

Relaxation

Relaxation is the act of relaxing the mind and body and it can physically change the way your body functions. When your body is relaxed breathing slows, blood pressure and oxygen consumption decrease, and some people report an increased sense of well-being. This is called the “relaxation response.”

The stress response is also known as the fight-or-flight response. The sympathetic nervous system is activated when we are in fight-or-flight mode. This over time can have detrimental effects to us both psychologically and physically and are seen as the symptoms of stress.

On the other hand the “relaxation response” is associated with physiological changes that are the direct opposite to the fight-or-flight responses of an individual. Relaxation techniques often combine breathing and focused attention to calm the mind and the body and reduce stress.

A relaxation technique is any method, process, procedure, or activity that helps a person to relax to attain a state of increased calmness or otherwise reduce levels of anxiety, stress or anger. Being able to produce the relaxation response using relaxation techniques may counteract the effects of long-term stress, which may contribute to or worsen a range of health problems including depression, digestive disorders, headaches, high blood pressure, and insomnia and pain.

Relaxation techniques are generally safe and may be most effective when practiced regularly and combined with good nutrition, regular exercise, and a strong social support system. There are various techniques used by individuals to improve their state of relaxation. Some of these methods can be performed alone whilst others may require the help of another person who may often require specialised or professional training. Some relaxation techniques involve movement eg) Yoga, walking, Tai chi, others focus on stillness eg) deep breathing and meditation whilst other methods involve different elements eg) music or floatation therapy.

Useful Links and Resources for Relaxation Techniques

<http://www.bupa.com.au/health-and-wellness/health-information/az-health-information/stress-busting#relaxation>

http://www.helpguide.org/mental/stress_relief_meditation_yoga_relaxation.htm

<http://www.innerhealthstudio.com/what-is-relaxation.html>

References:

National Centre for Complimentary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM): US Department of health and Human Service. (Sourced 2/3/2014) <http://nccam.nih.gov/health/pain/chronic.htm>