

Excerpts from
Relax and Renew
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THE RELAXATION SOLUTION ~ The antidote to stress is relaxation. To relax is to *rest deeply*. This rest is different from sleep. Deep states of sleep include periods of dreaming which increase muscular tension, as well as other physiological signs of tension. Relaxation is a state in which there is no movement, no effort, and the brain is quiet.

Common to all stress reduction techniques is putting the body in a comfortable position, with gentle attention directed toward the breath. Do these techniques really work? Scientists have researched the effects of relaxation and report measurable benefits, including reduction in muscle tension and improved circulation.

Among the first to study relaxation was Edmund Jacobson, M.D. In 1934, he wrote *You Must Relax* about the benefits of his progressive relaxation techniques. He reported success in using his approach to treat high blood pressure, indigestion, colitis, insomnia, and what he called “nervousness.”

One of the foremost writers and researchers in the field of stress reduction today is Herbert Benson, M.D., who coined the phrase “Relaxation Response” to describe the physiological and mental responses that occur when one consciously relaxes. In *The Wellness Book*, he defines the relaxation response as “a physiological state characterized by a slower heart rate, metabolism, rate of breathing, lower blood pressure, and slower brain wave patterns.”

David Spiegel, M.D., author of *Living Beyond Limits*, reports, “In medicine, we are learning that physical problems, such as high blood pressure and heart disease, can be influenced by psychological interventions, such as relaxation training. Indeed, the Food and Drug Administration issued a report recommending these non-drug approaches as the treatment of choice for milder forms of hypertension. Mind and body are connected and must work together, and this should be a powerful asset in treating medical illness.”

Indeed, body and mind are connected. Relatively new in medicine is the specialty called psychoneuroimmunology, another way of saying that body and mind-or psyche, nervous system, and immune system-are connected. This specialist understands that the health of the psyche is reflected in, and partly created by, the health of the body, and vice versa.

Among those whose scientific study supports the body-mind connection is Dean Ornish, M.D., author of *Dr. Dean Ornish's Program for Reversing Heart Disease*. He studied those with atherosclerotic heart disease and concluded that daily periods of relaxation are essential in preventing further deterioration. Ornish also created a unique lifestyle program which includes diet, yoga, and meditation.