

# IT'S TIME TO RELAX

## WEEK 1: THE RELAXATION RESPONSE

**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. Living in a constant state of stress is unhealthy for both the mind and body.

### The Effects of Chronic Stress

Highly stressed individuals are at greater risk for multiple health conditions, including:

- Cancer
- Cardiovascular disease
- Diabetes
- Depression and anxiety
- Obesity
- Fatigue
- Musculoskeletal pain



In fact, **psychological stress** and the associated chronic inflammatory response have been *linked* to virtually **all chronic conditions**.

### The Benefits of Relaxation Techniques

When faced with numerous responsibilities and demands relaxation techniques may take a back seat in your life. But, that means you may miss out on the health benefits of relaxation.

#### PRACTICING RELAXATION TECHNIQUES CAN REDUCE STRESS SYMPTOMS BY:

- Slowing your heart rate
- Slowing your breathing rate
- Reducing muscle tension and chronic pain
- Reducing anger and frustration
- Lowering blood pressure
- Increasing blood flow to major muscles
- Improving concentration
- Boosting confidence to handle problems

## The Relaxation Response

The **Relaxation Response** is meant to counter the stress (“fight or flight”) response. It is a physical state of deep rest that changes the physical and emotional response to stress.

“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*.”

## Eliciting the Relaxation Response

### Two 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

**Tip: Practice the technique once or twice daily. Try before both breakfast and dinner.**

To get the most benefit, use relaxation techniques along with other **positive coping** methods, including: exercise, proper sleep, and reaching out to supportive friends and family.

*Connect with your EWSNetwork Wellness Consultant to discuss further!*