THE ESSENCE OF RELAXATION

Arnie Shapiro, M.D.

Stress and relaxation are best understood by the ***Stress Response*** and the ***Relaxation Response***. The Stress Response is a rapid arousal of energy to deal with threats to survival. All animal species have this genetic readiness. The Relaxation Response is the opposite of the Stress Response. It is a necessary and genetically governed lowering of arousal that lets the body rest, recover, and recharge.

The Stress Response is induced by stressors: demands, pressures, actual or perceived threats, aggravations, or irritations. The Relaxation Response is induced by Relaxors. Relaxors are soothers: soothing images, words, touch, breathing patterns, movement, sounds, etc. "Soothe" is a word starting with the letter "S," and there are six other words beginning with "S" that characterize Relaxation.

SLOWING one's breathing and movements for even a minute or two interrupts the stress response. This has been known since the ancient days of Yoga and Tai Chi. Another age-old, proven unstressing practice is Buddhist Walking Meditation, using deliberately slow steps.

Another Relaxation word is **SMOOTH**. We can smooth the air flow of our breaths. We can smooth any of the ways we move. Relaxation is deepened by letting our eyelids, forehead, and lips become smooth. In deep relaxation, our eyelids can be said to be draped over our eyes like a smooth, silk fabric.

The next word is **SMILE**. Think about Mona Lisa's smile. Her whole face is relaxed. In another sense, we can smile inwardly, with gratitude to our amazing organs, systems, and cells. The simple act of smiling will evoke positive feelings. We can practice repetitions of smiles: two-second smiles followed by two-second releases.

Our next word is **SOFT**. We can utilize a soft cushion under us, soft sound levels around us, soft lighting, soft eyelids, and soft lips.

Next, we have the word **STILL**: Still the gaze. Look at one point with a soft focus. Stay in one position. Adjust your posture for neutrality and comfort. Let your mental focus center on one thing: a sight, a sound, a sensation, or an image of peace.

Finally, we have **SAVOR**: Savor the peace and quiet of the present moment. Savor each breath in a series. Savor the respites we create for ourselves. Savor our aliveness. Savor Planet Earth as hospitable to life.

Relaxation itself is savorable and essential. It is a respite from the stress arena. It costs nothing, and it brings dividends. I can assure you it is safe and effective. It is useful self-reliance. The essential words I have discussed are relevant to all relaxation techniques. ■

A Santé! To Your health!

Dr. Arnie Shapiro is a career clinic physician who has had a long-time interest in Wellness and Stress Management. He has a YouTube channel: "Arnie Shapiro, MD, Breathing Easy." He can be reached at alloydshapiro@gmail.com.