

RELAXATION TRAINING

The history of relaxation training began with the pioneering work of Edmund Jacobson who discovered that by systematically tensing and releasing various muscle groups and by learning to attend to and discriminate the resulting sensations of tension and relaxation a person may almost completely eliminate muscle contractions and experience a feeling of deep relaxation. The culmination of his studies was Progressive Relaxation (1938), a technical description of his theory and procedures.

Relaxation training has become increasingly popular as a method of teaching people to cope with the stresses produced by daily living. It is aimed at achieving muscle and mental relaxation. More simply, to be relaxed is the direct physiological opposite of being excited or disturbed. People need to take advantage of the "built-in tranquilizer" which exists in every one of us. Why use tranquilizers and sedatives when nature has provided a built-in device free from all such defects?

Today, tension disorders are more common than the common cold. During hard times, including inflation and loss of jobs, tension reduces personal efficiency even more.

The cause of tension disorders is excessive effort. Tension disorders include states of fear and anxiety, and are often involved in conditions known as peptic ulcers, high blood pressure, and coronary heart attacks. High tension results in other varied symptoms and complaints. Symptoms sometimes include fatigue, failure to sleep well, excessive sweating, constipation and/or diarrhea, chronic indigestion and irregular menstrual periods.

Suffice it to say that whatever the form of the disturbing symptoms, they are nurtured in tension states. Accordingly, whatever reduces the tension states tends to reduce the symptoms.

In Dr. Herbert Benson's book, The Relaxation Response, he indicates four predominant steps necessary in the relaxation response:

- 1) A quiet environment
- 2) A comfortable position
- 3) A mental device (some thought or action upon which to focus your attention)
- 4) A positive attitude whereby distractions are ignored and attention remains on the mental device.

A relaxation program should teach you how to produce the basic relaxation response so that you can eliminate tension from your body and enjoy a deep sense of relaxation. This response should be produced once, twice, or several times daily depending on how often you need it and how often you can get away to a comfortable and quiet setting.

The first goal in a relaxation program is to learn what the opposing feelings of tension and relaxation are really like. By alternately tensing and relaxing muscles, you can learn to identify feelings of tensions and substitute comfortable feelings of relaxation.

When you feel tense, upset, or nervous, certain muscles in your body tighten. If you could learn to identify these muscles and relax them then anytime these muscles are tense in different situations you could relax these muscles.

Also, if you are aware of a situation in which you feel you are going to be tense, then you can relax just before you go into that situation. If you have just been in a situation that made you upset or anxious and it still bothers you, then you can relax and minimize the effect on you. In other words, you can use relaxation as a self-control technique prior to a situation, during an anxious situation, and after an anxious situation, for the rest of your life.

The Relaxing Position

Ideally, sit in a comfortable chair for your size, sit up straight, keep your head over your shoulders. Your back should touch the chair. Keep your legs uncrossed and your feet flat on the floor. Put your hands on your lap or on the arms of the chair. Now, just try to relax.

Tightening and Relaxing Muscle Groups

After you feel comfortable, you will start to tighten and relax groups of muscles in your body. The sequence is to (1) tense the muscles to the maximum degree, (2) notice the feeling in all muscles that are tightened, (3) slowly relax, and (4) enjoy the pleasant feeling of relaxation. Try to keep the rest of your body relaxed when you are tensing a particular part of your body. By alternating tensing and relaxing muscles, you learn to identify feelings of tension and substitute comfortable feelings of relaxation.

The tension time of at least five to seven seconds (except feet) and notice of the relaxation for at least 10 seconds is recommended.

The Muscular Groups

Major Group I:

- a) Dominant hand and forearm
- b) Dominant biceps
- c) Nondominant hand and forearm
- d) Nondominant biceps

Major Group II:

- a) Forehead
- b) Cheeks and nose
- c) Jaws
- d) Lips and tongue
- e) Neck and throat

Major Group III:

- a) Shoulders and upper back
- b) Chest
- c) Stomach

Major Group IV:

- a) Thighs and buttocks
- b) Calves
- c) Feet and toes

Your relaxation program can help you deal with daily tensions so you will feel more rested and will use your energy more efficiently during the day. A relaxation program should teach you how to produce the basic relaxation response so that you can eliminate tension and enjoy a deep sense of relaxation.

REFERENCES

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