

Relaxation takes some practice

By Mandy Kendall

I just came back from a wonderfully relaxing 10-day trip. However, having been home for 24 hours, the relaxed bit already seems to be wearing off. I'm back to the old schedule of emails, errands, chores and work, making the memories of the trip already seem like a lifetime ago.

Why is it so difficult to relax and make it last? I think relaxing is like exercise, you have to keep doing it in order for it to be effective.



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Why do we need to relax? Back in the days when we encountered stressful situations (e.g. a hungry saber toothed tiger) we produced lots of adrenaline that allowed us to respond by running or fighting (the fight or flight response). These days there aren't so many saber toothed tigers, but lots of situations that prompt the same increase of adrenaline in our bodies. Unfortunately, most of the time, it is not appropriate to fight or run away so we build up all this stress in our bodies without releasing it.

As a result, if stress is prolonged or repeated, it can have some serious health consequences such as high blood pressure and reduced immune function. The symptoms of prolonged stress

can manifest in a number of ways such as headaches, neck or back pain, digestive problems, changes in sleep and appetite, muscle cramps or shaking. Emotional issues can also be rooted in long term stress situations with feelings of hopelessness, depression, irritability and anger being some of the common symptoms.

Stressful situations are often difficult to avoid but we can devise ways of dealing with them, so here are a few *Qwik-e* tips on how to deal with day to day stress and help keep that relaxed feeling all the time:

Calming foods:

Green Tea – is a natural source of L-Theanine which has been shown to reduce mental and physical stress, improve cognition and boost mood

Chocolate – dark chocolate especially helps regulate levels of cortisol, the stress hormone. The more pure the chocolate, the better. Unfortunately a small 1.4-ounce square is sufficient.

Honey – not only is honey a great antibiotic, it is also a wonderful natural anti-inflammatory and had a compound that has been shown to help fight depression and anxiety.

Your inner peace:

Just breathe – it is very easy, when we are tense, to forget to breathe properly. Long slow deep breaths that make our stomachs push out, with shoulders relaxed will help diffuse tension. Thinking the word 'accepting' when you breathe in and 'releasing' when you breathe out will also help stress melt away.

Stop thinking – no need to spend hours meditating (unless you want to). Recent studies have shown that just five minutes, twice a day, spent just focusing on breathing in and out can relieve stress and depression. If not thinking about anything

is a challenge just count your breaths as they come and go. If thoughts still enter your mind, try counting backward from 100 and subtract 7 each time.

Visualizing – this does take some practice but imagining a calm tranquil scene does have an actual calming physical effect on the body as the brain finds it hard to distinguish between what's real and what's imagined. So try to be mindful about what you think about and imagine.

Body relaxing:

Muscle clenching – sometimes we don't realize what tension we are unconsciously holding in a muscle until we consciously use it then relax it. Shoulders are often held in tension without us realizing it and just focusing attention there will alert us to any habitual over use. Tightening a muscle for a few seconds (at least one breath) and then letting it totally relax will help calm the whole body.

Stretch out the tension – releasing physical tension will put your whole system in a calmer state. Even some quick shoulder rolls or a chest opening stretch will help increase blood flow and perk up your energy levels. A few minutes of stretching just before you get into bed will release some of the tension from your day and so aid a more peaceful night's sleep.

Stroll out stress – sometimes a stroll around the block is all that is needed to re-focus, calm down and put things in perspective

Scents for the senses – essential oils have been used for centuries for all kinds of healing therapies. Lavender is known for its calming effects but whatever scent works for you is fine. Just a few drops in some warm water or in some carrier oil that you rub into your skin may help to take some of the stress out of your day.

Laugh it off – science shows that laughter boosts the immune

system and increases blood flow as well as just making you feel better.

A hug a day keeps stress at bay – we thrive on contact so, whether it's human, feline or canine, a jolly good cuddle will help reduce your blood pressure and perhaps make all of those stresses seem that little bit less important.

Until next time.

Mandy Kendall operates Health Connective in South Lake Tahoe, which aligns wellness seekers with their ideal wellness provider. If you have questions, would like some advice, or would like to request some Qwik-e tips on any health and well-being topic, drop her an email at connect@healthconnective.com or keep an eye out on Lake Tahoe News for regular Qwik-e tips on how to make healthy changes one Quick and Easy step at a time.