

# The Relaxation Response

By Herbert Benson, M.D.



## **How to Elicit the Relaxation Response:**

(Pages 12 & 13)

Two essential steps to eliciting the Relaxation Response are:

1. Repetition of a word, sound, praise, prayer, or muscular activity.
2. Passively disregarding everyday thoughts that inevitably come to mind, returning to your repetition.

This is the genetic technique I have taught patients and that I have used myself for many years.

1. Pick a focus word, short phrase, or prayer that is firmly rooted in your belief system.
2. Sit quietly in a comfortable position.
3. Close your eyes.
4. Relax your muscles, progressing from your feet to your calves, thighs, abdomen, shoulders, head and neck.
5. Breathe slowly and naturally, and as you do, say your focus word, sound, phrase, or prayer silently to yourself as you exhale.
6. Assume a passive attitude. Don't worry about how well you're doing. When other thoughts come to mind, simply say to yourself, "Oh, well," and gently return to your repetition.
7. Continue for ten to twenty minutes.
8. Do not stand immediately. Continue sitting quietly for a minute or so, allowing other thoughts to return. Then open your eyes and sit for another minute before rising.
9. Practice the technique once or twice daily. Good times to do so are before breakfast and before dinner.
10. You can also elicit the Relaxation Response while exercising. If you are jogging or walking pay attention to the cadence of your feet on the ground "left, right, left, right" and when other thoughts come into your mind return to "left, right, left, right." Of course, keep your eyes open! Similarly, swimmers can pay attention to the tempo of their strokes, cyclists to the whirl of the wheels, dancers to the beat of the music, others to the rhythm of their breathing.

### **More Caregiver Resources:**

**The Relaxation Response**, Herbert Benson, C. 1975 ([www.harpercollins.com](http://www.harpercollins.com))

**The Wellness Book**, Herbert Benson & Eileen M. Stuart, C. 1992 Simon & Schuster

**AARP Magazine & Monthly Bulletin**

**Oprah.com – O, The Oprah magazine & Spirit Newsletter** for stress management techniques

**Today's Caregiver website:** [www.caregiver.com](http://www.caregiver.com)

**Caring Today website:** [www.caringtoday.com](http://www.caringtoday.com)