

Steps to Elicit the Relaxation Response

The following is the technique reprinted with permission from Dr. Herbert Benson's book The Relaxation Response pages 162-163. There has been considerable research validating this simple meditation technique; it is an evidence-based practice.

1. Sit quietly in a comfortable position.
2. Close your eyes.
3. Deeply relax all your muscles, beginning at your feet and progressing 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, at 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 upon them and return to repeating "one."

With practice, the response should come with little effort.
Practice the technique once or twice daily, but not within two hours after any meal, since the digestive processes seem to interfere with the elicitation of the Relaxation Response.

* It is better to use a soothing, mellifluous sound, preferably with no meaning. or association, to avoid stimulation of unnecessary thoughts - a mantra.