

# Relaxation Response



## Principle

Herbert Benson, M.D., from Harvard Medical School, practiced Transcendental Meditation and then adapted the instructions to be more accessible to a Western audience. Benson coined the phrase "Relaxation Response," publishing a book with that name.

The relaxation response offers a style of meditation that is outside of, but complementary to, any religious venue. Universally accepted and appropriate for all, the relaxation response provides people with a focal point for their attention. The relaxation response is now used in a wide variety of medical and non-medical settings to teach people how to relax and to activate their body's internal healing mechanism. The physiological indicators of the relaxation response include decreases in metabolism, heart rate, blood pressure, and rate of breathing.

## Technique

The relaxation response requires four basic elements:

1. A quiet environment
2. An object to dwell upon -- try lighting a candle, or sound a bell and listen until you can no longer hear it ringing. You may utilize a "mantra," a repeated phrase, as a way to anchor your attention. The mantra can be as simple as the words "One" or "Peace" or can consist of your counting your breaths. Use this focal point to keep your mind from wandering.
3. A passive attitude -- empty all thoughts and distractions from your mind. This is the most essential factor in eliciting the Relaxation Response. Consciously, cultivate a neutral attitude to your own progress with the relaxation response; having unrealistic expectations or criticizing yourself defeat its purpose. If a thought disturbs you, then imagine it floating away as a cloud, and bring your attention back to your object.
4. A comfortable position -- sit against a straight-backed chair with your feet flat on the floor or resting flatly on a pillow. Let your hands rest on your lap with your palms facing upwards. Relax the jaw and shoulders, and soften the eyes and cheeks. Try to remain quiet and alert as you practice the relaxation response for at least twenty minutes daily.

## Websites

### [All That Matters](#)

A holistic center located in Wakefield, RI that specializes in yoga and other health services and mindfulness practices. Visit this website for help in taking charge of your well-being and making lifestyle changes.

### [Yoga Wiz](#)

This website provides detailed information on yoga -- its various types, poses and postures, its basics and benefits.

### Books

Benson, H. and Klipper, B. (2000). The Relaxation Response. Harper Paperback: New York, NY.

Benson H. and Proctor W. (2010). Relaxation Revolution: Enhancing Your Personal Health Through the Science and Genetics of Mind Body Healing. Scribner: New York, NY.

### Videos

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3vLZqPZxZE>

A 10-minute video featuring yoga for beginners that focuses on breathing and basic postures.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C639ArXu1iw>

A 10-minute video that features beginning yoga for stretch and strength on a relaxing beach setting.