

# DISTRESS OR DE-STRESS?

## IT'S TIME TO RELAX



**Stress** is a normal reaction to situations perceived as challenges, threats, or even opportunities. It is our physical, mental, and emotional reactions to events rather than to the events themselves that cause stress. Living in a constant state of stress is unhealthy for both the mind and body.

### Effects of Chronic Stress

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

Psychological stress and the associated chronic inflammatory response have been linked to virtually all chronic conditions.

## THE RELAXATION RESPONSE

The Relaxation Response is meant to counter the stress response, also known as “fight or flight”. It is a physical state of deep rest that alters the physical and emotional response to stress. Eliciting the relaxation response doesn't have to be difficult, but it does require a commitment. Try practicing these two strategies:

- 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.



## The Benefits of the Relaxation Response

### 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

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When faced with numerous responsibilities and demands, relaxation techniques can seem to take a back seat in your life. Don't miss out on the many health benefits of relaxation.

### Practice Makes Perfect!

Try to practice the technique twice a day, before or after breakfast and dinner, to help you develop a good routine. 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.



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 minutes. As you progress, aim for 20 minutes.
8. When complete, do not stand immediately. Continue sitting quietly, allowing other thoughts to return.

Stress is unavoidable. It is a pivotal part of our growth and development. It can drive us to make decisions, problem-solve, and react when there is a threat. Establishing boundaries around avoidable triggers can help to keep us calm. Maintaining these boundaries can be difficult until we recognize the benefits of doing so. Keeping boundaries in place and using the Relaxation Response will change how we respond to stressors and keep us focused on the positive.

Sources: [www.relaxationresponse.org](http://www.relaxationresponse.org)

