

## THE RELAXATION RESPONSE: THE ULTIMATE HEALING STATE

*Information adapted from the Optimum Health Clinic*

When we have ME/CFS we can often feel the frustration of 'I'm resting but I am not healing'. We push ourselves to the point of crash (try to push ourselves better) and then rest believing it will make us better (try to rest ourselves better).

It gets confusing when we rest and rest and rest but feeling like we are still running a marathon and not seeming to get better.

The thing with ME/CFS is that we can't push ourselves better, nor can we rest ourselves better. We need to instead find a third way and heal ourselves better.

This is a journey of getting to know what works for you using the frameworks we teach like the different types of tiredness, stages of the illness, the tree, but most importantly start the important process of understanding the feedback your body is giving you (listening to the body) and collaborating with it.

It's not necessarily the thing that you are doing but more the state you are in when you do what you do. A driven state whilst resting, for example, can defeat the process of taking a rest.

The key therefore is to have AWARENESS to be able to start to gauge what state you are in....

A healing state is when we are present to the moment around you.

How do we check we in a healing state?

- 1) Is your mind racing?
- 2) Is your breathing shallow or deep?
- 3) Do you feel tension in your body or muscles?

When we first learn that our body is in stress, we can then get into more stress. Instead of being anxious about what we discover we need to thank the body for its feedback, without judgement, and then do the things that help it to gently move into a healing state. (This can take some time if you have been stressed for much of your life!)

Learning tools to assist our bodies to move from a stressed to a healing state is an important part of this process. We can do this through our daily healthy maintenance practices ie. healthy calming distraction, redirecting, reframing, practicing 'mindfulness' or relaxation techniques or simply by doing pleasurable activities that take us into a calmer and more relaxed state.

Moving from a stressed to a healing state takes time and requires us to be connected and in tune with ourselves. We discover more and more treasures about ourselves when we do this. With patience, consistency and a good dollop of trust, if you continue with your daily healthy maintenance practices you will see results and your body will love you for it!

### **Key Points**

- When you understand why you do what you do, it's easier to make the necessary changes to support healing.
- When you have been in a stressed state for a long time, it's not easy to remember or connect to what being relaxed feels like.
- Pay attention to the messages your body is giving you. Tension = stress – do more of whatever eases your body. Remember the “think of something positive exercise vs think of something negative exercise”.
- Learn to be present to the moment around you. Check how busy your mind is. Is your breathing shallow or deep? Is your body contracted or relaxed?
- Begin noticing what state you are in and how much energy you are currently using.
  - Are you actually resting or horizontal stressing? You can be resting and burning more energy than someone doing physical work when you are in a wired state. It's not necessarily what you do but the state that you are in when you do what you do.
- Breathing shallowly keeps you in stress and sends messages to reinforce to our brain that there is an actual reason for being in stress.
- Retrain your breathing patterns and reassign 'helpful' meanings to your circumstances (reframe appropriately) to move into a healing state.

So, in summary, here are some key questions to ask ourselves ....

- *Am I in a healing state?*
- *Are there underlying predisposing factors that are energy-depleting?*
- *Have I got my day to day activity managed in such a way that I am building up my energy reserves rather than depleting them?*

#### Information on Guided Imagery

One of the many forms of relaxation because it includes deep breathing, visualization (pictures which speaks directly to your subconscious) and positive messages.

- A gentle but powerful relaxation technique that focuses and directs the imagination.
- Research has established that guided imagery has a positive impact on health and healing, creativity and performance. Guided imagery can also reduce pain, blood pressure and cholesterol levels, lessen blood loss during surgery, and heighten short-term immune cell activity.
- It also assists to change the neural pathways in our brains to support changes that we are choosing to make in our lives.