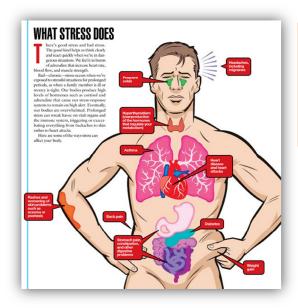
# **De-Stress Out!**



**Stress** is the normal reaction to situations perceived as challenges, threats, or even opportunities. It is our **reaction** (physical, mental, emotional) to events rather than the events themselves that cause stress.



Highly stressed individuals are at greater risk for **multiple health conditions,** including: cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, depression and anxiety, fatigue, obesity, and musculoskeletal pain.



In fact, **psychological stress** and the associated chronic inflammatory response have been *linked* to virtually **all chronic conditions**<sup>1</sup>

The **Relaxation Response** is meant to counter the stress ("flight or fight") response. It is a <u>physical</u> <u>state of deep rest</u> that changes the *physical* and *emotional* response to stress. When eliciting the relaxation response: metabolism, heart rate and blood pressure **decrease**, muscles **relax**, and breathing **slows**.

## **Eliciting the Relaxation Response**

### 2 Main Steps

- 1. Repeat a word, sound, short phrase, prayer or muscular activity
- 2. Passively disregard everyday thoughts that come to mind and return to the repetition

## **Put it into Action**

- 1. Pick a focus word, short phrase, or prayer that is rooted in your belief system
- 2. Sit quietly in a comfortable position
- 3. Close your eyes
- 4. Relax your muscles from head to toe
- 5. Breathe slowly and naturally. As you exhale, repeat your focus word or phrase
- 6. Assume a passive attitude. Don't worry about how well you're doing, return to your repetition
- 7. Continue for 10-20 minutes
- 8. Do not stand immediately. Continue sitting quietly, allowing other thoughts to return
- 9. Practice the technique once or twice daily. Try before breakfast and dinner.



"The ideal is to develop a **routine**, a time to bring forth the **relaxation response** that becomes as much a part of the day as *brushing your teeth*."

# 10 Relaxation Techniques to Reduce Stress On-the-Spot

- ✓ **Meditate.** Any repetitive action can be a source of meditation. Walking, swimming, painting any activity that helps keep your attention in the present moment. Try 5-10 minutes a day.
- ✓ **Picture yourself relaxed.** Is your mind too talkative to meditate? Try creating a peaceful "dreamscape." Replace stress with an image that evokes a sense of calm (e.g., fantasy island)
- ✓ **Breathe deeply.** Imagine your center as a deep, powerful place. Feel your breath coming and going as your mind stays focused there. Repeat 10 times, relax more fully each time.
- ✓ **Look around you.** Mindfulness means focusing on one activity at a time, forget multi-tasking! Stress will take a back seat as long as you focus on something in the present.
- ✓ **Drink hot tea.** Consider going green. Coffee raises levels of the stress hormone (i.e., cortisol) while green tea offers health and beauty benefits.
- ✓ **Show some love**. Cuddle your pet, snuggle your spouse, or talk to a friend about the good things in your lives. Physical contact may help lower blood pressure and decrease stress hormone.
- ✓ Try self-massage. Place both hands on your shoulders and neck. Squeeze with your fingers and palms. Rub vigorously, keeping shoulders relaxed.
- ✓ **Take a time out.** When your temper is about to erupt, find a quiet place to sit or lie down and put the stressful situation on hold.
- ✓ **Try a musical detour.** When the going gets rough, take a musical stress detour by aligning your heartbeat with the slow tempo of a relaxing song (e.g., classical music).
- ✓ **Take an attitude break.** Thirty seconds is enough time to shift your heart's rhythm from stressed to relaxed. Envision anything that triggers a positive feeling (e.g., child, pet).

#### **Stress-Busting Foods**











**Oranges** 

Spinach

**Fatty Fish** 

Green Tea

**Raw Vegetables** 

Resource: <a href="www.webmd.com">www.webmd.com</a>, <a href="www.massgeneral.org">www.massgeneral.org</a>

