

Go to Your Cabin

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Stress is a composite of the demands placed upon us, and the nature of our response to those demands. No two people are alike in their spectrum of demands (stressors) or in their response to those demands (their stress response). There is likely an optimum range of stress (stressors and stress responses) in which we optimally function (eustress). Above this range, there is a subjective sense of discomfort and dysfunction (distress). Below this range, insufficient stress might result in a different kind of distress: boredom.

Whether we have excessive stress, optimal stress, or deficient stress, we can benefit from relaxation skills. Relaxation is easy to learn but must be practiced regularly, even when we don't "need" it, to maximize its benefits. Relaxation is best understood in terms of the Relaxation Response, which has been studied and is found to be psychologically the opposite of the Stress Response. If "stressors" (demands) elicit a Stress Response, then "relaxors" (soothers) elicit a Relaxation Response. We will explore "relaxors."

Stress is an arousal or "gearing up" that consumes energy. Relaxation, physiologically the opposite of stress, is a "gearing down" that conserves energy. Unabated stress leads to fatigue and exhaustion and is a factor in many illnesses. Relaxation is the antidote to stress.

Sleep, a crucial component of well-being, is prolonged relaxation, during which the mind and body get a chance to "fully" refresh. As we know, sleep deprivation leads to very noticeable discomfort and dysfunction. Relaxation is a miniature version of sleep.

Like any other worthwhile skill, relaxation takes practice. The practice sessions can be "planted" strategically into busy work days. Even a few minutes of concentrated "unstress" will reset our tension levels and boost our morale and productivity. Instead of a coffee break, make it a relaxation break.

We need to be proactive to create relaxation sessions in the midst of a busy day. Just as we have the need (and

right) to excuse ourselves for bathroom breaks, we can briefly pause for relaxation. Our productivity might even gain as a result. If we work at a computer, we might utilize an on-screen reminder to relax every hour or so. Or we might insert an hourly beep on a wrist watch or cell phone.

Relaxors are soothers. I will mention six categories:

- Soothing mental images and visualizations
- Soothing images from a natural or artistic source
- Soothing words (affirmations)
- Soothing movement (especially if done slowly)
- Soothing natural sounds and/or music
- Soothing breathing that is deep, slow, smooth, rhythmic, and diaphragmatic (inhale begins in belly).

Here are some examples of affirmations you can use:

- *I am strong, I am resilient*
- *I bend without breaking*
- *I have what it takes*
 - *I take a few deep breaths and savor their sweetness*
 - *I refresh and renew*
 - *I am thankful for my sources of support.*

RELAXATION TECHNIQUE:

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Take a mini-vacation at work and come back refreshed. Follow these steps:

1) **C**lose your eyes. The simple act of closing your eyes gives your brain a significantly reduced workload, starting the relaxation process.

2) **A**adjust your posture. Release any forward leaning, and have your spine be comfortably vertical. Employ low-back support if desired. If a body part feels tense, move it gently or stretch it gently for a few seconds, then simply settle down.

3) **B**reathe slowly, smoothly, and deeply (three or more breaths). Feel and listen to the inhalations and exhalations. Let the abdomen expand on inhalations, and contract on exhalations. Loosen any restrictive clothing. Use a slow, even pace.

4) **I**magine your favorite tranquil place—maybe a cozy cabin in the woods. Enter the scene in your mind and take in its peaceful, soothing sights, smells, sounds, etc.

5) **N**urture yourself. Compliment yourself for your efforts. Use simple, soothing touch or words. Smile. Then,





open your eyes and return to work refreshed and recharged. For optimal relaxation practice, establish a measure of privacy and comfort. Choose quiet surroundings if possible. Some of the best times of the day to practice these techniques are:

- when you awake
- when you go to sleep
- before you have a meal or snack
- during mini-breaks at work
- when you get home from work

Mix and match the techniques. Make them your own. Adjust them to maximize your enjoyment.

Namaste! ■

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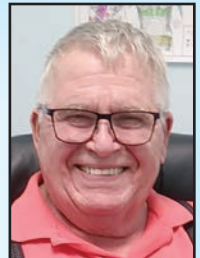
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