

Introduction to Relaxation and Stress Management



There is a wealth of scientific evidence that supports the use of relaxation, breathing, and focusing techniques, such as yoga and meditation, to improve psychological and physical well-being. Only within the past two decades, however, has Western medicine accepted what has long been known -- that breathing techniques, yoga, and meditation can have a significant positive impact on the autonomic nervous system and, in turn, on physiological and psychological functioning.

Breathing and relaxation techniques are important components of the treatments for Anxiety Disorder and depression. Such techniques increase the activation of the parasympathetic nervous system, which leads to mental relaxation. Recent evidence also suggests that these techniques can help individuals with attention problems improve their capacity to focus and sustain their attention. While breathing and relaxation techniques are helpful tools for addressing a specific situation or stress, they are even more helpful when practiced on a daily basis. Individuals who practice these strategies once or more daily are likely to reduce their overall tendency to become overwhelmed by stress and anxiety.

It is strongly recommended that individuals who wish to start using these techniques receive formal training in them. Instructors who teach yoga, meditation, and breathing techniques can be found in most communities, and many therapists are trained in teaching these techniques as part of stress management. There are also videos online that can help one begin practicing these techniques.

Some relevant books, websites, and videos are listed below. In addition, we have provided you with instructions for many of these relaxation techniques. Use these sets of simple directions to help you get started in these areas. We encourage you to go beyond our materials in order to gain the full benefit of these practices.