

How Relaxation Affects Your Body – The Relaxation Response

We are bombarded with messages all the time telling us that we need to relax – but at the same time, it seems as if we are also bombarded with reasons not to! The truth is that if you take care of your body and mind, it pays dividends and can help you to deal with some of the unwelcome things in life that give stress us out in the first place. The first things to tackle are getting your share of rest and relaxation. Here's why.

Your Body Needs to Rest

Getting enough sleep, and good quality sleep at that, is absolutely essential for functioning optimally. Whether you're working, learning or just living, sleep is key. Sleep is also vital for is essential for restoring your body's energy, repairing muscles and promoting good appetite. Quality of sleep matters as much as the amount of shut eye you cram in. The more time you spend in the REM stage of sleep, the better, as REM (dream) sleep is the most restorative – ideally you should spend about 25% of time in this type of sleep (if you have a fitness tracker, the sleep tracking function can be a real eye opener). Lack of good sleep can lead to a higher risk of heart disease, diabetes, obesity, headaches and depression. Of course, sleep isn't

the only way to rest, relaxation while you're awake is very important, too.

You may have heard of the fight-or-flight response? Well, it has an opposite – the relaxation response. This happens naturally when your body no longer thinks it is in any perceived danger, and when the autonomic nervous system returns to normal after a stressful situation. The relaxation response is like an off switch, where the body moves from a stressed state (physiological arousal) to one of calm. You can bring this response on deliberately by using techniques that are designed to relax both body and mind. Some of the most effective ways to do this include:

- Meditation
- Breathing Exercises
- Yoga
- Massage therapy
- Facials
- Spa Treatments

How to Relax

Making time to unwind and enjoy life is really important – and often undervalued. Relaxation has many physical benefits; it can decrease your blood pressure, help to relieve pain, and also improve your

immune and cardiovascular systems. Did you know that a good belly laugh is one amazingly effective way to de-stress, too? Get the funny films out, a big laugh can potentially help your heart and lung health as well as promoting muscle relaxation. We all know that a good giggle can help our mental health too; as well as flooding our body with feel-good chemicals, it helps to reduce anxiety.

If you aren't getting enough time to relax, you may find yourself feeling tense and stressed out. Next time you feel the fight-or-flight feelings getting on top of you, or you notice tell-tale effects of stress like break outs or constant headaches, stop it in its track with a massage session, yoga class or some deep breathing exercises and feel that relaxation kick back in...