

# Use Your Senses ~ Be Good To Yourself



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If you close your eyes when listening to John Denver's Annie's Song,

*You fill up my senses  
Like a night in a forest  
Like a mountain in springtime  
Like a walk in the rain  
Like a storm in the desert  
Like a sleepy blue ocean...*

you are left with some beautiful images and music that enraptures you...

When discussing stress management or relaxation techniques, this is called imagery.

If you add a simple breathing technique of slowly breathing in, and then slowly breathing out, you can now feel your muscles, as well as your mind begin to relax. A relaxation CD or instructor could also assist you in learning to tense varied muscle groups as you breathe in, and relax them as you breathe out. After going through a series of muscle groups, you will be able to identify what your body feels like as you relax (known as "progressive relaxation"). These simple foundations are meant to help you understand how simplistic these daily routines can be in your life, and they can easily lead you to varied forms of yoga, meditation and relaxation... with huge rewards!

Research has shown that following these simplistic routines with regularity, may assist in reducing high blood pressure, cardiac disease, diabetes management, fibromyalgia and cancer-related symptoms. People with these diagnoses relayed better control over stress (daily and /or due to their diagnoses) which then had a positive effect over their physical, emotional and spiritual well being.

Does it work? Everyone needs to decide that for themselves. But I can share a few instances with you where it had positive impacts. When initially trained in relaxation techniques, I immediately was able to experience that nice, warm fuzzy state one does before drifting to sleep. What made me uncertain was being able to bring my "image" (e.g. being on a boat and feeling the warmth of the sun on my face) to convey that relaxation response. I had to speak in front of 100 people

within a week of relaxation training and practice. As soon as I saw the audience, I tensed. But then I geared up to "get on that boat"... and guess what? My body immediately relaxed. I've been a believer ever since.

During that time, I was part of an outpatient cardiac rehabilitation team. When I initially introduced this concept and process to the patients, I was met with healthy skepticism. We would take our pulse rate prior to the exercise and then following the exercise. The rate, as well as the blood pressure rate, typically dropped. Most would practice in the evening after dinner or before bedtime. Most believed it helped them relax considerably. Many did not use imagery with the relaxation response, but just let their minds wander, even thinking of positive times in their lives.

Soon after, Mom was diagnosed with colon cancer. Patients using guided imagery when getting their chemotherapy was just being researched with positive outcomes. Once relaxed, they were to imagine the little Pac Men gobbling up their cancer cells. I told my mom about this exercise. Whether it was to humor her child, a willingness to try anything to rid her of the nasty cells invading her body, or give her the opportunity to relax, she and I would follow the relaxation response and then follow through with the guided imagery. Mom also said it made her feel that she had some control in a frightening world she did not understand. She also became a believer then and years after. You've got nothing to lose and much to gain...use your senses. The results may surprise you.

Here are some CDs and a workbook that may get you started:

- Deep Stress Relief: When You Need a Long Vacation, but Only Have a Short Time: Total Relaxation and Guided Relaxation by Kelly Howell
- Relaxation Healing by Peggy Huddleston
- Total Relaxation/How to Manage Stress Easily by Bob Griswold
- Relaxation & Stress Reduction Workbook by Martha Davis, Matthew McKay, Elizabeth R. Eshelman. **GLM**