

Healthy & Resilient You



Ah, relaxation. It's one of the most effective tools for managing stress and anxiety, and yet at the same time thinking about it can touch off those very same feelings. (*How many times has the phrase "Just relax" triggered the opposite response in you?*) Still, being able to initiate what's called the relaxation response in our bodies and minds is incredibly important, and starts with reframing our perspective on the subject.





[CLICK HERE](#) for an earlier Concern Healthy & Resilient Workplace newsletter all about changing your perspective in ways to help overcome adversity.


Once we recognize how relaxation helps rejuvenate body and mind, we can use it to make us more focused, confident, and prepared for life's challenges. But how exactly does relaxation improve your health? How is it different from vegging out? And how can you build more relaxation into your daily routine?


How A Little R&R Goes a Long, Healthy Way


Some stress in certain doses can be put to good and productive use, but if it persists, it can have undesirable side effects. Conversely, relaxation often helps promote good health and a resilient mind. Here are a few ways how stress impacts our health, and how relaxation can intervene:

 **A Healthier Heart** Ever feel that knot in your chest tighten in times of stress? That's adrenaline rushing to the heart—a helpful and necessary response in short bursts, but not so good when prolonged. Relaxation can calm that flow, lowering the risk of heart attack, stroke, and high blood pressure.

 **Maintaining Memory** While making executive decisions under stress is sometimes necessary, it isn't ideal. Research indicates stress signals can impact the brain in ways that inhibit critical thinking and memory. Relaxation can help us return to optimal recall and decision-making levels.

 **Immune Booster** A Carnegie Mellon University professor has found a possible connection between chronic stress and the body's immune response. Lasting stress can double your risk of catching a cold, as the immune system isn't working at top capacity. Relaxation can bring it back to normal.

 **Staving Off Depression** Staving off Depression: Chronic stress can affect the brain in ways that may cause or trigger depression by damaging brain cells related to appetite and joy, and by lowering the presence of neurochemicals that help sustain a happy, healthy mood. Relaxation works to help counter these effects.

 **A Break from the Stress and Snacks** Indulging the sweet tooth now and then isn't always a terrible thing; but pronounced stress levels can actually increase our appetites and make it harder for us to say no to junk food. Relaxation can help activate our will power.

The Relaxation Response...and Its Imitators

Think of the relaxation response as your ability to kick off the flow of chemicals and signals in the body and mind that tell everything to slow down, open up, and stay flowing.

When finding your own path to relaxation, it's important to be aware of what a relaxation response is and isn't. A relaxation response *isn't* achieved by lying on a couch, catching some z's, or spacing out—though there's a time and place for that. A true relaxation response is achieved by reaching an active, conscious, and awakened mind state, one that brings feelings of ease and calm.

Relaxation means different things to different people. ([Click here for more on that.](#)) However, here's a simple physical relaxation exercise that can be useful to everyone.



Tense, Release, Repeat: An Anytime, Anywhere Relaxation Technique

Stress doesn't just live in our minds: it makes its way into our muscles as well. We all have a certain level of resting tension in our muscles — some have more, some less. Periods of stress can cause the tension in our muscles to spike, causing pain, exhaustion, and general discomfort.



A **Tense and Release**, or **Progressive Relaxation Technique** can be a neat way to trigger a physical and mental relaxation response. It might seem a little counterintuitive, but when you tense and release your muscle groups, they often settle at a lower level of stress than where they started. Here's how to do it:

1. Make yourself comfortable, whether sitting in your chair, standing in line, or lying on the floor.
2. Feel free to close your eyes; remove contacts or glasses.
3. Perform a quick body scan, starting with your head and making your way to your toes. What sensations do you notice?
4. Starting with the muscles in the head, tense for 2 seconds.
5. Take a breath. What does the sensation of tension feel like?
6. Release the tension, letting it dissolve into relaxation.
7. Take a breath. What does relaxation feel like?
8. Continue to tense and release with the muscles all the way down to your toes.

Perform as many repetitions of the tense and release exercise as you like, and over time you'll be able to adjust the technique to suit time constraints and circumstances.

Like all things, the more you practice relaxation, the better at it you'll become, helping you to tackle daily challenges more quickly and with greater ease and calm. Doesn't *that* sound relaxing?

This newsletter is intended for informational purposes only, and should not be used to replace professional advice.

If you find your level of stress is impacting your well-being, you can contact us for additional help and support.

Call: 800.344.4222
employees.concernhealth.com