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The Relaxation Response

There are four basic components necessary in bringing forth the relaxation response. They are:

1. A quiet environment with as few distractions as possible.
2. A "Mental Device", such as a value free single syllable word (e.g., "One"), which is repeated constantly to keep the mind from wandering.
3. A passive attitude. Distracting thoughts will occur but should be disregarded. Do not worry about how well you are doing, but let it happen.
4. A comfortable position to avoid falling asleep. Sitting is preferable to lying down.

Procedure for eliciting the Relaxation Response:

1. Sit quietly in a comfortable position.
2. Close your eyes.
3. Deeply relax all your muscles, beginning at your feet and proceeding 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" silently to yourself. For example, breathe In...Out, "One"; In...Out, "One"; etc. Breathe easily and naturally.
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, sit 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 on them and return to repeating "One." With practice, the response should come with little effort. Practice the techniques once or twice daily, but not within two hours of any meal, since the digestive processes seem to interfere with the elicitation of the response.

From: Herbert Benson, M.D., The Relaxation Response, Williams Morrow, N.Y. 1975