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## THE RELAXATION RESPONSE

The relaxation response is a process which needs to be learned and which becomes more helpful to you with daily practice. Recent research has shown that in response to certain relaxation techniques, many body changes occur:

Metabolic rates lower (to a lower level even than sleep). Adrenalin production is lowered. Blood pressure is lowered and numerous other measurable changes occur. These body changes continue for many hours after relaxation has been completed.

Medical professionals are instructing patients in achieving the relaxation response in order to reduce stress symptoms such as headaches prevent high blood pressure and even to help some heart patients reduce the frequency of irregular heart beats. The relaxation response is not automatic in the body like stress response, so it has to be learned. Don't be alarmed if it takes awhile to achieve complete relaxation. Keep practicing until it becomes a conditioned response.

### Relaxation Techniques

- Practice relaxation two times a day for maximum benefit.
- Allow 10 to 20 minutes for each session.
- There is no benefit from doing more than 20 minutes of relaxation.
- Do the relaxation techniques whenever you want, but wait at least two hours after meals, since the digestive process interferes with achieving the relaxation response.
- Particularly at first, choose a quiet place, free from distraction and interruption. This quiet place can be located at work, at home or elsewhere.
- Be comfortable, but stay in a sitting position. If you lie down you might fall asleep. Sleep interferes with maximum achievement of the relaxation response. You can use the technique to fall asleep, but that is another use of the relaxation technique and falling asleep ends the relaxation response.
- Remember to be patient. You may need time to master the technique and feel comfortable doing it. Many have not had experience in trying to achieve a passive state.
- After your position is comfortable and relaxed, close your eyes and sit quietly and fix your gaze on a stationary focal point.
- Relax your muscles completely, beginning with toes and in sequence relaxing each of your other body muscles clear up to the top of your head.
- Breathe through your nose. Become very aware of your breathing and breathe normally. But remember to breathe through your nose.

- Each time you breathe out; silently think of the word one. You may use the word one or any other word or phrase will do. This technique is used because it keeps other thoughts from entering your mind and allows you to focus on breathing. Your mind will wander, especially at first, but as soon as you realize your mind is wandering, focus on the word and your breathing.
- Wear a watch or look at a clock but don't use an alarm. The alarm ringing might interfere with achieving the relaxation response.
- Don't worry if you are relaxed enough or not. If you are doing the techniques, the relaxation response is occurring.
- After the time is up, sit quietly for a few minutes longer, eyes closed at first and then with eyes open.
- Many report better ability to cope with routine stresses and personal interactions. Whether or not you feel better, remember the effect is occurring.
- If you have medical problems, consult your doctor before starting on this program.
- If you have any questions or find some part of the instructions unclear, please feel free to check with one of the staff nurse educators, or one of the doctors.
- If you are interested in joining a "stress reduction" group, check with the nurse or your doctor.