

Following is an adaptation of Benson's Harvard Relaxation Response by Betty R. Wood, M.S. This relaxation technique may be used by children and adults. Children will benefit from practicing the relaxation response for as little as 5 to 10 minutes. They may begin with 3 to 4 minutes. Adults require the full 20 minutes, but may begin with 10 minutes and gradually increase to 20 minutes.

HARVARD RELAXATION RESPONSE

The relaxation response should be practiced twice daily for 20 minutes per session. If you are unable to practice twice daily, try to practice in the morning on weekdays and in the morning and afternoon on weekends. Regular relaxation using this technique has been shown to lower blood pressure and heart rate as well as reduce generalized anxiety and stress.

Select a time before meals morning and afternoon when you will not be interrupted. Ideal times are before breakfast and around 3:00 PM. Do not do the exercise after 5:00 PM. You will be alert and may have difficulty sleeping.

Sit quietly in comfortable clothing and close your eyes for about 30 seconds and let your mind go blank.

Begin repeating to yourself a pleasing word or phrase. The word "one" has been shown to be a good choice, but you may use any pleasing word you wish.

Simply let yourself hear the word being repeated in your own mind. It may take on changing rhythms and tones. Don't focus too strenuously on repeating the word. Simply let yourself hear it being repeated like background music in your mind. If your mind should wander, and you realize that you have stopped hearing your word, just gently remind yourself to return to it.

Use a watch to time your session. When you think 20 minutes have elapsed, glance at your watch opening only one eye. You may want to use an alarm with a soft tone. At the end of the 20 minutes, stop saying your relaxing word, but let your eyes stay closed for a couple of minutes, then slowly open your eyes and return to your activities.

While practicing the Relaxation Response, you may see colors or your head may jerk slightly. Don't worry. This is just accumulated stress being released.

Harvard Relaxation Response (Benson: 1997. **Timeless Healing**)