation has also been found to aid in weight loss, reduce muscle tension, and tighten the skin.

If the whole concept of meditation seems a little too “out there” for you, take note that you can do it just about anywhere anytime. If you’re at work, you can simply close the door to your office, sit in your chair, close your eyes, and pray. At home, you can sit on the edge of your bed after you wake up and spend a couple minutes calming your mind. Try the following Relaxation.

The Relaxation Response

One of the simplest ways to meditate and reduce stress is a technique called the Relaxation Response developed by Herbert Benson, M.D. at Harvard Medical School.

Directions:

1. Sit quietly in a comfortable position.
2. Close your eyes.
3. Deeply relax all your muscles, beginning at your feet and progressing up to your face. Keep them relaxed.
4. Breathe through your nose. Become aware of your breathing. As you breathe out, say the word “one” (or some other relaxing word you choose) silently to yourself. For example, breathe in... out, “one”, in... out, “one,” etc.
5. Continue for 10 to 20 minutes. You may open your eyes to check the time, but do not use an alarm. When you finish, sit quietly for several minutes, at first with your eyes closed and later with your eyes opened. Do not stand up for a few minutes.
6. Do not worry about whether you are successful in achieving a deep level of relaxation. Maintain a passive attitude and permit relaxation to occur at its own pace. When distracting thoughts occur, try to ignore them by not dwelling upon them and return to repeating “one.” With practice, the response should come with little effort. Practice the technique once or twice daily, but not within two hours after any meal, since the digestive processes seem to interfere with the elicitation of the Relaxation Response.